ADULT LEARNER 2011

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Editorial comment

Adult Educators very often speak of their vision of a learning society as one where learning plays its full role whether it be in promoting personal growth, in fostering prosperity, or in promoting solidarity at a local level. An understanding and commitment to a better world is also increasingly becoming part of the discourse which includes the need to respond to economic, social, environmental and technological challenges both locally and globally.

The recent publication of AONTAS 'Community Education: more than just a course' (2011) has once again highlighted the need to acknowledge the wider benefits of learning. These could include personal, social, civic development as well as health outcomes. The report also demonstrates how investment in education can contribute to democracy, equality, and well-being. The need for a vision to address the needs of communities and disadvantaged groups is one of the key recommendations of the research. This report is reviewed in the book section. The articles in this 2011 edition together inform the debates raised in the report.

In the first section, John Field's opening article reminds us of the need to articulate the benefits and outcomes of adult learning and how learning affects learners' lives. He looks at how adult learning appears to affect health and well -being and establishes the influence adult learning can have on individuals including physical and mental health, civic engagement and promoting community cohesion. In the next article, Professor Barry Golding returns to the theme of learning and well being when he reports findings from research on men in different community settings in Australia and Ireland, He concludes that where older men participate in community learning, they can better redefine meaning and identity and in so doing address positive ageing. It has been shown that one

of the key determinants in participation in adult learning is level of literacy and in his article on extending the assessment of literacy John Stewart argues that literacy cannot be disconnected from the context and purposes of its use and that assessment and accreditation processes should reflect the diverse needs of adult learners.

A further two articles which draw from research funded by Irish Aid complete this section. In the first paper, Goretti Nakabugo and Rob Mark examine the contribution of the Irish-African partnership for research capacity building (2007-10) in broadening and enriching research collaboration between Africa and Ireland. In particular, they examine the use of 'foresight' methodology to establish a base line understanding of research capacity for international development and identifying the need for partnership in building research capacity between Africa and Ireland. Finally, an article, by Natasha Bailey, goes on to examine how development education and active global citizenship might be integrated into adult and community education in Ireland.

Section 2, includes a series of articles examining ways in which community educators can respond to adult learner needs. In the first , Grace Finlay looks at how 'Solution Focused Brief Therapy'(SFBT) can provide support for adults out of work who want to return to education. In a similar vein, Annmarie Judge Preston looks at how adult educators and guidance counselors can use autoethnography as a reflexive tool. Finally, Des Mooney looks at how adults returning to education might benefit from charting their learning journey.

Together, these articles make a contribution to our understanding of the benefits which learning can bring to individuals and communities. They reinforce the role which community learning can play in promoting lifelong learning and active citizenship and in supporting community regeneration and social inclusion, and in so doing, help individuals and communities tackle real issues in their lives. Finally, I would like to thank all the contributors to this edition of the Adult Learner for the opportunity they provide for us to engage and reflect on a number of issues related to adult and community learning.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I would like to extend our thanks to the external peer reviewers, without whose assistance this issue would not have been possible. I would also like to thank those who wrote book reviews and to Editorial Board members for their ongoing support attending meetings, commenting on scripts and in so many other ways. Finally a special word of thanks

is due to Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS and to Eleonora Peruffo, Secretary to the Adult Learner for their ongoing dedication and support to the work of the Adult Learner, without which we would not be able to publish. I hope this issue will provide you with stimulating reading and we welcome any comments you might have for our future publications.

ROB MARK, EDITOR
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SECTION ONE

Peer Reviewed Articles

Adult learning, health and well-being – changing lives

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Abstract

It is increasingly important for adult educators to articulate more clearly their understanding of the benefits and outcomes of adult learning. This paper reviews existing evidence of the impact of participation in education, and particularly explores the relevance of recent studies of how learning has influenced adults' health and well-being. Overall, the balance of evidence suggests that learning has clear, identifiable positive effects for both well-being and health. Adult educators should, though, treat these findings with care. The relationships are probabilistic, and do not imply that all individuals will benefit in the same ways from any type of learning; and in most cases, the effects seem relatively small. However, given the well-known challenges of persuading adults to improve their health or well-being by other means, this evidence is important, and confirms' practitioners experiences of the transformations that learning can produce in people's lives.

Introduction

What does adult education do? And how does it affect learners' lives? Practitioners often tell spell-binding stories about people who grow and shine as persons, or communities who hold their heads high. But are these more than individual anecdotes? The answers to these questions matter a great deal. While many people will see adult education as a good thing in its own right, even as symbolic of a civilised way of living, this is not enough to persuade policy makers that it is a public good which merits public funding. Equally importantly, it means that adult education is all too easily overlooked by many public agencies whose remit is not directly educational. So the question of what impact people can expect when they take an adult course is an important one for policy and practice, for learners and providers, as well as for researchers, who are interested in the different ways in which adult learning can change people's lives.

This paper explores the ways in which adult learning appears to affect health and well-being. This is relatively new territory for researchers, who only recently have started to pay serious attention to the social outcomes of adult learning. And although researchers have had plenty to say about the personal outcomes of learning, most of it has been based on a relatively narrow evidence base [1]. This paper assesses and builds on recent studies that use advanced statistical techniques to explore longitudinal data, following people's behaviour over time, and trying to establish what influence adult learning appears to have on a person's life course. I start, though, by placing this important body of research in the wider context of policy interest in the wider outcomes of learning.

Assessing the wider outcomes of learning

For most European policy-makers the primary goals of education are to promote the twin aims of economic prosperity and social cohesion. As the European Council recently put it, education and training support wider policy goals 'by equipping citizens with the skills and competences which the European economy and European society need in order to remain competive and innovative, but also by helping to promote social cohesion and inclusion' (European Council 2011). This marks an important shift over time, with competitiveness and inclusion rising to the top of the agenda, while the personal and democratic functions of education are being relegated to a subordinate position, if not actually disappearing from view. The European Commission proposal to merge the Grundtvig programme for adult education into its Leonardo initiative for vocational training neatly exemplifies this wider trend.

Many adult educators see this trend as an important, even critical loss (Biesta 2006). Certainly it represents a change from earlier, more generous definitions of lifelong education, such as those espoused by the Council of Europe and the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in the early 1970s (Field 2006, 10-18). Even if policy makers still envisage a continuing public role for adult education in respect of economic performance and social inclusion, that role is becoming more narrow and circumscribed. It is also increasingly subject to measurement, with a focus more on outcomes than on inputs (Ioannidou 2007).

Elsewhere I have suggested that this is part of a wider process of change within the welfare state, which can be understood at least partly as an attempt by public

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1   To be explicit, I am not criticising qualitative research as such. I am only saying that all types of research method have their limitations, including small scale qualitative studies. And longitudinal survey studies, of course.

sector managers to convince politicians and the wider public of the value of the services that they provide (Field 2006). Other commentators, including the Irish researcher Fergal Finnegan, see this trend as part of a wider shift towards what they call neo-liberalism, by which they mean a preference for marketisation of services and massive reductions in the role of the state (Finnegan 2008). Either way, the search for measurable evidence which can inform decision-making has become an important feature of contemporary public policy, and adult education is no exception. This has been very visibly the case at European level, where the Lisbon agreement empowers the European Commission to develop policy in a number of new areas, including education, through what it called the 'open method of co-ordination'. In practice, this involves an attempt to use new techniques of public management to steer the complex policies of the European member states in a common direction; one of those techniques has been the development of quantitative (and sometimes qualitative) benchmarks and indicators against which Member States can be compared and evaluated (Lange and Alexiadou 2007).

Wider interest in the evidence base for policy provides the context in which researchers have paid increasing attention to the outcomes of adult learning. This paper now turns to examine the evidence for claims that lifelong learning has a measurable impact on people's lives. In particular, it explores research into the impact of adult learning on individual well-being and health, and on social capital (defined here as active engagement in civil society). A recent AONTAS report argued that such research is valuable partly because it shows how investment in adult learning can help reduce state spending in other policy areas, and partly because it confirms the role of adult learning in promoting participation, democracy and equity (Bailey, Breen and Ward 2010, 11). In short, it enables us to argue that adult learning has a public value.

A strengthening evidence base

Researchers have had little to say about the wider effects of adult learning until relatively recently. By contrast, we know a great deal about the economic consequences of adult learning, though we probably don't know as much as we think we do. At the level of the individual, much recent research suggests that while adult education has a positive influence on people's earnings and employability, the average effects are relatively small (for example see Jenkins et al 2003). However, adult learning has a larger impact for some people. First, there is good evidence of a clear return, and possibly increasingly so, to improvements in basic adult skills (e.g. De Coulon, Marcenaro-Gutierrez and Vignoles 2007).

Interestingly, in an international context, the value of basic skills in the UK labour market is comparatively high (Hansen and Vignoles 2005). This may reflect the high proportion of UK adults with comparatively poor basic skills as compared with other some other countries; if so, then it is worth noting that this is a pattern that Ireland broadly shares with the UK. As well as showing clear returns to improved basic skills, there is also some evidence that adult learning can sometimes deliver greater benefits to women, and delivers them faster than to men (Blanden et al 2010; Jenkins 2006). This almost certainly reflects the way in which women can use educational credentials to help compensate for other relative disadvantages within the labour market.

To summarise, much recent UK research shows that participating in adult learning is likely to improve their economic situation. While this improvement is relatively small on average, it is larger for women than for men, and larger still for people who improve their basic skills. These studies are based on the analysis of large longitudinal data sets, such as the British Cohort Studies (most analyses tend to use the 1970 and 1958 birth cohorts) or the British Household Panel Survey. The main advantage of the latter is that it allows us to look at people of different ages; the birth cohort surveys may be better-suited to allowing us to make informed judgements about cause and effect, but by their nature each survey sample is taken from only one generation. Nevertheless, these are large scale sets of data, and for around a decade they have been increasingly used to study the wider social and personal consequences of adult learning. While much of the initial work has been Scandinavian and British, it has inspired considerable international interest, and has started to influence international thinking about the collection of data on adult participation in learning (Schuller and Desjardins 2007).

Improvements in one's economic prospects clearly have a wider impact on one's life course. There is a relationship between well-being and prosperity, though the relationship becomes much weaker among high earners. And high incomes are also generally associated with good health, for some obvious reasons. There has also been a heated debate in Britain recently over a recent study that presented a wide range of evidence, from a number of different studies, which were said to suggest that life chances were affected as much by relative levels of material equality as by absolute levels of wealth (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). But health and well-being do not depend only on economic circumstances; they also depend on socio-cultural and individual factors.

There are good reasons for considering well-being to be among the most important outcomes of adult learning. Research into well-being has burgeoned in recent years, and there is no reason to suppose that its relevance is less at a time of hardship and recession. Well-being can be defined as 'a dynamic state that refers to individuals' ability to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community' (Beddington et al 2008, 1057). It is separate from but related to ideas about positive mental health, with the relationship being understood in terms of resilience and flourishing, and where mental health is seen as more than simply the absence of infirmity or disease (Huppert 2009). The use of this idea has been attacked from a Marxist standpoint as a distraction from the underlying structural causes of poor health, including poor mental health (Ferguson 2008), and from a radical conservative perspective as somehow tending to diminish our view of the human subject (Ecclestone and Hayes 2009).

Well-being, though, cannot be so easily dismissed. It has significance for the wider community as well as for learners themselves; and as well as being desirable in itself, it also has further consequences. For learners, a positive outlook on the future and a sense of one's ability to take charge of one's life are indispensable to further, continuing successful learning. Well-being is also associated with better health, higher levels of social and civic engagement, and greater resilience in the face of external crises (Cooper et al 2010). Conversely, the absence of well-being is a cause for wider concern. The recent growth of research into lifelong learning and well-being is therefore an important development.

Social and personal well-being

Researchers have long been interested in the influence of adult learning on personal development, while experiences of the impact of education on learner confidence and self-esteem are frequently mentioned in the professional literature. A considerable body of recent research has explored the relationship between adult learning and well-being. While much of this is positive, participation in learning also has a downside, and there is some evidence that for some people, in some circumstances, learning can be associated with stress and anxiety, and erode factors that have helped people maintain good mental health.

A number of recent studies, including the research undertaken by AONTAS, have drawn on learners' self-reported judgements of mental health. In her review of community learning, Veronica McGivney reported that participation in learning has positive consequences for mental health (McGivney 1999).

Another British study, based on a survey of people short-listed for adult learning awards, found that almost nine out of ten reported positive emotional of mental health benefits, albeit among what is clearly a rather select sample (Aldridge and Lavender 2000). Another study found that four-fifths of learners aged 51–70 reported a positive impact on such areas as confidence, life satisfaction or their capacity to cope (Dench and Regan 1999). German survey data provide further support for this view (Schleiter 2008), as do the findings of the AONTAS study of community education (Bailey, Breen and Ward 2010, 147). In Britain, there is also experience from projects involving health providers in referring selected patients to learning opportunities (James 2004).

These studies of self-reported wellbeing have recently been supplemented by longitudinal studies. Analyses of cohort survey data show that accredited learning appears to protect individuals against depression, though it seemingly has little or no impact on happiness (Feinstein et al 2003). Participation in learning also has an impact on adults' levels of life satisfaction, which is an important aspect of well-being, as well as showing gains among learners in optimism and self-rated well-being (Feinstein et al 2003, Hammond and Feinstein 2006). These changes should be understood in the context of the greater confidence and sense of agency that many adult educators have witnessed among their learners. So, again using longitudinal data, Feinstein and Hammond (2006) found that learners were more likely to report gains in self-efficacy and sense of agency (perceived control over important life choices) than non-learners. Again, this is consistent with findings from the AONTAS study of community education (Bailey, Breen and Ward 2010, 148-9).

Healthy bodies

It would be consistent with general theories of agency and self-efficacy for active learners to experience overall health benefits as a result of their learning. Here, the longitudinal survey findings are particularly important. Most surveys of self-reported health tend to rely on respondents' responses, usually to questions about positive health behaviour; for instance, the AONTAS survey asks whether people smoke less, but does not allow for them to say they smoke more (Bailey, Breen and Ward 2010, 152). The longitudinal surveys usually collect data about actual behaviour, as well as self-reported accounts of change; and because they cover such a wide range of issues, and are not confined to the population of learners, they allow for comparisons of different groups and different effects. Thus Feinstein and Hammond used the 1958 cohort survey to compare changes in the health behaviours of learners and non-learners between the ages of 33 and 42,

showing that participation in learning had positive effects in terms of smoking cessation and exercise taken. The same authors also found a growth in self-rated health among those who participated in learning as compared with adults who did not (Feinstein and Hammond 2004, Hammond and Feinstein 2006). Sabates and Feinstein (2006) found that adult learning was positively associated with the probability of taking up cervical screening for women. While the effect sizes are small ones in all these studies, again it is important to note that adult values and behaviour rarely change much, so this finding is of consequence.

Social capital

One possible explanation of greater agency and self-efficacy is that learners have become better at connecting with others. Such connections in turn can have very well-documented consequences for democracy and participation. The positive relationship between adult learning and civic engagement is virtually a foundational myth for many of the individuals and organisations involved in adult learning. Finding evidence for its reality is therefore not simply of academic interest.

Survey data demonstrate a close association between participation in adult learning and engagement in a variety of social and civic activities (Field 2005). Participation in learning tends to enhance social capital, by helping develop social competences, extending social networks, and promoting shared norms and tolerance of others (Schuller et al 2004). The AONTAS survey showed similar trends among community education participants in Ireland, though with stronger effects for community engagement and relatively weak effects for participation in the formal political process (Bailey, Breen and Ward 2010, 127-8). This pattern might have been expected, given the local and non-formal character of much community based learning.

Learning also appears to strengthen people's support networks. A survey of over 600 literacy and numeracy learners in Scotland over time showed significant increases among females and older people in the proportion going out regularly; greater clarity about future intentions on community involvement; and a rise in the number who could identify someone they could turn to for help. The learners were particularly likely to have extended their 'bridging' networks, through contacts with tutors, other staff and fellow students (Tett and Maclachlan 2007). This is consistent with the AONTAS study, where one very clear finding was a self-reported tendency among learners to be willing to talk to new people (Bailey, Breen and Ward 2010, 129).

Taken together, these findings suggest that adult learning has positive direct effects on well-being. There is also some support for the view that adult learning has some positive effects on health. While most of the quantitative studies suggest that the effect size is comparatively small, this is by no means to suggest that it is trivial. Given that policy-makers repeatedly find that influencing the behaviour of adult citizens is difficult, and sometimes downright impossible (as illustrated by the limited success of public health campaigns in many countries), it is highly significant that adult learning has these positive results, both for individuals and for collective groups more widely. Of course, these findings are usually at the aggregate level, and they tend to rest on bodies of evidence that take little account of the experiences of people who drop out along the way, or who are deterred from enrolling by poor provider behaviour. For some people, experiences of learning are deeply unsatisfactory, and the next section explores this issue further. But we should not lose sight of remarkably consistent findings from research that suggests an overall positive influence of adult learning on the way people feel about themselves and their lives.

Negative outcomes of learning

It is natural to focus on the positive consequences of learning, especially when so many researchers come from a background of practice. Nevertheless, participation in learning can sometimes have negative consequences; far from improving people's well-being, it can actively damage it. This is rather different from acknowledging that serious learning can be demanding, even painful, yet worthwhile in the longer term. The study of people nominated for Adult Learners' Awards – a sample that is likely to be biased towards comparatively successful learners – found that, while there were many benefits, most of their respondents also experienced 'disbenefits' such as stress, broken relationships and a new dissatisfaction with one's present way of life (Aldridge and Lavender 2000).

One factor here is that adult education can evoke – even if unintentionally – unpleasant and stressful experiences from people's earlier lives. A study of adult basic education participants found that anxieties were particularly acute "if elements of the learning environment recalled people's previous negative experiences of education or authority, or other traumatic or painful events from their histories" (Barton et al 2007). Further, although learning can help extend some social networks, it can also disrupt existing ones (Barton et al 2007, Field 2009). This is inseparable from the processes of social mobility and change that learning produces. In particular, while it tends to extend those wider and more heterogeneous networks that some social capital analysts call 'bridging ties', it can

also disrupt 'bonding ties', such as close kinship and neighbourhood connections. And while bonding ties can often form a barrier to social and geographical mobility, they can also provide access to types of social support that can be extremely important in times of trouble (Field 2008). This can in turn increase vulnerability to ill-health, including poor mental health, and undermine resilience.

Conclusions

The evidence is, on balance, persuasive. Adult learning influence people's income and employability, as well the attitudes and behaviours that affect people's mental well-being. In principle the benefits could be assigned an economic value, which could then be set against the costs of investing in adult learning. In practice, there are enormous data weaknesses, the relationship seems to be non-linear, and adults' life-courses are complex and highly context-dependent, so it is highly unlikely that a realistic cost–benefit analysis is feasible or even worthwhile (some might argue that it is better not to know, either because the answer might be inconvenient or because they think it tends to reduce everything to cash). Nevertheless, even if we cannot assign a simple economic value to the well-being that people derive from learning, in general the evidence suggests a clear positive relationship. These effects can be found for some general adult learning as well as vocational learning, and they are particularly marked for basic literacy and numeracy.

A number of qualifications need to be made. First, at best these are probabilistic relationships; their existence does not mean that everyone who takes a course will feel happier and better about themselves. And it is in the nature of longitudinal data that the findings are related to events and experiences that are now in the past; predicting the future on the basis of probabilistic findings is extremely shaky. Second, in all the studies reviewed above, the effect sizes are relatively small. Even so, the findings are reasonably consistent, and we know – for example from health promotion campaigns or health and safety training – that attitudes and behaviour in adult life are entrenched, so even small shifts are significant. Third, it is not possible to be confident about causation, as it is possible that unobserved factors might explain both findings. This can only be clarified through further research. Fourth, much of the quantitative research takes learning as a given, and does not identify those features and types of learning that are particularly likely to promote well-being. Fourth, virtually none of the research on the benefits of learning identifies its costs. None of the studies I have seen even attempts to identify the costs of achieving a particular benefit. This reduces its value for policy makers, who are required to compare

any potential intervention with other ways of achieving similar ends (Behrman 2010). Finally, there are some areas of well-being and health where there is no evidence – at least, not yet – of well-being effects from education and training. In our ageing European societies, it is particularly important that we still lack any evidence on the relationship between learning and dementia, nor do we know yet whether participating in adult learning can counter infant-acquired or genetic disabilities such as dyslexia or ADHD (though it is possible that it can help to address some of the problems that these disabilities produce). We should not over-state the case.

Despite the inevitable limitations of any body of research, and allowing for the gaps, I believe that the longitudinal studies represent a major advance in our knowledge of the economic, individual and social impact of learning. They provide a basis on which further work may develop. This remains, then, a ripe area for further research (Desjardins 2008). It has, of course, benefitted from an explosion of interest in empirical studies of learning and its benefits, and this in turn reflects a growing policy concern for evaluating the impact of particular interventions. The importance of this research for adult learning is, though, troublesome and difficult: it shows that adult learning has positive consequences for a variety of policy domains such as health policy or public welfare, but of course these areas lie outside the responsibility of public educational authorities. It is therefore up to professionals involved in adult learning to take their case to health authorities or social work authorities if they wish this research to influence public policy.

To return to my starting point, adult learning does indeed change lives. More accurately, it offers people resources that they can use to make changes in their own lives. These changes may be particularly important for those who have benefited least from initial education. What we do not yet know fully is what kinds of resources help people to make what kinds of changes. What we do know is that very practical capabilities – sometimes spoken of disparagingly as 'basic skills' or even 'merely instrumental' – can have dramatic consequences for people's lives. Beyond that, the evidence simply tells us that adult learning provides resources that can help fuel important changes, but cannot be seen as a 'pedagogic aspirin' that works instantly for everyone. But we can be reasonably confident that at its best, adult learning encompasses the instrumental and practical, but also transcends it to offer what Raymond Williams (1983) called 'resources for a journey of hope'.

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Taking charge at any age: Learning and wellbeing by older men through community organisations in Australia

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Abstract

This paper examines and compares learning narratives associated with older men's participation in three community organisations in an Australian rural setting: an adult and community education provider, an emergency service organization and an aged care facility. The interview data are from a larger Australian study of learning in community settings by older men (age 50+ years of age). The paper examines what factors influence older men's learning and wellbeing through community organisations. It concludes that preferred learning for older men in community organisations is typically through group participation in practical situations for pragmatic purposes. Community organisations aside from education providers are shown to provide critically important opportunities for older men to actively redefine and recreate personal meanings and rapidly changing identities beyond those developed through paid work.

Introduction

Australia is experiencing an increasingly older population. One of the fastest growing cohorts is older men of working age who are not participating in the paid workforce or who are retired from paid work. These men are less likely than other adults to engage in formal learning, including through adult and community education (ACE) organisations. Such men are also vulnerable as they age to social isolation and problems with health and wellbeing.

Education and training discourses typically presuppose that adult education participants are either younger individuals preparing for paid work, or pursuing learning 'out of interest' through ACE providers. This research looks specifically and deliberately at older men's learning through community involvement in two organization types beyond ACE: fire and emergency services and an

age-related organisation in one rural site (Oatlands) in the Australian state of Tasmania. Oatlands was one of six diverse sites in Golding, Foley, Brown and Harvey's (2009) broader study of older men's learning through 48 organisations in three Australian states. The broader study sought to explore what is hypothesized as a broad gulf between work-related learning and the learning that is sought and valued by men through participation in community organisations during later life.

This paper explores Golding's (2011, p.248) contention, framed in a study of age-related community organisations in Australia, that the most effective learning for older men is in situations 'where men are actively involved, not only in the activity itself, but in the identification, framing and control of the activity in collaboration with other men.' The learning activities examined in the current study, as Field (2009, p.226) also observed in relation to our 2007 men's sheds study (Golding, Brown, Foley & Harvey 2007),

> … would not normally be defined as learning, in that they are not part of any formal learning structures, but provide valued opportunities for the men involved to make transitions from their working lives … to a range of activities [that] provide new learning opportunities as well.

Literature review

Burke (2006, p.719) noted that the discourse of lifelong learning in the United Kingdom is one that favours individualism and instrumentalism. All sectors of Australian post-compulsory education and training in 2011 can be similarly characterized as having discourses with a heavy emphasis on narrow and individual vocationalism and educational formality (Golding, Foley & Brown, 2009). Neoliberalism has transformed Australian adult education to an extent that many of the community learning functions of the remnant, state-supported adult and community education providers have been neglected or deliberately defunded by governments. And yet in Australia, as in the UK, 'Community-based informal learning plays a critical role in widening participation among people who are educationally, economically and socially disadvantaged' (McGivney 1999b, p.v).

In Ireland Ryan, Connell, Grummell and Finnegan (2009) have argued for 'a radical re-positioning of learners away from the individualist models promoted in mainstream education' (p.130) and urged adult education and theorists 'to pay more attention to analyzing the nature of transformative learning and

how it is achieved.' Slevin (2009) identifies the importance in East Donegal of enabling men 'to become more agentic in their own lives [as] a central aim of community education and community development' (p.57) from a Freirian (Friere, 1993) pedagogical perspective. Sfard similarly (2008) identified usefulness of the analogy of learning as participation compared to learning as acquisition and gaining knowledge. Sfard concluded that learning could be usefully conceived…

> … as a process of becoming a member of a certain community, so that learning is viewed as a process of becoming part of a greater whole. Where acquisition stresses an inward movement of knowledge, participation is learning interaction, where the whole and the parts affect and inform each other and the existence of the whole is fully dependent on the parts. (p.33)

Aside from research in community-based men's sheds, summarized in Golding (2009), very few studies of Australian adult education have examined learning as a characteristic of older people's participation in community-based organisations. Mackean's (2010) study of older learners in Tasmania is one exception. Elsewhere,

Slevin (2009) investigated the transformative aspects of learning associated with minibus driver program for men in West Donegal. Mark, Montgomery and Graham (2010) investigated men's learning in community settings 'beyond the workplace' in several sites around Belfast. Oosterlinck (2010) undertook a case study of adult education in the Flanders region of Belgium. Oosterlinck (2010) observed that in Flanders, by law, 'Learning processes are not only set up in order to educate the individual, but to optimize the way our society operates' (p.15). However he concluded that the educational function of the set of socio-cultural organisations he examined in Flanders was in 'dire straits'. That research sought, as the current research attempts in Australia, to postulate that the socio-cultural education function of community organisations can and should go beyond the sum of individual competencies to include socially and personally transformative learning.

Method

The data comprise a small part of a very large body of interview and survey data from a national study of older men's learning and wellbeing through community organisations by Golding, Foley, Brown and Harvey (2009). The narrative data from the three community organisations discussed in this paper are drawn

from those collected in the small town of Oatlands (population 540) in rural Tasmania, Australia. Though located in the southernmost Australian State, the Oatlands Edwardian townscape, green hills and cool climate could superficially be somewhere in Ireland or the UK.

The interview and survey questions applied specifically to older men as active participants organisations. The 30-minute, group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The men's names used in this paper are pseudonyms in order to ethically protect participant confidentiality. The qualitative data cited are limited to illustrative narratives from only two Oatlands organisations: a residential aged care centre, and a volunteer rural fire brigade, since the adult education on-line access centre had insufficient older males to participate in the research. The rich, narrative insights from only eight men interviewed in these two organisations are used to illustrate Beck's (1986, pp.115-120) general contention that in reflexive modernity,'there is no more a general consensus about common norms and behaviour. Individuals live in different situations where they each construct their own identity, the 'do-it-yourself biography'.

The hypothesis in presenting these older men's narratives in such detail is that valuable learning for many older men in Oatlands is much more likely to occur though meeting and participating in different ways with other, older men than it does through undertaking formal courses as individuals in adult education.

Quantitative comparisons about learning in three organisation types
An analysis of the learning-related survey data from all six Australian sites (48 organisations) confirmed statistically significant differences by organisation type between older men's perceptions of learning, their learning needs and preferences.

Factors that attract and engage older men in three community settings
Of the six organisation types, *voluntary fire and emergency services* organisation participants were significantly more interested, active and engaged, 'hands-on' learners. Older men involved were significantly more interested, even than adult and community education participants, in more learning in a course that leads to a qualification ($p<0.001$). Fire and emergency services volunteers were also significantly more likely to agree ($p<0.014$) that they were interested in hands-on learning, ($p<0.001$), to have attended a formal learning program in the past year, to have played a leadership role in the organisation ($p<0.000$) and been active participants in the organisation ($p<0.001$). They were also signifi-

cantly more likely to agree that they did not to feel comfortable about going to the local adult learning organisation.

By contrast, while older men in adult and community education (ACE) were more interested in classroom-based learning (p<0.004), they were much less likely to be active participants in the organisation (p<0.001) and significantly less likely to be interested in hands-on learning (p<0.014).

Older men in age-related organisations differed yet again in their attitudes towards learning. They were significantly less likely than other men to be interested in a course to get a qualification (p<0.001) or in hands-on learning (p<0.014). Like fire volunteers, older men in age-related organisations were significantly less comfortable about going to what was described generically in the survey instrument as 'the local adult learning organisation' (p<0.008), but significantly more likely to agree that their opportunities to learn were affected by their health (p<0.043).

The types of learning that are experienced and valued
While 93 per cent of all older men surveyed across all six organisation types in Australia agreed that they were 'keen to learn more' through the organisation, it is important to put the learning they experienced in its wider context. Firstly, the learning had very little to do with paid work. Of all the older men surveyed, only eleven per cent expected to get more paid work as a result of participating. Secondly, only 46 per cent of all older men surveyed agreed that 'yes', they would be interested in taking part in more learning opportunities, if they were available through the organisation, though an additional 36 per cent surveyed answered 'maybe' rather than 'no'.

While older men generally reported that their skills had improved as a result of participating in the organisation (77% agreement for social skills, 72% agreement for communication or literacy skills and 61% for organisation skills), the strongest agreement had to do with identity, enjoyment, belonging, being accepted and giving back to the community. Virtually all men agreed that as a consequence of participating they felt better about themselves (98% agreement), were doing what they enjoyed (96% agreement), had a place where they belonged (91% agreement), could give back to the community (90% agreement) and also felt more accepted in the community. Consistent with these findings, while most older men regarded the community organisation as a place to learn new skills (84% agreement), even more saw it as a place to meet new friends (93% agreement), keep

them healthy and give back to the community (88% agreement for both). Most of these highly valued, social and community attributes are missing in traditional, individualistic discourses about mainstream education in Australia as well as in Ireland (Ryan, Connell, Grummell & Finnegan, 2009).

Qualitative comparisons about learning in three organizations

The narrative data from interviews in three organisations (italicized) in one rural Tasmanian site (Oatlands) are used below to illustrate and 'tease out' the trends observed in the national survey and interview data reported in Golding, Foley, Brown and Harvey (2009).

Adult and Community Education: Oatlands On Line Access Centre

The *Oatlands On Line Access Centre* was the only active, publicly supported adult education provider in 2009 in the small town of Oatlands, since the Community House and Community College were now respectively dormant and defunct. While Adult Community Education (ACE) organisations used to exist in many other towns like Oatlands in most Australian states, by 2009 neo-liberal training agendas had greatly reduced their coverage. In Tasmania, a series of government reviews and restructures had reduced ACE's presence in Oatlands to what was effectively an information and communications technology (ICT) centre connected to the local secondary school. It was not providing 'second chance education and training opportunities' that the Tasmanian government originally intended such centres would do when set up a decade ago. While a small number of women were using the ICT services, very few men were involved either as participants or volunteers. Too few men, and none over 50 years old were using any of the On Line Access Centre services for the organisation to participate in the surveys or interviews. In effect, the adult learning opportunities available through the Centre were arguably totally inappropriate for or unused by almost all men in Oatlands.

Volunteer fire and emergency services organisation: Oatlands Fire Brigade

Oatlands Fire Brigade, like most fire and emergency service organisations in small Australian towns, was centrally located, seldom needed but always ready. While the number of people, mainly older men, involved as volunteers was small, the proportion of the small and rural Oatlands community involved was high, and there was some crossover between roles. In the case of road accidents, all three services often attended and closely collaborated. The jobs required more than technical skill, including some community service work, which was challenging for state emergency services (SES) volunteers, as a team leader stressed.

Some of the stuff on the side of the road is really gruesome. We have to cut bodies out and pickup the bits and pieces up and clear the bodies of cars. … But that's part of the game, the community service and support. While 70 per cent of the volunteer ambulance work in Oatlands involves 'domestic' work, 30 per cent of it is sometimes horrific, road trauma.

As in many smaller towns with ageing populations, these emergency service volunteers, almost all men, were also ageing and had multiple work and community roles. The five men interviewed included men from all three services and ranged in age from: 'Les', 54 and Fire Brigade Captain; 'Noel', 55 and SES team Leader; 'Colin', 56 and fire service member; 'Ray' 64 and Volunteer Ambulance Officer, to Fire Service member, 'Jack' who was 67, a former police officer, the only retired interviewee and the most recent volunteer. Most of the men had long histories in this or similar voluntary fire or emergency services organisations.

Les explained the training, the fire brigade's role and the minimum training needed to get on the fire truck.

We have a two-hour practice … every month … we have a run, ensure that things are clean and tidy, reports up to date, the gear on the trucks is working properly. … We handle all fires … and we have a high incidence of vehicle accidents … [The minimum level of training is the] Basic Fire Fighting Course. It's a two-day run through of everything after an introduction to the Brigade.

Les described the fire training and assessment options.

[If] someone comes along with interest [in training] we have a self-assessment [and] a program over a period of weeks or months that we basically put them through up to a level that we feel that they are ready. Then we opt to send them away to our fire service [headquarters] to do a full weekend, to do everything formally and when they come back they qualify. … Then [they] go on as firemen and ride the truck and then from there on they pick the courses that they require going up … to officer levels and hazardous chemicals.

In the case of the training for the ambulance service, Ray explained that …

> Our supervisors come down … each month. …They keep you up to scratch with your training and most of the time we assess ourselves on jobs and come back and say what we could have done right and what we did do right and talk about it and go from there.

Ray at 64 had been in the volunteer role for more than half his life and being on call every second week, sensed it was time for him to step aside but it was hard to find new members with the commitment and 'stomach' for the difficult work.

Colin reflected on what he had learned on his several decades of fire service.

> Probably the most important thing is that you learn that everyone is human … Different people have got different capabilities, different people have got different levels that you can put them to … I mean I know [Noel's] skills, he knows mine … and that flows into the day to day jobs. I know that I can go and say to [Noel], "Can you do this?" Whereas it might be a totally different role to what I would ask [Jack] to do.
>
> I guess [you get] satisfaction knowing that you have done something great or good. … [You learn] control, being able to have control at the scene of an accident … knowing that you have done a good job, or done it to the best of your ability …

Age related organisations: Oatlands Multipurpose Health Centre

The Oatlands Multipurpose Health Centre is set behind the Oatlands main street. The three men in permanent residential care who volunteered for interview lived in various parts of the complex, including 'Errol', age 79, who as a result of a stroke required a wheelchair and in his own words, only had 'one good arm', but which was still good enough to take part in the gardening activities. Several of these older Oatlands men had recently decided to set up a vegetable garden on part of the Health Centre lawn, and the Centre kitchen was using the produce.

'Frank' had been a farmer and was very polite and quietly spoken. There weren't many things 'Wally', hadn't done in his 67 years before being brought to the Centre in desperate need of care. More than in other interviews, this narrative has been pasted together with often short, one sentence fragments from the men's typically short but thoughtful comments and responses.

Errol explained that he "had that stroke and they wouldn't look after me at home, so I had to go somewhere didn't I?" Errol was understandably frustrated but satisfied by the 'limited amount' he could still do with one good arm from a wheelchair, including hoeing their vegetable garden.

> [It's] exercise of a different sort, like moving your arm mightn't seem much but it's doing good somewhere isn't it? … You feel satisfied when you achieve something, don't you? … We have had two or three feeds of new potatoes and green peas.

Errol still went up the main street on a 'nice' day.

> Well I find if I feel all right, I go for a walk up the street. … I go window-shopping … There's an antique shop up here, its very interesting to look at the junk or whatever. [On a wet day] I read … there's nothing much else you can do … I watch TV. … If there's football on I like to watch that, and if it's raining I listen to that.

Wally gave a potted history of his life.

> Teaching in the army, working with books, sorting, working … in Melbourne as a metal worker. … I came out of [a rural town]. I was there for 15 years and I have been here [in the residential facility for] a year. [I came here because] I was spending more time at the hospital here [than at home]. … I would like to be [home] but I can't be … As soon as I get back home I would probably be on the phone for an ambulance.

A few years after returning from war service Wally …

> … [was] on medication, and when I drank beer I would go off my head and start fighting and end up in the lockup and that sort of thing. … I didn't [associate it with war service] at the time, but probably do now. A lot of the blokes that I was with there either committed suicide or have 'gone off their trolley' at one time or the other. Most of the blokes that I know, if they are still married, they are not living with the same wife as they started off with.

Wally was now passionately involved in the garden. He described what was in season and reflected philosophically on the sudden onset of retirement and his recent life in care.

I don't get involved [in programs]. … The most I do is a resident's meeting or barbecue … Bingo doesn't grab me at all. … [Retirement] comes all of a sudden … it's inevitable, it's going to happen to everyone isn't it? … I think if we accept what we have got and should be grateful. There would be something that you would want but we must accept what we get and that's it because it is good enough. I would like to go out the bush every day with a chain saw and get some wood but I have to accept that I can't go. … Well that's what I have always done. That's the biggest problem, I think, is to change from one life to an entirely different one … But we have to accept what we've got and I think everyone has and we are thankful for it.

Frank, now 83, had done a lot till it 'came to a sudden stop' when he divorced and moved to the Health Centre in Oatlands.

I started farming, when the boys grew up for higher education and moved to [the capital city]. I had several jobs down there. … [Then I] just kept the farm going until I moved in here and then came to a sudden stop. … When you retire, you retire. … I took up reading .. The [paper], … magazines. … Physical exercises in the day room, … twice a week, … kicking balloons around from one to the other so you have got your presence of mind. … [I most enjoy] sitting in the sun and reading. I don't [enjoy the social activities]. … I don't join in at all.

Frank talked about how he came to be at the Centre and how he felt as a 'solitary person' about being there.

I grew up with elderly parents. I am not quite myself and wanted to make sure that my son didn't have the worry of the parents, I was living on my own I woke up after three days of rather a mess and at least coming in here my son doesn't have the worry of the parents [dying] on them. They were pushing for [me to come here]. … They seemed to get sick of me and thought it was a good idea for me [to come here] anyway. … When I was [in Hospital] there were five [of us] with strokes and each one … lost our wives in the eight months period prior to when we had the strokes, and they reckon that's the cause of the strokes. If you could go back to what you used to do, well [Wally] would have had his occupation [too]. If he could go back and do that for say only two or three days it would feel different altogether, wouldn't it mate? *(Spoken to Wally)*

Wally replied to Frank.

> He would like to go back to that bloody farm. That's how I feel now, I used to get up every fortnight and take the dogs and the gun and go recreation shooting. Well there's nothing I would like better than that … But it's something that you have to accept that you can't do, you have to accept [this …] a cup of tea in the conference room, don't you? … [I don't have privacy or freedom here]. Being a solitary person, it doesn't go down well. … When you go back to what your normal life was out in the bush and do the things you used to do, you feel entirely different … its natural isn't it?

The three men were asked what they got out of doing the garden. Wally found that it …

> Fills in the time. [It's] better than sitting in my room by myself. You get sick of reading or watching videos, well I do anyway. Plus you can go around and torment anyone else that is around. … I like reading the big gardening books and that makes a difference. Yes I have still got a couple up there.

Discussion

It is only possible to compare older men's experiences of adult and community education in Oatlands with their experiences in other organisations by default. The only adult and community education provider in Oatlands had very few services or programs of interest or relevance to most older men. Using the key words from the title of McGivney's (1999a) study of men's learning in the UK, while men were not 'excluded' from the On Line Access Centre, older men were certainly and conspicuously 'missing'.

By contrast, the narratives from the voluntary fire and emergency service organisation confirm that the training, though accredited, was actively and regularly embraced. While the training was a necessary prerequisite of active participation in these organisations, most of what older men learnt and valued derived from the rich community of practice, working voluntarily in teams over decades in trusting relationships with other men. The training was regular, hands-on, accredited and oriented to future emergencies. However what older men were seeking and learning as participants was much deeper and broader, and acquired over many years through a rich community of shared practice.

Narratives from older men in the Oatlands aged care setting illustrated that men had been forced, often suddenly and through changed life circumstances (ageing, disability, loss of partner, need for nursing and aged care) to reluctantly move and live permanently in a very different place. Removed from familiar places, people, interests and resources, they were required to take on very different identities. What they enjoyed sharing with other men were reminiscences about old times and the 'hands-on' life skills. They were reluctant to be taught as students, socialized as clients or patronized as patients. Here, the older men were much less interested in learning new things. They were most interested in sharing what they already knew and could do to create new and very personal understandings about their diverse and often difficult and much changed, identities in later life.

The positive experiences older men related so personally and positively to each other in the context of extreme adversity and isolation in the Oatlands aged care organisation have strong parallels with the findings in Ghandour, Bahous and Bacha's (2011) study of ageing in a Lebanese nursing home. Regardless of difficult life circumstances, 'the words selected by all of the older men were positive and came from the discourse of living life to the full' (p.275). The Oatlands interviews were also 'linguistically and communicatively densely-packed' (p.273). Like the Lebanese study (p.278), what was striking was way the interviewees reconstructed their identities, including as learners, as they talked, contradicting the general negative stereotypes of older people 'based on ageist stereotypes of incompetence … often directed at older adults in both institutional and community settings' (p.268). Both studies suggest that the context for learning in nursing homes will likely require both further research into gender differences and into the very different assumptions about learning in such settings.

What the survey and narrative data suggests, is that learning for men in later life is qualitatively different from and often totally unrelated to vocational learning. While adult and community education organisations position themselves as learning organisations, organisations involving communities of hands-on practice, such as voluntary fire and emergency services organisations, are in several respects more accessible to and accommodating of older men's preferred learning pedagogies than Australian adult education and training (ACE) providers. While both organisation types typically provide nationally accredited training, unlike ACE organisations, fire and emergency services organisations, require participants to meet regularly, maintain current competencies, take on positions of responsibility and work in teams. The data from older men

in age-related organisations are indicative of minimal or no interest in accredited learning, but a greater need for self-exploration through positively narrating the past. There is interest in collectively making and maintaining old relationships, doing hands-on things together and learning to stay as fit and healthy as possible as they age, even in the most adverse of circumstances.

Conclusion

The data and narratives examined, in their totality in these three different Australian community organisation contexts, lead to the conclusion that much learning for older men in later life is essentially ontological, about being, rather than cognitive, or about knowing. Through learning is undertaken under a range of other guises (vocational, community emergency service-oriented, therapeutic and leisure) consistent with different community organisation purposes, it is in many important and powerful senses re-creational, in that older men are struggling with new identities. Learning, even when it has a pragmatic purpose and is undertaken in a practical setting, allows men to actively redefine and re-create personal meanings and identities other than those they developed through paid work.

While the conclusions from three community organisations in one small, rural Australian town cannot be extrapolated internationally, data from the wider study (Golding, Foley, Brown & Harvey, 2009) confirm that there is an absence in Australia of appropriate opportunities to address positive ageing and social isolation of men, particularly for older men not in the workforce or unemployed. Mark, Montgomery and Graham (2010), in a study using a parallel method came to a very similar conclusion in Northern Ireland. With a very weak and deliberately emasculated government-funded adult learning sector and institutional aged care settings that tend to view older people as helpless and useless, Australian community organisations other than adult and community education, such as fire and emergency services and community men's sheds organisations, are playing critically important, new surrogate roles. This includes helping older men to participate in the community, shape new, positive and different post-work identities and improve wellbeing (Golding, 2011). There is evidence that is never too late for older men to positively take charge of life through learning, even when ACE is inappropriate or missing. These findings have important implications for adult and lifelong learning policies as well as for health and wellbeing strategies in other nations including Ireland and elsewhere in Europe with ageing populations, particularly where ageing is also exacerbated by high levels of unemployment.

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Extending the Assessment of Literacy as Social Practice

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Abstract

This article explores how the FETAC standards and processes at Levels 1 and 2 can be used to recognise literacy as a social practice. A summary review of the development of the National Framework of Qualifications is provided. Levels 1 to 4 in Ireland are compared with three key international frameworks, including OECD levels and those in Northern Ireland/England and Europe. Following a short consideration of assessment in adult literacy practice in Ireland, a process is outlined that practitioners and managers in adult basic education can use to support the certification of literacy as a social practice in adult education and real life contexts.

Introduction

When the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was launched in 2003 adult learners and educators welcomed the innovation of the new Levels 1 and 2 and the potential they provide for national qualifications. These levels are particularly relevant to adult literacy and basic education practice and to adults with no or low qualifications and the educationally disadvantaged. The aim of this article is to explore the potential within these levels for recognising achievement for literacy as a social practice.

The methodology involved a comparison of NFQ levels with international benchmarks, analysis of FETAC statistics in relation to programme validation and awards at Level 1 and 2, and a consideration of assessment in adult literacy practice in Ireland against the standards at Levels 1-3 specific to literacy and numeracy practices.

The analysis of the above has resulted in certain outputs that will be of use to adult literacy and basic education practitioners.

- The provision of a summary table of levels 1 to 4 in Ireland, with international comparisons, including Northern Ireland.

- An outline of Level 2 standards involved in common social practices of literacy in adult education centres.

- A synthesis of a process practitioners and managers in adult basic education can use to support the certification of literacy as a social practice.

It is hoped that this article will inform a national dialogue on levels and assessment in adult basic education practice, and may enhance providers', and ultimately adult learners, engagement at these levels.

The Certification Context

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications is a 10 level framework of standards for accreditation purposes, established in October 2003. Levels 1-3 are of most relevance to adult literacy learners, but progression to levels 4 and 5 is also important. There were no previous awards at Level 1 and 2. However, accreditation is not a requirement of participation in adult literacy, and it is vital that participants continue to take part in adult literacy learning activities with an option of accreditation.

Before the NFQ, the most accessible certification for adult literacy learners was the Junior Certificate or an old NCVA / FETAC award now at Level 3 on the framework. The certification system was not unlike the fire escape of a New York building. It was easily used by those on the inside to move up or down levels, but the ladder could not be accessed by people on the ground outside. The introduction of NFQ Levels 1 and 2 brought the accreditation ladder within everyone's reach. For many, including the 500,000 Irish adults with literacy difficulties identified by the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (1998), it provided a more appropriate or realistic opportunity for certification, often for the first time. This was a significant innovation in an Irish context and relatively new in international terms. Levels 1 and 2 are different in two key respects from the other levels. Firstly, the volume of learning is smaller than at Levels 3 up to 10. Volume of learning is important as over-assessment is a greater risk with smaller volumes of learning. Secondly, Level 1 and 2 were 'greenfield' levels, and assessment for certification at these levels remains a new development for national awarding bodies, providers and learners. The introduction of the NFQ has also facilitated discussion on levels in adult basic educa-

tion beyond what individuals could or could not do. The NFQ is now a familiar and concrete framework with a common language, and can be used to compare qualifications with those gained in Belfast or Berlin. A general and summary comparison of levels is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: General Comparative Table of Levels

Ireland – National Framework of Qualifications	European Qualifications Framework	International Adult Literacy Survey	National Qualifications Framework England Wales & Northern Ireland
NFQ	EQF	OECD IALS levels	NQF Levels
Level 1	*Level 1*	*Level 1*	*Pre-entry*
Level 2	*Level 2*	*Level 2*	*Entry*
Level 3	*Level 3*	*Level 3*	*Level 1*
Level 4			*Level 2*

This comparison is based on analysis of levels used in IALS, the European Qualifications Framework, the National Qualifications Framework in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the NFQ and NQAI publications (2008, 2009) as well as conference presentations [1].

FETAC Common Awards System

FETAC are currently rolling out the new Common Awards System (CAS) which will cover every award they make at Levels 1-6 on the NFQ by 2014. Providers are required to formally agree quality assurance arrangements and to validate programmes with FETAC before they can offer programmes to learners that lead to certification. Both the quality assurance agreement and programme validation cover assessment policies and processes.

The roll out of the CAS is being achieved on a phased basis, and started with awards at Levels 1 and 2 in 2007. Analysis of the FETAC Register of Validated Programmes[2] shows that the response from providers to Levels 1 and 2 has been mixed. While VECs have led the way in this regard, there are still consider-

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1   For example, a presentation by John Vorhaus, NRDC, Institute of Education, London on 1/12/08 in Germany.
2   www.fetac.ie FETAC Register of Validated Programmes, Levels 1 and 2, May 2009 and February 2011.

able gaps. It is also clear that community based providers of adult education are struggling to use the CAS. According to FETAC award statistics, 65 FETAC Major Awards were made at Level 1 and 2, in 2008, with 266 Major Awards in 2009 and 451 Major Awards in 2010[3]. When Minor Awards are included, less than 1% of all awards made in those three years were at Levels 1 and 2. The implementation can be described as disappointingly slow, at best. Adult learners in Ireland do not yet have equal access to the option of accreditation for learning at these levels. In 2011, eight years after the NFQ was launched, where a person lives, and which provider a person accesses services from, are still determinant factors in the availability of Level 1 and 2 awards to learners, including adults returning to basic education.

Adult Literacy Learners

Adults return to education to tackle a literacy need for a wide range of reasons (Bailey & Coleman 1998, NALA 2009). For instance, adult literacy learners tend to go back for a particular social purpose. For some it is to write their own Christmas cards, to read for leisure, or to help children with homework. For others, it may be to grapple with changes in literacy practices at work or in wider society, such as the increasing use of websites and ICT. Success for learners is about participation, reaching goals and improving their facility to engage more fully in the contexts they want, without literacy and numeracy practices being a barrier (NALA 2008, 2009).

A typical profile of a participant in VEC adult literacy services in 2008 was an adult, about 40 years of age, who had left school at 15-16, most likely without achieving a Junior Certificate level qualification. The learner typically received two hours literacy tuition per week. Analysis of the VEC adult literacy returns indicates that in 2008[4]:

· 70% of all students were under 45 years of age.

· 79% of all students were in group tuition.

· Females comprised 60% of all students and with 40% males.

· 38% of all students had Primary Certificate qualifications or less.

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3   www.fetac.ie FETAC Annual Statistics 2008, 2009 & 2010.
4   Based on an analysis of the DES VEC Adult Literacy Returns 2008, unpublished.

- 70% had a Junior Certificate level qualification or less.

- 26.5% of learners were ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) learners.

- 39% of students were in employment, but students were increasingly likely to be unemployed in 2008 than in previous years.

Literacy as social practice

There is a compelling literature base that maps the evolution of literacy as social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995, 2001; Crowther, Hamilton, & Tett, 2001; Prinsloo 2005; Reder & Devila 2005; Tett, Hamilton, & Hillier, 2006; and Hegarty & Feely 2009). One way of understanding literacy as social practice is, as Barton (2007) describes, to use a perspective which sees literacy as

> located in interactions between people, rather than being a decontextualised cognitive skill…

Adult literacy is predominately conceptualised in Ireland as social practice. This approach is central to NALA's (2005) definition of literacy, which recognises that people use different skills for various real life situations, including in family, community and work settings. This means literacy cannot be seen as a discrete set of technical skills. A social practice approach recognises the limits of a focus on the autonomous skills of reading, writing, numeracy and language, to embrace…

> what people do with literacy, numeracy and language, with whom, where and how. (Tett, Hamilton, and Hillier, 2006)

The purposes, uses and contexts of literacy practice are fundamental to literacy development in Irish basic education. It follows then that purpose and context should be included in the assessment of literacy. This has not always been the case, and it is timely to explore the challenge to literacy practitioners as they develop programmes and assessment systems to recognise literacy achievement under the FETAC CAS.

Assessment in adult literacy in Ireland

Assessment in the Irish adult literacy services developed in the absence of a comprehensive national standard and has been practiced informally and often intuitively by literacy practitioners[5]. Juliet Merrifield (2001) outlines three main purposes of assessment – for accountability purposes, for accreditation purposes and for teaching and learning purposes. In some cases processes are interlinked. For example, in Ireland initial assessment in adult literacy provides information for both teaching and learning purposes and for accountability.

While there is no formal national procedure for initial assessment currently in use in Irish adult literacy services, there is a common approach in terms of the aims, ethos and the principles underlying initial assessment[6]. Initial assessment is characterised as a process which is informal, adult friendly, and carried out by initial interview with the Adult Literacy Organiser. The Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) programme was introduced in 2006 and provided for six hours tuition per week for 14 weeks. It required all participants (about 2,000) to have an initial or pre-programme assessment, as well as an assessment at the end of the programme. The assessment process is based on checklists for reading, writing, speaking and listening and numeracy that reference the FETAC national standards.

Formative assessment is a core feature of literacy work. Mapping the Learning Journey (MLJ) was introduced in 2005 as a framework to capture and support formative assessment for teaching and learning purposes, based on practice in the field and international research. MLJ can help identify, record and summarise progress learners make in literacy work. It covers the areas of reading, writing, numeracy, oral skills and personal development. MLJ informed the development of Levels 1 and 2[7]. FETAC Level 1 and 2 awards in Reading, Writing and Listening and speaking closely match the standards and range of the MLJ beginning and mid-level levels respectively[8]. The upper level of MLJ is not closely aligned with standards at Level 3.

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5   A short account of assessment in adult literacy practice was outlined in Guidelines to the level definitions for the Department of Education and Science VEC adult literacy returns (NALA, 2007).

6   Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work NALA 2005.

7   NALA provided drafts of standards for awards in Reading, Writing, and Listening and Speaking at Levels 2, based on MLJ, and these were largely adopted by FETAC.

8   The cornerstone cards in the MLJ guide (NALA 2005) are a very useful reference for comparison with the published standards for Level 1 and 2.

Summative assessment processes in literacy work have until very recently been based on the standards within the 'old' FETAC Foundation Certificate and the Junior Certificate.

When a person joins a literacy service they immediately engage in a process of initial and formative assessment. Initial assessment usually starts with their first visit to the centre and focuses on what they can do already and what they want to do. From the first few literacy classes, a learning plan is developed based on the goals, objectives and preferred learning styles and teaching methodologies that emerge. These processes are critical to 'assessment for learning' – that is, assessment activities that inform the teaching and learning plans and activities (See Black and Williams, 1998). But they are also important for students and practitioners in deciding what areas, if any, may be the focus for 'assessment of learning', which involves making judgements about learning achieved, often including certification.

Literacy Standards in Ireland

The FETAC CAS standards are based on learning outcomes and are criterion-referenced. Each award has a specific set of standards that a learner must demonstrate to achieve it. The standards for Reading at Levels 1 and 2 are outlined in Table 2 below. They identify a small number of realistic and specific outcomes a learner must achieve. But they do not prioritise how the learner has achieved the standards. The standards are blind to provider, courses, methodologies, and student background. The requirement is simply that a person must demonstrate the standards, and do so to the satisfaction of the quality assurance process of the provider. This presents what Jay Derrick (in Campbell, 2007) refers to as "local freedom" in the assessment of standards, while maintaining the integrity of the standards themselves. This local freedom is at the discretion of the provider but can only happen within the assessment processes that are approved with FETAC and instituionalised. Providing flexibility, without undermining the rigour of summative assessment processes, is key to demonstrating standards in a way that will allow for different learning journeys to the same destination.

Table 2: Learning outcomes for Level 1 and 2 Reading Awards[9]

FETAC Level 1 Reading	FETAC Level 2 Reading
(R1) Recognise some familiar words independently including some that are commonly used and personally relevant	(R1) Read familiar words that are commonly used and personally relevant
(R2) Interpret some common symbols and signs in familiar contexts	(R2) Use simple rules and text conventions that support meaning
(R3) Demonstrate awareness of text conventions, print material and the alphabet	(R3) Interpret different forms of writing and text, including social sight signs and symbols
(R4) Make sense of simple personally relevant sentences containing familiar words	(R4) Find key information from different forms of writing
(R5) Use word identification strategies	(R5) Use reading strategies
(R6) Identify the nature of familiar documents	

Assessment for certification purposes in literacy

At the heart of the literacy approach is the understanding that 'A beginner reader is not a beginner thinker' (Frost and Hoy 1985). People are not at levels, programmes and standards are. The range of skills, interests and experiences of an adult learner is unlikely to produce a neat or linear result in terms of national standards. For example, an adult learner may demonstrate a set of knowledge, skill and competence in reading at Level 2, but not in writing at that level, while their competence in health and safety awareness may be at a much higher level. Adult learners demonstrate spiky profiles. That is, they have strengths in some areas and weaknesses in others. When these skillsets are benchmarked against the defined sets of knowledge, skill and competence that make up FETAC awards, they may stretch across levels 1-6 (or even higher). This is especially true for adults returning to basic education.

In December 2010, I had the privilege to attend the SIPTU Basic English Scheme celebration of 20 years of service. It centered on the production of a magazine of student writing and a reading night. Some were clearly emergent readers while others were more advanced. There was a wide range of literacy practices demonstrated that night and these can be specifically matched to the FETAC standards for reading and writing. All readers met some or all of reading standards at Levels 1 and 2 in their performance that evening (see Table 2). This included

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9   FETAC Level 1 and 2 Reading award specifications on www.fetac.ie.

the emergent readers, as learning at these levels is intended to be supported and familiar, and help with the odd word here and there does not negate achievement. Some demonstrated competencies at Level 3.

Many adult literacy services and community schemes hold similar reading nights and events. Adult literacy students also contribute to the life of their centre in other ways. Students regularly contribute to promotional events. They are usually involved in training courses for volunteer tutors. Student committees are another regular feature of literacy centres. In all these cases, the students are using literacy and numeracy skills in their social practice within the education centre. The point is that assessment systems can capture these practices and provide accreditation, once it is built in to their learning programmes.

Table 3 below provides a comparison of some literacy practices that typically occur in a learning centre with relevant learning outcomes within Level 2 awards. However, many other awards may be relevant. For example, at the SIPTU reading night, Reading, Writing, and Personal Decision Making awards at Level 1 may have been appropriate to recognise achievement in some cases. At Level 3, practitioners will recognise opportunities to meet some or all learning outcomes in such awards as Communications, Self Advocacy, or Event Participation.

Table 3: A comparison of literacy practices in a learning centre with relevant learning outcomes within Level 2 awards

Activity	Level 2 award and outcomes*	Note on assessment evidence
Contributing to a student reading night	Level 2 Writing W2 & W3 Partial meeting of W4 Level 2 Reading R1, R2, R4 & R5	Digital Recording, or tutor verification of the quality, of a students participation
Contributing to a student writing publication	Level 2 Writing W2 & W3 Partial meeting of W4	Draft of student input to publication Copy of publication
Participation in Initial Tutor Training (or a specific promotional event)	Level 2 Listening and Speaking All outcomes	Digital Recording, or tutor verification of Evaluation by participants, of a students participation
Participation on a committee (benchmarked against practices in the NALA student development committee)	Level 2 Listening and Speaking Level 2 Reading Level 2 Personal Decision Making All outcomes	Learner Record Meeting documentation – including agenda, minutes, tutor verification
Participation in a consultation process or event	Level 2 Listening and Speaking, Reading All outcomes	Learner Record Meeting documentation – including agenda, minutes, tutor verification

(*Note: level award outcomes are summarised with firstly the initial(s) of the award and then the order the outcome appears in the award specification. So, R1 refers to the first outcome in the Reading award, W4 refers to the fourth outcome in the Writing award, and so on).

Surprisingly, the collection of evidence of standards can be relatively straightforward at Levels 1 and 2. Providing the option of certification in such instances requires some purposeful planning and rigorous recording, but does not need to involve a significant additional workload. The vast majority of the learning, planning and development required for certification purposes already occurs in the organisation of student reading nights, or in the preparation for a students' input into a volunteer training course. Additional planned inputs are clearly required for assessment purposes. For example, providing information about certification and agreeing with interested learners what can be recognised and how. The assessment

instrument can include digital or audio recording parts of the reading night for a specific group of readers, but it can be sufficient to rely on verification by the tutor or internal verifier. (Indeed, if the recording is carried out by a student it may be possible to recognise this practice as part of the Digital Media or Digital Photography awards.) For presentations to groups of trainee volunteers, the participant evaluations and the verification of the tutor trainer can provide ample evidence of achievement.

Practitioners need to be mindful of introducing additional elements in a way which is non-threatening and does not increase pressure on a participant. Equally practitioners should not decide unilaterally that adding additional planning elements would be too much for the adults concerned – they are usually well able to judge for themselves.

NALA used this approach in the initial delivery of its Level 2 programme. The assessment instrument was a presentation of the learning achieved by participants on a learning programme covered by the TV series "Written Off?". So far so good – however we set the bar too high. The presentation was to the President of Ireland, and was carried out on the TV set. Fortunately, the extra pressures did not deter the learners. They demonstrated and often exceeded standards of listening and speaking and personal decision making at Level 2.

Integrated assessment is an especially useful concept at Levels 1 and 2, where over assessment is a significant risk due to the smaller volume of learning. Here, integrated assessment means providing an assessment task that allows the student to demonstrate a range of standards from several award areas. The NALA Distance Learning Service has used integrated assessment briefs at Level 2 in this way. For example, one particular distance learner had identified an interest in reading about the history of Ireland in the early 20th century. When the programmes' formative assessment process identified the learner as 'accreditation ready', a customised assessment brief was designed. The brief required the student to plan a trip, browse in a bookshop, join a library, find a book appropriate to their interests, read a section of it and describe it to their tutor, and submit a description of this learning experience by post. The evidence included tutor verification and allowed the student to meet many of the learning outcomes across a number of awards at Level 2 including reading, listening and speaking, personal decision making and writing.

There are other opportunities within the life of an adult education centre to recognise achievement. The NALA student development committee is a very

active group and members organize a range of events including National Student Days and promotions at the National Ploughing Championships. The literacy and numeracy practices that the members demonstrate putting on these events so successfully could also be recognised. The sets of knowledge, skills and competencies practiced by students on this committee can be identified and matched to particular standards and outcomes in a range of minor awards. Participation on a committee provides a rich source of evidencing achievement of literacy practices in relation to the array of reading, personal decision making and listening and speaking that typically goes on. There are awards at Level 2 in each of these areas, as well as awards at Level 3 such as Self Advocacy and Event Participation. The key is firstly to design opportunities to capture literacy practices into learning programmes and assessment processes. Secondly the exercise of quality assurances procedures must confirm that the assessment is appropriate, valid, reliable and fair.

The literacy practices involved in the reading night can be exercised in different contexts. The activities of a student committee can be mirrored by engagement in a residents committee or organisation of a fundraising event. Presentations that students might make in work, or a speech at a family wedding, can equally be benchmarked against standards. These real life literacy practices can be matched to national standards to recognise literacy practice, in such areas as managing diabetes, planning a holiday, or in work (think of a painter and numeracy). Again, this approach can only be adopted when it is incorporated into learning programmes, and is consistent with quality assurance agreements made with FETAC. In each case the purposeful planning will require a specific assessment brief that identifies the inherent literacy and numeracy outcomes in specific awards to be demonstrated, and the assessment and verification requirements. However, once the learning programme incorporates this approach, the collection of evidence is not necessarily problematic. Speeches can be recorded. Journals and portfolios can be kept. A job search with identified literacy events can be logged and supported by documentation and report.

Although, this approach is challenging for adult literacy providers and practitioners, it remains eminently possible. While the practitioner may be the expert in terms of teaching methodology and assessment procedures, the student is the expert in their use of literacy. Providing assessment processes that build on both of these skill sets can provide national awards for learners' goals that are evidenced in the social practices and the real world contexts of the learner.

A Summary Guideline

The approach to the assessment of literacy as social practice must be built into the learning programme from the beginning, and it would be useful to reference the approach at the programme validation stage.

The process starts by identifying what the learner would like to be able to do in different contexts. It involves an analysis of the literacy and numeracy practices involved, as well as the steps along the way to achieving the goals set out. This will help match literacy and numeracy practices to specific standards. It is vital to explore how specific sets of literacy practices or standards can be evidenced and captured in the practice and contexts the student is comfortable with, before building assessment processes around it.

Planning is the key.

- Think about the learning plan and learning objectives of the individuals.

- Identify the inherent literacy and numeracy practices involved in achieving these goals.

- Match the student's involvement in the life of the centre, and available real life events and practices, to the criterion referenced standards in the relevant awards.

- Agree the contexts for assessment with the student.

- Ask how you will know the standard has been achieved for the particular practice.

- Identify the assessment technique, and evidence required.

- Provide an assessment brief.

- Reinforce and prepare.

Conclusion

It is important to stress that achievement for adult literacy learners is not primarily about certification. It is more about fluency and independence, and about confidence in doing things that involve literacy and numeracy practices. However the option of accreditation should be provided to learners that want

it. This means that accreditation is not optional for providers. To date, adult basic education providers and accreditation systems have not found it easy to recognize literacy achievements. With the implementation of the CAS, there is now a greater facility to do so. There is also an opportunity to build on the ethos of adult literacy development in Ireland, which recognises that literacy cannot be disconnected from the contexts and purposes of its use, and to reinforce this ethos through the emergent assessment processes. The evidence so far suggests that there is an access issue with the take up of Level 1 and 2 that may need to be addressed at national level. There is no doubt that the design, review and development of assessment processes under the FETAC CAS are new and challenging. Nevertheless, the CAS offers a current and fundamental opportunity to provide certification in ways that reflect the diverse needs of adult learners and facilitate their interests.

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Irish-African partnership and research capacity building for development: potential to learn from research for the education and lifelong learning sector

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Abstract

The Irish-African Partnership for Research Capacity Building (IAP) is a research consortium involving all of the nine universities on the island of Ireland together with four African universities, with the overall aim of building research capacity for poverty reduction. The project was supported by a three-year grant from Irish Aid. This article examines the achievements of IAP and argues that the 'foresight' approach and methodology used to generate the health and education research priorities can make a useful contribution not only to development research, but also to adult education.

Introduction

The right to education is an internationally recognised right noted in Article 26 of the 1950 Universal Declaration of Human Rights to Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. More than thirty years ago, member states of UNESCO affirmed the importance of adult education both as a right and as a means of enabling people to claim their other rights. Meeting in Nairobi in 1976, the Development of Adult Education UNESCO General Conference set out a vision for adult education by noting:

'the access of adults to education, in the context of lifelong education, is a fundamental aspect of the right to education and facilitates the exercise of the right to participate in political, cultural, artistic and scientific life.' Recommendation of the development of Adult Education UNESCO General Conference, 19th Session, November 1976, Nairobi.

While the particular role which adult education and lifelong learning can play in promoting development is widely recognised, there has been less emphasis on the role of research in the development of adult education – and to determine what kind of contribution it can make towards the development of policy and practice.

What is the Irish-African research partnership?

The Irish-African Partnership for Research Capacity Building (IAP) is a research consortium involving all of the nine universities on the island of Ireland together with four African universities, with the overall aim of building research capacity for poverty reduction[1].

Research capacity building involves developing institutional-level capacity for research in the service of development in this context. For example, assisting partner institutions in Africa to create and strengthen their research management and support functions is one way of building research capacity. It also promotes a concerted contribution to international development among the universities on the island of Ireland.

The IAP is supported by a three-year grant from Irish Aid within the context of the *Programme of Strategic Cooperation between Irish Aid and Higher Education and Research Institutes, 2007-2010*. Its underlying rationale was to collaboratively strengthen research capacity in the service of the global development imperative of poverty reduction (and associated challenges such as livelihood security, environmental protection and disaster risk reduction), in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa. Within this broad ethos, the project strives to achieve three overarching aims:

1. To build capacity in development research in nine partner Irish universities.

2. To build capacity in health, education, gender and ICT research within four partner African universities.

3. In the longer term, to develop an Irish-African network of excellence in

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1   The Irish universities are: University College Cork (UCC); University College Dublin (UCD); National University of Ireland – Galway (NUIG); National University of Ireland – Maynooth (NUIM); Trinity College, Dublin (TCD); Dublin City University (DCU); the University of Limerick (UL); Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and the University of Ulster (UU). The four African universities are: Makerere University (Uganda); University of Dar Es Salaam (Tanzania), University of Malawi; and Eduardo Mondlane University (Mozambique).

development research.

In the course of its three-year lifespan, the IAP project has comprised several interlocking components:

i)   Five residential workshops – three in Africa and two in Ireland where a selection of researchers and administrators from all the 13 partner institutions meet in thematic dialogue.

ii)   A stakeholder consultation to document opportunities and constraints to research capacity building in the partner institutions.

iii)   A 'foresight' exercise to identify the main health and education priorities in Africa over the next 10 years around which specific research partnerships could be developed.

iv)   The formulation of a set of quantitative and qualitative metrics to help to gauge the status and progress of research capacity in partner institutions, and beyond.

v)   Development of a digital repository and research register to provide a prototype online platform for African and Irish researchers working together in the future.

IAP's particular focus on research capacity building (RCB) derives from the 'greater recognition of the potential of the higher education and research sectors in developing countries to contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)' (Irish Aid, 2007: 2). As a corollary of this, there is a need to ensure that development-related research is being adequately supported, both in terms of personnel with appropriate knowledge and skills as well as in terms of appropriate infrastructure.

An initial goal of IAP was to establish targeted capacity building programmes in the context of real issues and priorities for Africa but with relevance to Ireland as well. The rationale is that the world is so interconnected that issues for Africa today might become issues for Ireland in future.

In doing so, the programme promotes an understanding of RCB which needs to be based on the principles of local relevance in the African context and its applicability to global poverty eradication. The IAP is conscious of Africa's future in

a globalised world and the risks of exclusion from the new information economy and is mindful of the need for capturing Africa's contribution to world knowledge. Central to the programme's operations is recognition of the priority role of local knowledge and conditions as key to making the RCB initiative both relevant and applicable.

For the Irish Universities participating in the IAP there are equally serious challenges in bringing to bear higher education in terms of global development. Since independence in the 1920s and more particularly since the start of outward oriented growth in the 1960s the Irish Universities have been focused on national development needs. However over the last ten to fifteen years the Irish universities much as Irish society, has become internationalised. Today the Irish universities need to find concrete ways to build sustainable global development in a way which keeps growth with equity always at the centre.

The IAP is thus a unique opportunity for all the Irish Universities to develop a methodology that can facilitate their contribution to global development by focused partnership with four of the Irish Aid partner countries and their leading higher education establishments.

RCB in the Context of the Millennium Development Goals and Poverty Reduction

Irish Aid (the official development assistance programme of the Government of Ireland) has as its overarching objective the reduction of poverty, vulnerability and increased opportunity in all its partner countries in the South. It seeks to contribute to global development by putting the MDGs at the heart of its approach to development (DFA 2006). Thus, IAP's poverty reduction focus in its RCB endeavour is routed within this broader Irish Aid framework.

Poverty reduction gained ground on the international political agenda with the institution of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at a UN Summit in 2000. The MDGs include halving the number of people living in extreme poverty, reducing child mortality by two thirds, reducing hunger and malnutrition by 50 percent, universal primary education and halving the spread of HIV-AIDS by 2015. The UN's Human Development Report has tracked progress on the MDGs and now admits that the major goals for 2015 in health, nutritional and educational contexts cannot be reached. In Sub-Saharan Africa life expectancy is actually declining and child mortality is rising. This grim prognosis will only get worse following the global recession unleashed by the banking crisis

of October 2008. With the MDGs likely to not be met, Higher education partnerships such as the IAP ought to position themselves accordingly. There is a widespread mood internationally of the need to reinvent development research if it is to be fit for purpose in the decade to come. There is need to reinvent what development research is actually about. The North/South dichotomy is no longer seen as helpful with the local and the global being inextricably linked (Preece 2009). This reinvention of development research calls for a more holistic approach to research which would look at an issue across a wide range of contexts unencumbered by North/South labels.

Linking research on education and lifelong learning in Ireland and Africa through a stakeholder consultation and 'foresight' methodology

A first step towards identifying the need for, and potential of, partnership in building capacity for research for mutual benefit in Ireland and Africa involved a survey of stakeholders' views. This stakeholder consultation sought to establish a baseline understanding of research capacity for international development in the Irish universities as well as research capacity in general in the four participating African universities. The consultation sought to elicit the views of administrators and researchers within the 13 partner universities on the opportunities and constraints to research capacity building at both institutional and individual levels, and possible ways of overcoming the barriers. The consultation exercise was complemented with a 'foresight' exercise, which was specifically designed to facilitate the identification of health and education research priorities for the next 10 years on which Irish-African counterparts could work together in partnership to contribute to poverty alleviation.

The 'foresight' exercise was an integral part of the stakeholder consultation process and three of the five project workshops that took place in Dublin, Entebbe and Maputo. It was utilised as a tool for prioritising research areas in health and education for the IAP and helped the project partners focus on developing strategies relevant to the future. Specifically the role of 'foresight' in the project was two-fold: to ensure that the partners identified and took advantage of the changes that could support and enable research capacity building; secondly, that they were aware of those changes that could undermine or restrict the potential for research capacity building and identify options and strategies for minimising their impact. The particular 'foresight' tool used was scenario planning which allowed partners to engage in creative thinking about the threats and opportunities in regards to research capacity building in the area of development for poverty reduction. It furthermore helped to build consensus

by 'travelling and learning together' as the partners explored the international literature around health and education priorities and derived their own list of priorities. It is this mutual learning and development of a research strategy and capacity building practice which will, we hope, be the lasting contribution of 'foresight' to the Irish African Partnership. Using 'foresight', and in particular scenarios, enabled the partners to: i) set the aims and objectives of the Irish African Partnership within the wider context of social, economic, cultural and political change ii) examine the extent to which the world in which we need to develop research capacity building and the policy context in which it might occur may change, and what will drive those changes iii) examine some of the many issues affecting research capacity building iv) consider and develop options, opportunities and strategies for research and research capacity building which take the changes of the future, rather than the status quo of the past into full consideration.

The field research for the stakeholder consultation took place between June and September, 2008. During the stakeholder consultation process, the two project researchers visited all 13 institutions and spent three to four days in each location. In total, over 300 academics and administrators were consulted. This number included 71 African colleagues, all active in the field of education, who participated in education-specific and/or multidisciplinary group interviews and workshops conducted as part of the research. These colleagues came from Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique (12), University of Malawi (2), University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania (15) and from Makerere University in Uganda (42).

During some of the group interviews and workshops, researchers employed an exercise whereby participants were asked to plot perceived levels of research capacity against their research career during the last 10 years. This allowed for an evaluation of the factors perceived to be responsible for low or high levels of capacity and the factors that represented turning points from low to high levels or vice versa. Group discussions were also used to explore factors associated with institutional capacity building and the merits and demerits of participating in education research partnerships such as the IAP. Transcripts were analysed for emerging themes and trends.

IAP believes that research capacity building takes time and is itself a lifelong learning process and needs to be set within the context of longer term changes and possible futures. For example, the time needed to turn an able student into

an active and effective member of a research team can be as long as 10 years of study and training. During that time the world will have moved on and the economic, academic and funding context within which research needs to be undertaken will have changed significantly; the priorities which need to be addressed may have altered; new approaches to and tools for education and research may have been developed – hence, the need to use 'foresight'. This type of strategic thinking facilitates the ability to maintain a high quality and coherent forward view (Bezold et al 2009; Loveridge 2009) while at the same time permitting tapping into new potential areas of research and modes of capacity building. It makes research partnerships more focused rather than opportunistic drives for currently available funding.

Education and health research priorities and the stakeholder consultation and 'foresight' exercise: Adults learning together

The 'foresight' exercise began at the first project workshop in Dublin in 2008 when participants were asked to identify factors which would have the greatest impact on health and education in the future. Common responses included:

- Clean water and sanitation

- Renewable energy and bio fuels

- Food security and nutrition

- Increasing mobility

- Stable/democratic governance

- New and emerging infectious disease

- Non-infectious disease

- Education and empowerment of women

During workshop two, hosted in Entebbe in November 2008, participants derived four future paths for development in Africa around which, parameters for research in health and education could be based. These scenarios were framed around axes of the global political economy and national, social and political cohesion. Groups were asked to consider and discuss how health and

education might look within the four resultant scenarios and what the priorities in each of the scenarios might be. To aid the discussion, groups were provided with lists of top ten future priorities in education and health (Table 1) as suggested by individuals who had contributed to the stakeholder consultation.

Table 1: Research Priorities in Health and Education from the Stakeholder Consultation

Health	Education
Food Security/Food Studies/Nutrition	Inclusive Education and Gender
Climate Change/Environment	Education for Community Development
Public Health	ICT and Education
Water	HIV/AIDS Education
Biodiversity/Biosafety/Conservation	Teacher Education (Initial and Continuing Professional Development)
HIV/AIDS	Curriculum Development and Reform
Infectious Medicine	Diversity in Education
Malaria	Education in Disadvantaged Communities
Maternal Health	Improving Education Delivery (Adult & Child Literacy, Science & Maths, Special Needs Education)
Gender and Health	Education for Sustainable Development/Life Skills Education

These research priorities were revisited at the Entebbe workshop as part of the scenario discussions to examine which would be priorities within the different futures. Two groups each focused on one topic – two on health and two on education with issues, options and priorities relating to ICT and gender integral to those discussions. Table 2 below sets out the priorities within each scenario. Participants not only prioritised specific areas, but also considered how those priorities might change within the different futures. The research priorities identified in each of the scenarios showed considerable overlap and consistency.

Table 2: Health and Education Research Opportunities and Priorities in each Scenario

Health		Education	
Scenario A – Capitalism unbound	Scenario B – Back to the future	Scenario A – Capitalism unbound	Scenario B – Back to the future
Infectious diseases – HIV/ AIDS	*HIV*	*Initial teacher education – Continuous Professional Development*	*Curriculum Development and Reform*
Maternal health	*Gender and health*	*ICT in education*	*Diversity in education*
Food security	*Maternal health*	*Education for sustainable development*	*Education in disadvantaged communities*
Climate change	*Infectious medicines / diseases*	*Education in disadvantaged communities*	*Improving education delivery e.g. using ICT*

World/Scenario A was called *'Capitalism Unbound'* because it was one in which globalisation takes off and accelerates and at the same time national politics remain fairly stable. It is a highly structured and regulated world which creates great dynamic growth but also more inequalities. World B was given the title *'Back to the Future'* because the world has turned protectionist and political cohesion is at a very low level. There is less mobility of people, capital and ideas. Inevitably communities are torn apart as political vision is in short supply.

These two most opposed worlds set up a strong tension for the partners' thinking about future education and health needs. In the more globalised yet more consensual world 'A' one would expect more private provision of health and education services as internationalisation deepens. There are likely to be two quite distinct health and education systems for the 'haves' and 'have not's'. In World B, which is both less globalised and less cohesive, one would expect a greater importance for local provision of health and education services and a general 'return to basics'. Interestingly it would be expected that the chosen health and education priorities such as maternal/child health and teacher edu-

cation would be important in both worlds even if for different reasons. Likewise the cross cutting themes such as gender equality and ICT and climate change would be hugely relevant in both scenarios.

Validating the Health and Education Priorities

Having elicited health and education research priorities from workshop participants, the next stage was to compare and contrast these priorities with those identified by broader analysts and actors. To achieve this, in the period between the second and third workshop further research was carried out. This involved mapping existing literature and research at international and regional levels as well as relevant national plans and strategies (see Table 3 and 4 for the literature sources) and conducting elite interviews with a range of health and education specialists, both internationally and nationally within the five IAP partner countries.

A number of further possible research priorities emerged from this work. It was therefore proposed that the lists of potential research priorities should be expanded (See Appendix 1 and 2). The longer lists would then be prioritised to generate a list of 3-5 key health and education topics for the IAP. Groups used a combination of scoring and ranking to prioritise the list based on the following five criteria:

1. *Contribution to poverty reduction*

    • To what extent does the problem contribute to poverty?

    • How severe is the problem?

    • To what extend will the research contribute to poverty reduction?

2. *Contribution to community empowerment*

    • To what extent does the problem reflect measurable community priorities?

    • To what extent will the community be actively involved in the research process?

    • To what extent does the project enhance community capabilities?

3. *Relevance to policy and practice*

   - Can research from this area be translated in policy?

   - Will the project have the support of local/national authorities/policy makers?

   - Is it likely that the results of the study will be implemented?

4. *Contribution to the empowerment of women*

   - Does the problem place a particular burden on women?

   - Is research in this area likely to contribute to empowering women?

   - Will the project meet basic engendering of development criteria?

5. *Criticality/ feasibility*

   - How urgently are results needed for developing interventions?

   - Is further research needed?

   - Are there sources of funding available for this project?

Table 3: Literature consulted on health priorities

Global	Continental	National
WHO – Health for All *(Policy for the 21st Century for the African Region 2007)*	NEPAD – Health Strategy 2003	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy 2006
G8 (Africa Action Plan 2002)	AMREF – Strategy 2007 – 2017	Mozambique Strategic Plan for the Health Sector 2009 – 2015
World Bank *(Strategy for Health, Nutrition and Population 2007)*	African Union – The Africa Health Strategy 2007 – 2015	Tanzanian National Health Policy 2003
Mathers & Loncar 2006 *(Projections of Global Mortality and Burden of Disease)*		Ugandan Health Sector Strategic Plan 2005/06 – 2009/10
Irish Aid (*Health* Policy + Country Strategy Papers for Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique)		
DFID *(Research Strategy 2008 – 2013)*		
DANIDA *(Development Assistance to the Health Sector 2003)*		
Sida *(Policy for Health and Development 2002)*		

WHO – World Health Organisation
NEPAD – New Partnership for Africa's Development
AMREF – African Medical and Research Foundation
DFID – Department for International Development
DANIDA – Danish International Development Agency
Sida – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

Table 4: Literature consulted on education priorities

Global	Continental	National
UN – MDGs *(UN Summit 2000 brief), UN Decade for Sustainable Development 2005-2015)*	African Union *(Second Decade of Education for Africa 2006-2015 plan of action & 2004 Strategic Plan of the African Union commission)*	Republic of Mozambique Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty 2001-2005.
UNESCO *(2008-2013 Medium-Term Strategy; 2006-2015 TTISSA Concept Note; & 2007 Report on Teacher Education)*	NEPAD *(2001 Framework Document)*	Republic of Uganda *Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2004-2015*
World Bank *(Education priority areas downloaded 5 Feb 2009)*	BREDA *(Education priorities, Downloaded 5 Feb 2009)*	Republic of Uganda Poverty *Eradication Action Plan, 2004/5 – 2007/8*
Irish Aid *(Education policy and strategy + country strategy papers for Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania + Department of Foreign Affairs 2008 Press release on Malawi)*	ADEA *(Plan of action, downloaded 19 Feb 2009)*	Government of Malawi *Growth and Development Strategy, 2006-2011*
DfID *(2008-2013 Research Strategy)*	AAU *(2003-2010 Strategic Plan)*	Republic of Tanzania *Education Sector Development Programme, 2008-2017*
USAID *(Sub-Saharan Africa Education priorities, 2009)*		Republic of Tanzania *National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty, 2005*

UN MGDs – United Nations Millennium Development Goals
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
DfID – Department for International Development
USAID – United States Agency for International Development
NEPAD – New Partnership for Africa's Development
BREDA – Regional Bureau for Education in Africa
ADEA – Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AAU – Association of African Universities

The five criteria were the subject of intense discussion with some, for example the one on community empowerment, emerging as part of the deliberations at Workshop No. 3 at Maputo. How to deploy this grid sensitively and with due cognisance of qualitative criteria was also carefully discussed.

In health; the highly scored priorities were infectious diseases; maternal health; HIV/AIDS; food security and gender and health. The importance of engendering research projects was repeated throughout the four day workshop and the health group felt strongly that any project proposals should be gender sensitive. It was also deemed critical that the impact of climate change be considered. Additionally, taking a health systems approach to research and advocating for equity in health were thought of as crucial in emerging research proposals. It was therefore agreed that gender, climate change and health systems/equity were to be treated as cross cutting themes within the three thematic areas.

In education, it was agreed to focus on Teacher Education and Education for Sustainable Development because they were felt to be more inclusive themes that incorporated a set of areas. For example, teacher education was argued to be covering other areas such as improving pedagogy, professionalism and assessment practices. Education for Sustainable Development was noted to cover issues such as HIV/AIDS, quality of education and curriculum reform. In addition, ICT and Gender were embraced as cross-cutting themes in tandem with global trends where Information, Communication and Mobile Technology have become a major driver of research and teaching in Higher Education. The rationale for ICT and education as a major cross-cutting theme was also based on the projection that due to globalisation a number of people will in future be excluded from participating in the world economy not because they cannot read and/or write but because they are ICT illiterate. It was also important to keep in mind the gender component in all themes to ensure that research undertaken catered for the needs of both genders. It was also seen as a means of contributing to the achievement of MDG 3 that advocates for gender equality and empowerment of women.

The importance of IAP focusing on teacher education as a research strand cannot be overemphasised. The quality of the teaching force is a major driver for the global education agenda. The recent Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2007) underscores the need for more teachers globally if the goal on *Education for All* is to be fully attained by 2015. The report notes that across the world, more than 18 million new teachers will need to be employed by 2015. Sub-Saharan Africa faces the greatest challenge. To reach universal primary education

the stock of teachers will have to increase from 2.4 million in 2004 to 4 million in 2015, in addition to the 2.1 million new teachers required to replace those leaving the teaching workforce. Thus, any intervention that has the potential to impact positively on teacher quality, quantity, motivation and working conditions, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa is a worthwhile initiative.

The identified health and education research priorities were deemed relevant to scenarios A and B. In education for example, research in education, particularly teacher education, would play a major role in Scenario A. With the increased mobility and brain drain, there would be need to beef up teacher education and pedagogical research in order to increase both the quantity and quality of teachers. To achieve this, alternative approaches to research and teacher education such as the use of ICT would need to be embraced. ICT in education would also be useful for its potential to bring education and learning to remote rural areas, enhance women's access to education, and reduce exclusion among disadvantaged communities and those with special needs. In addition, the free-liberalised market economy and the internal and external pressure on natural resources, calls for the need for education for sustainable development to mitigate the resultant impact of climate change. Teacher Education research and curriculum would also need to be reformed so as to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development. Due to the deepening economic depression within Scenario B, Education for All is at threat, because it has become unaffordable for the poor. Because of decreased mobility, there is massive pressure and dependence on the meagre natural resources, resulting into environmental degradation and climate change. As is the case in Scenario A, Teacher Education and Education for sustainable development would play a major role in redressing the society. The two education strands would be crucial to explore the conditions and factors that would impact on changes in behaviour that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental sustainability, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations.

Lessons learnt from the IAP and the implications for adult educators

It could be argued that the 'foresight' approach and methodology used to generate the health and education research priorities can make a useful contribution not only to development research, but also to adult education. If it is genuinely partnership based it can go some way to developing participation in ironing out a pro-active research agenda. Trans-disciplinary development research lends itself perfectly to the 'foresight' approach with its open problem-solving orientation. 'Foresight' can encourage dialogue across disciplines but also helps bridge the

researcher/practitioner/policy makers divide by providing a 'safe place' for thinking on a long-term horizon. The participatory nature of the 'foresight' approach is also highly valued by participants and, indeed, this feature could be extended to other communities of interest including adult and lifelong learning.

It would be important to recognise that a futures orientation for development research is not a panacea for development. It is only a tool and we would have to be sceptical about its ability to overcome structural forms of inequality in and of itself. It is not a technical fix. Indeed, it is possible for the 'foresight' methodology to create a false impression of accuracy and 'scientificity'. Its value is rather, in creating a shared mind-set focused on creative solutions to development problems and in forging a more collectivist or partnership-based approach. There is also a potential pitfall in that it can become a 'top-down' approach with mainly the experts empowered to talk. 'Foresight' can only too easily become another in a long list of Northern 'solutions' to development issues based on superior knowledge.

From our own experience of participating in the IAP, the following general conclusions can be drawn:

- A futures orientation to development research planning can be a valuable tool if undertaken in a partnership modality.

- 'Foresight' and its associated methodology can be a valuable development tool but there is need to guard against 'scientificity' and 'top down' approaches.

- Given the complexity of global development challenges any research programme needs to acknowledge that there is no 'quick fix'.

- The challenge of creating a 'pro-poor' development strategy will not be met by 'foresight' alone. The approach may, however, empower Southern-driven research agendas with wider relevance and help harness global development resources and agency within academic and other research agencies.

It can be argued that the IAP project for Research Capacity Building laid the ground work for identifying research priorities and for building partnerships for research. It identified research priorities including cross-cutting and interdisciplinary themes of relevance to adult education and lifelong learning. It also provided the opportunity for professionals including researchers and policy makers to meet to discuss and agree priorities.

The next challenge for IAP and others is to take these goals forward through the development of research partnerships which can make a real change to the lives of individuals in Africa and in Ireland. Through the development of new synergies, which should involve all the stakeholders including policy makers, teachers and learners, it can perhaps hope to influence policy and practice in development education for the benefit of everyone, in particular those excluded from education in Ireland and in Africa.

Appendix 1: Health Priorities Expanded List

Infectious/ Endemic disease
Maternal health
Food Security
HIV/AIDS
Climate change
Gender and health/ Gender equality
Health system performance, service delivery, accessibility
Participatory Action Research
Reproductive health
Health literacy/promotion
Health equity/reduction in disparities
Human resources for health
Health resources – drug supply, infrastructure, equipment
Financial management/monitoring
Health systems governance
Health in humanitarian crises
Chronic diseases
Malnutrition
Health and ICT
Traditional medicine

Appendix 2: Education Priorities Expanded List

Assessment and evaluation
Curriculum reform and development
Education for sustainable development
Education for the knowledge economy
Financing education
Gender equality and empowerment of women
HIV/AIDS education
ICT and education
Inclusive education / equitable access
Management of education
Interdependence of education levels (balancing pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher, adult education and lifelong learning)
Non-formal education
Peace education / peace building
Quality of education
Resources to support teaching and learning
School health and nutrition
School-work linkage / transition
Teacher education
Teacher professionalism and professional values
Teaching and learning (pedagogy and methodology, classroom interactions)

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Could integrating development education into adult and community education create more space for critical adult and community education in Ireland

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Abstract

From 2008-2009 the author was commissioned by AONTAS in partnership with Irish Aid[1] to carry out a piece of research which aimed to examine how there could be a strategic focus on the integration of development education, or incorporating a global dimension to learning, into adult and community education in Ireland. It also examined whether or not its usefulness as a process for active global citizenship could be employed as a message to promote development education to adult and community educators.

As part of that research, the author investigated the theoretical debates about the purpose of each practice explored in the research, active citizenship, development education and adult education. These debates hold ramifications for curricular integration and learning outcomes. These debates are particularly relevant during a time in Ireland when many academics and practitioners are asking what impact a human capital emphasis in adult education is having on the content and methodology of adult learning opportunities. Is there room for development education in an adult education process that, according to the prevailing policy zeitgeist in Ireland, should focus on the development of skills for the labour market? Could the integration of development education into adult learning opportunities in Ireland help to widen the space for adult and community education, which promotes participatory democratic agency and seeks to combat inequality?

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1   The Irish Government's programme of assistance to developing countries.

This article will present the key theoretical trends in relation to each practice.

Finally, the overlaps between the three practices are scoped. The overlaps between the three practices are presented under a liberal/humanist framework and then a justice/ critical framework. The article concludes that integrating a justice approach to all three practices can retain a critical space for adult learning and could have powerful outcomes for the individual and collective development of learners, fostering a diverse array of skills as well as active global citizenship. This overlap is demonstrated through a detailed analysis of one of the case studies done for the research, giving a real life example of the integration of a justice approach to development education, adult education and active citizenship.

Introduction

In 2007, the Government's White Paper on Irish Aid stated that, "Every person in Ireland will have access to educational opportunities to be aware of and understand their rights and responsibilities as global citizens and their potential to effect change for a more just and equal world" (Irish Aid, 2007).

This commitment necessitated a strategic focus on the provision of development education, or taking a global dimension to learning, in the context of adult and community education. While there are a number of existing opportunities for adults to engage in development education in Ireland, to date a strategic focus on adult learning at both State and development education sector as a whole, has been missing.

From 2008-2009 the author was commissioned by AONTAS in partnership with Irish Aid to carry out a piece of research which aimed to examine how there could be a strategic focus on the integration of development education into adult and community education in Ireland. It also examined whether or not its usefulness as a process for active global citizenship could be employed as a message to promote development education to adult and community educators. The latter was focused on as fostering civic competence and active citizenship are strategic goals for both Irish and European policies on adult education (Commission of the European Communities, 2005; Government of Ireland, 2000).

The aims of this paper are to:

- Present literature reviewed for the research, which set out the competing explanations of the purposes of the three practices explored in the research: **active citizenship; adult and community education, and development education.**

- Show the theoretical overlaps in these competing explanations and the adult learning spaces that these overlaps point to as appropriate for an integration of development education into adult learning.

- Introduce adult and community educators not familiar with development education to it and present some rationale as to why they might integrate it into their work with learners.

The debates considered in the literature presented in this paper are particularly relevant during a time in Ireland when many academics and practitioners are asking what impact a human capital emphasis in adult education is having on the content and methodology of adult learning opportunities. The literature prompts the following questions. Is there room for development education in an adult education process that, according to the prevailing policy zeitgeist in Ireland, should focus on the development of skills for the labour market? Could the integration of development education into adult learning opportunities in Ireland help to widen the space for adult and community education, which promotes participatory democratic agency and seeks to combat inequality?

The paper argues that if a critical or justice approach to all three practices was taken space could be created for adult learning, which could increase participants' critical awareness of and action on global issues, but also contribute to the realisation of different social justice agendas nationally by empowering learners, if they chose to do so, to become active critical cosmopolitan citizens. A case study from the research is presented to illustrate what this critical overlap looks like in the provision of adult and community education in Ireland. We first turn to a brief theoretical exploration of each practice – active citizenship, adult and community education, and development education – all of which are hotly contested terrains in the literature.

Active Citizenship

Active citizenship simply refers to the enactment of citizenship rights and responsibilities. It refers to taking action as a citizen. However, there are different ideas surrounding what skills that capacity should entail, and what physical boundaries one's citizenship relates to. In Ireland, and at EU level active citizenship is a current goal for decision-makers and many civil society organizations. The Irish Government set up the Taskforce on Active Citizenship in 2006 to make recommendations about fostering "civic spirit and active participation" in Ireland[2]. There are generally considered to be four underlying theories of active citizenship: liberal; critical, communitarian; critical, and cosmopolitan (see Task Force on Active Citizenship, 2007; Khoo, 2006):

Liberal thinking about active citizenship refers to a legal contract between an individual and the State. In return for legal citizenship[3] to a particular nation and protection of personal freedoms the individual upholds certain responsibilities such as voting, paying taxes, and participating in consultations. The emphasis is on the well-behaved citizen engaging in thin forms of citizenship being left to make personal choices as long as they do not violate the rule of law in their country. It is individualistic.

Communitarian active citizenship emphasises the notion of an individual citizen having a responsibility to work towards the collective good of their communities. This responsibility can be realized through volunteering or participating in community activities. However, they act within a pre-defined understanding of what a 'good society' is without necessarily questioning it.

Critical active citizens recognize that while we have an entitlement to citizenship rights, those rights may not always be upheld for disadvantaged groups in society, and members of those groups may not have access to or have been denied the skills needed to participate in democracy. Therefore, a critical active citizen is concerned with how marginalised groups of people have a differential access to the exercise of power in society. They are concerned with questioning how social, political and economic arrangements maintain these inequalities. Therefore, they may become involved in protesting decision-makers, campaigning, community development and working to ensure those who have unequal status develop and use their voice to protest their inequality and demand that their rights be vindicated.

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2   See www.activecitizen.ie.

3   In other words, the person must have been granted citizenship of a country either through birth or a naturalization process.

The three concepts of citizenship described above are not mutually exclusive, but are sometimes critiqued because they depend on the legal status of citizenship. Because of this feature, rights and responsibilities of citizens can vary from nation to nation. Those inside national boundaries without citizenship may be denied the accordant rights and responsibilities. Moreover, the legal rights protected by citizenship may not ensure protection of universal human rights for all people inside the jurisdiction (Ravazzolo, 1995).

In contrast the fourth underlying theory refers to a **Cosmopolitan** understanding of active citizenship. This speaks to the idea that we are all citizens of the world entitled to those universal human rights articulated in the UN Convention and that we all need to work to ensure that those rights are vindicated for all citizens of the world (Tanner, 2007). It is a critical form of citizenship. The values associated with a **critical cosmopolitan citizenship** include, solidarity, empathy, respect, social justice and equality.

Each way of thinking about active citizenship is informed by a different way of thinking about democracy. In the case of a liberal or communitarian citizenship democracy is about having representatives who you vote for and who you trust or lobby to represent your interests. A critical citizenship is founded on the notion of participatory democracy or a situation where everyone has the right to be heard about what they think the common good is and what decisions should be taken to maintain it.

In Ireland, the global dimension of active citizenship has not been given due consideration by key stakeholders guiding policy development. The Task Force on Active Citizenship Report gives only scant consideration of this feature. The Democracy Commission in their case for democratic renewal in Ireland does not mention the global dimension of citizenship at all (The Democracy Commission, 2005).

Some say that confining active citizenship to the liberal or communitarian concepts puts us in danger of losing the capacity to be critical about how the human rights of people in our own countries and throughout the world are not equally maintained (Ravazzolo, 1995). Therefore, we play a part in maintaining inequality globally, because we are not critical of the way in which our actions, and those of governments, business and powerful organizations negatively affect others here at home and in other parts of the world.

The liberal and communitarian concepts may not take into account the ways in which citizens in the state and the world may have differential access to the status, feeling and practice of citizenship and that action may need to be taken to rectify this (Osler, 2004). Within a critical cosmopolitan understanding of active citizenship such actions as protesting and campaigning are seen as essential and necessary forms of active citizenship. Many reflect that within the liberal and communitarian concepts a citizen who is extremely critical of the state is perceived as disobedient (Khoo, 2006).

A critical citizenship is seen by some as essential to combat the pervasiveness of neoliberalism, an ideology that places the market as the organising force for human existence and devalues non-market spheres such as public schools, trade unions and civil society organisations.

Giroux asserts that, in the face of neoliberalism, governments abscond from their obligation to protect the public good and become critical of citizens who demand they maintain that requirement. He contends, "As markets are touted as the driving force for everyday life, big government is disparaged as either incompetent or threatening to individual freedom, suggesting that power should reside in markets and corporations rather than in governments and citizens" (Giroux, 2004, online paper).

Giroux further asserts that the way to challenge this position is to foster a critical citizenry who demand that government reassert a truly democratic society. Research shows that adults would like citizenship education. Ceccini refers to a survey in which nine out of 10 people in Ireland supported the provision of lifelong learning that includes active citizenship (Ceccini, 2003). In contrast to a primary and secondary education system in Ireland that provides some citizenship education for children, there is a gap between the institutional commitment to adult citizenship education and actual compliance with that commitment in the day-to-day provision of adult and community education (ibid.).

We now turn to key theoretical debates surrounding the purpose of adult and community education.

What is the Purpose of Adult and Community Education?

Maunsell et al. (2008) indicate that there is no master concept of 'lifelong learning' in Ireland and recommend that one is developed. In Ireland, adult and community education is part of lifelong learning provision, which embraces a belief in the need for humans to learn throughout the life course and develop competences for personal development, social and civic engagement and employment (Government of Ireland, 2002) The main purposes of adult/community education are set out below.

Adult education for the development of human capital sees adult/community education as purely for the development of workers for the economy. This instrumental view of adult/community education focuses on the development of vocational skills for the workplace (Baptiste, 2001; Finnegan, 2008). The citizen is understood as worker, consumer and client.

Adult education as personal development or leisure activities suggests that individuals joins adult learning opportunities for the development of soft skills or personal enjoyment. This personal development view of adult/community education focuses on adults returning to learning for personal enjoyment and the development of self-esteem, and well-being (see Grummel, 2007). This citizen can be potentially be seen a consumer of entertainment through leisure learning whose social capital should be fostered through education but not critical analysis skills[4]. This purpose embraces a liberal model of adult learning.

Adult education as transformation towards a more equal society proposes adults return to learning because they were denied their first chance for learning due to social and economic disadvantage. In this radical or collective view of education adult learners critically analyse the disadvantage they have experienced and gain the skills and awareness to individually and collectively address their exclusion. Equality, social justice, solidarity and empathy are values associated with this approach. This citizen is educated for meaningful interaction in participatory democracy.

Community education is a type of adult education that merits separate consideration. It is seen by the State and providers as a distinct form of adult learning, which focuses on engaging disadvantaged individuals in education that enhances learning, fosters empowerment and civic contribution using a dis-

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4   This is not to say that this type of learning may not offer an important route back into learning for those who are educationally disadvantaged.

tinct methodology. The emphasis is on community based local groups taking responsibility for co-ordinating courses, negotiating curriculum and choosing tutors as opposed to a provider imposing these in a local area. Notably, there are also competing purposes for community education as set out below.

Community education as a service in a community sees it as provided by a range of providers, but not of the community and solely for individual personal development and empowerment.

Community education as preparation for community development and social change ensures that education grows out of the community's needs and wants. In this way of thinking about community education, provision is firmly entrenched in the principles and practices of community development and is for the critical purpose described in the latter understanding of adult education, employing participative, action-oriented methodologies (AONTAS, 2004).

Again, these concepts of adult and community education are not mutually exclusive but depending on the emphasis in the policy document or provider ethos each may give priority to different outcomes. Much research has noted a predisposition on the part of European governments to place higher value on adult learning that enables the labour market progression of individuals (Ceccini, 2003). When this focus holds sway, certification and measurable learner outcomes and targets in relation to the development of skills for work are prized. Learners are seen as human capital for economic growth (Faul, 2007). The literature indicates that there are many reasons to avoid a purely instrumental view of adult learning, such as: the need to foster social capital through adult learning (ibid.); ensuring that all groups are targeted for lifelong learning, not just those who are seen as economic actors, and a requirement to acknowledge education's "central role in educating people to deny, challenge, or ignore local and global injustice" (Lynch, 2004, 144).

If adult learning was seen as a process that brought the above aims to the centre different outcomes from the education process would need to be valued, acknowledging that a focus on quantitative targets and certification, "are not effective proxies for…or drivers of the desired behaviours that would make a qualitative difference to education" (Faul, 2007, 11).

Giroux (2004) also argues against an education system that reduces "agency to the obligations of consumerism" by cutting the connection between education

and social change. He asserts that, "democracy necessitates forms of education that provide a new ethic of freedom and a reassertion of collective identity as central preoccupations of a vibrant democratic culture and society" (ibid.).

We now turn to an exploration of the theoretical terrain in relation to development education.

Development Education

Academics, educators and civil society organisations also debate the purpose and definition of development education. Moreover, the appropriate terminology used to describe the process is also contested. The main ways of describing the purpose of development education can be summarised thus:

Development education as a process for ensuring public moral support of a government's or organisation's programme of giving to, usually, Southern or 'Third World' countries for growth or modernisation. In this process, individuals learn about the 'problems' of other countries and are asked to give to agencies working in those countries (Kenny and Malley, 2002). Typically, in this way of thinking about the purpose learners are asked to give uncritically and may not explore how their own behaviour or their state's actions have impacted on the well-being of people in other nations. People in other countries and the nations themselves may be seen as 'less developed.' Development is seen in terms of human rather than social capital.

Development education as a process for raising people's awareness about global issues and to promote campaigns. This process may facilitate critical engagement about development issues and motivate individuals to help. However, it does not call them to be critical of the ways in which help is offered and may ask learners to adopt an already defined idea of the good society as opposed to asking them to define it. The above approach and this one are usually described as part of a soft, charity approach, although this process does move the learner to actions beyond donating money (Andreotti, 2006).

Development education as a process for understanding, how people and countries are interdependent, the global nature of inequality and the development of the skills necessary to enact change to address global social injustices. In this way of thinking about development education learners are involved in critically analysing why other countries are 'under-developed', as well as how some countries are prevented from developing social capital by our own and

our state's actions. It asks us to look at the global nature of poverty and inequality and to consider how human rights are vindicated differentially around the world. It helps learners to develop the skills need to engage in active global citizenship. It also fosters critical thinking about the types of development aid and interventions in existence and to protest those that are seen to be inappropriate.

Again, as with adult and community education and active citizenship, these ways of thinking about development education are not mutually exclusive. In fact, many see that the latter two are historical evolutions of the first. However, Ireland has a strong tradition of giving to church organisations carrying out development work in southern countries that, in the past, operated according to a soft, charity approach.

Today, development education generally aspires to both the process and the content of a set of learning activities towards the latter purpose described above. The literature also shows that it operates out of a clear set of values. There are also many adjectives to describe the process and many other types of education that may touch on development education. The figure below gives a summary of the process, topics, values and adjectives for development education (see Bourne, 2003 and Marshall, 2007).

Figure 1: Development Education

Process/ Values	Content	Adjectives
• Development theory • Freirean methodologies • Experiential, participative learning • Learner-centred – starts where learners are at • Action-oriented for social change • Teaches and engages critical social analysis • Rights-based (from International Declaration of Human Rights) • Research and information processing • Debate **Works from the Values of:** • Social justice • Equality • Respect • Human dignity • Human rights • Empathy	• Overseas development • Women's issues • Human rights • Health • Environmental issues/ Water • Children • Agriculture • Income generation • Debt • Globalisation • Sustainability • Fair Trade • Racism • Self-reliance • Trade justice • Famine relief • Arms trade • Interdependence • Housing • Land • Asylum seekers/ refugees • Development aid • HIV/ Aids • Conflict resolution • Food security • Interculturalism • Political prisoners	• Global education • Global dimension to learning • Global citizenship education • International education • World studies • Human Development in a Global Context • Education for international understanding[5] **Also brought into:** • Political Education • Citizenship Education • Human rights Education • Intercultural Education • Education for Sustainable Development • Environmental Education • Peace Education • Media Studies

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5   For further consideration of debates in regard to terminology see Marshall, H. "The Global Education Terminology Debate: exploring some of the Issues." In Hayden, M et al (Eds). Sage Handbook of Research in International Education. Sage: UK

What are the overlaps between Adult and Community Education, Active Citizenship and Development Education?

In order to assess the overlaps between the three practices and to investigate to what extent they can have matching purposes the information from the previous sections is synthesised into a description of all three practices under two different philosophical frameworks. Each of the practices can be unpacked from liberal/humanist or justice/critical understanding. For instance, the human capital approach to adult education and the learning for leisure approach both fit within a liberal/ humanist understanding, which is focused on the importance of individual rights. The service community education approach and liberal and communitarian concepts of active citizenship also fit into the first framework as do the public moral support and global awareness approaches to development education. The rest of the approaches explored within the three practices align to the critical/ justice framework, which sees them as contributing to the achievement of a fundamentally different society, redistributing power to those who do not have it and fostering collective action for equality.

Figure 2: Approaches to Active Citizenship, Adult/ Community Education and Development Education

	Liberal/ Humanist	Justice/ Critical
Citizenship	A communitarian approach, individuals should make a contribution to the collective good, ie volunteering. May not critically examine how some do not have equal access to participation in civic life. Focus on obedient citizen.	Critical citizenship based on human rights and responsibilities. Fosters skills for participation for all out of a recognition that some do not have equal opportunities to participate in democracy. Advocates action for social change whether it is critical of decision-makers or not. Takes the side of those who do not have power
Adult/ Community Education	Learner-centred – the learner returns to learning to satisfy personal goals be they the development of hard or soft skills. Current emphasis on development of vocational skills for personal advancement.	Learner and collective-centred employing Freirean methodologies and a concern for radical social change. Fosters learning as a site for analysing and resisting inequality. Fosters critical analysis for social change and individual and collective empowerment
Development Education	Not uncritical about development processes in other countries or interdependence. Learner asked to take action by supporting existing campaigns. Does not seek to foster citizen's own critical analysis.	Employing Freirean methodologies and human rights, fosters idea that we are interdependent and should play an active role in changing unjust social structures that cause global inequality, poverty and injustice. Fosters critical analysis and skills to take action for a more just world, including campaigning and protest

What we can see from the above figure is that there is an overlap of purposes between the three practices under each philosophical heading. In the liberal tradition the overlaps include some attention to the common good and person-centredness and that action should be taken to enhance it. However, there is an individual focus shared by the liberal tradition that focuses on relying on the individual to make personal choices or changes.

In the justice/ critical framework a great deal of overlap can be seen between the three practices in terms of the importance of critical analysis and recognition of inequality. The emphasis is on fundamental social change and a resistance to the status quo. The process shared in adult and community education and development education in this framework is a Freirean methodology that is participative. In this understanding of active citizenship and development education there is an emphasis on taking action to achieve equality and social change. The justice approaches to all three practices share the values of equality, social justice, solidarity, empathy and respect for human rights.

Increasingly, development organisations and other stakeholders are seeing development education as a process for facilitating active global citizenship. Many large development organisations such as Oxfam and Concern have begun to call development education 'global citizenship education'. The *Maastricht Global Education Declaration* – a strategy for improving and increasing global education to 2015 states the importance of citizens being educated to *interact critically with our global society as empowered global citizens. This poses fundamental challenges for all areas of life including education* (Europe Wide Global Education Congress, 2002).

Much of the literature speaks to the effectiveness of development education in fostering the knowledge and skills necessary to be a global citizen:

Development education has a valuable role to play in contributing to a new broader, more inclusive understanding of active citizenship, which acknowledges the global responsibilities of individuals and communities (Osler, 1994, 4).

There is also acknowledgement within adult education literature that citizenship has a global dimension (Ceccini, 2003). Exploring the global dimension to citizenship through development education does not just foster citizens who take action internationally but has the potential to support engagement in the national and local context too, "Development education is a way of helping us

to create knowledge about ourselves, and the consequences of our actions. It can help us to understand our own lives in the global context – and to re-evaluate our lives against what is endured/enjoyed elsewhere" (Fincham, 2005, 4). Many authors agree that the foundation for education towards global citizenship is the universality of human rights expressed by the United Nations.

The understanding of development education as a process for active global citizenship is aligned with the descriptions of development education and active citizenship given in the critical tradition set out above. It follows that the approach to adult education needed to integrate these practices into adult learning would also need to be aligned to the same framework. Why would and how could adult or community educators seek to take a critical approach to these three practices in their work? This question is considered in the next section.

Why Integrate Development Education into Adult and Community Education?

Development education can help adult and community education in meeting strategic commitments at a European level. The Commission has set out eight key competences that should be fostered through lifelong learning (Commission of the European Communities, 2005). They are compared in Figure 3 against what some of the literature posits as the outcomes of development education for adults.

Figure 3: Outcomes of Development Education

EU Competences	Development Education Outcomes
Communication in the mother tongue;	Knowledge about systems and societies that a nation trades with in order to implement fair business behaviour;
Communication in the foreign languages;	
Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;	Self-directed learning and problem solving (Toepfer, 2003.);
Digital competence;	Understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity;
Learning to learn;	Understanding the global employment market (Scottish Executive, 2003);
Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence;	Coping skills for rapid change;
Entrepreneurship; and	Social literacy to work with others to address global issues (White, 2004);
Cultural expression.	Making connections between different contexts and situations (Osler, 2004);
	Research and debating skills;
	Campaigning and protest;
	Critical analysis of complex social issues – ability to connect single events to systemic arrangements, and
	Making value judgements (Rost, 2004)

The importance of North/South solidarity (Naidoo, 2004), the need to tackle social exclusion on a global level (Najmudin, 2004) and enhancement of community cohesion (Scottish Executive, 2003) are all rationale for ensuring adults have the opportunity to learn about development issues.

The following case study from the research demonstrates how the integration of a critical approach to development education, adult and community education and active citizenship resulted in some of the outcomes considered above.

Moyderwell Adult Education Centre

The Adult Literacy and Basic Education Group in the Moyderwell Adult Education Centre in Tralee, County Kerry is provided under the auspices of the Kerry Education Service or Kerry VEC. This group is a case study in how the desire to gain knowledge and skills for active citizenship can be a progression from an exploration of global issues.

In 2004 this group of ten participants came together to improve their literacy skills. In order to achieve this aim the tutor offered them a development education course with the following aims:

- To provide adult literacy learners with an opportunity to improve reading and writing skills.

- To introduce development education issues and themes in order to develop a broader world view and learn about different countries and cultures.

Using the NALA *Worldwise* resource, the course covered issues like poverty, inequality and injustice. Learners were challenged about their perceptions and asked to make connections between poverty, injustice and world conflicts. Some of the students were from RAPID areas in Tralee. These are socially excluded communities in Tralee and are being targeted for poverty reduction and social inclusion interventions. They made connections between their own marginalisation and those of others around the world and *"started to see themselves in a different way"* (course tutor).

After completing the development education content in 2006 the tutor consulted with the learners about what they wanted to do next. "*They wanted to continue to develop and learn about what they had learned in the course. I think they wanted to look further at their responsibilities, they saw themselves as more of a community and wanted to learn more about their world and their place in it*" (course tutor).

The tutor suggested a range of possible activities and the one chosen was a voter education project encompassing the Vincentian Partnership Voter Education Programme since it was an election year and many in the group had never exercised their vote. This project involved the tutor and the group brainstorming a number of possible actions that the group could take collectively. The participants themselves came up with and engaged in the following:

- Adopted a little boy from Lesotho and held a coffee morning with a raffle through which they fundraised for the boy.

- This coffee morning was a fundraising event at which students showed a video about child labour.

- Before the general election students held another coffee morning and displayed a Wall of Issues which were photographs of what they felt to be important local and national election issues.

- With the tutor's assistance they wrote and performed a play called "*Standing at the Crossroads*" about a first time voter with literacy difficulties. This play was performed in a variety of places including for the Lord Mayor in Dublin.

- The group made contact with their local politicians and visited a local TDs clinic.

- The group visited the Dail.

After this the group went on to do a FETAC module entitled *Living in a Diverse Society* which had, by its very nature a development education component. In addition to the planned outcomes for participants for all the learning such as the improvement in literacy skills the group also gained:

- Improved technological skills (as they had to learn to use digital cameras for the Wall of Issues).

- Ability to critically reflect rather than just focusing on acquisition of literacy skills.

- Self-directed learning.

- Ability to organise information into dramatic form.

- Improved communication skills, and.

- A broader world view.

It is the contention of the tutor that the broader worldview facilitated by the development education activities made it possible for the participants to see themselves as citizens and facilitated them to see the voter education project as something that was relevant to them. In other words, the case presented here shows how critical development education can facilitate those who have little access to the political process to gain the skills and confidence necessary to contribute to participatory democracy.

It is clear that participation in the activities described above resulted in learners becoming active citizens. It appears that these actions encompassed a critical global citizenship where learners not only increased their participation in existing avenues for action, but were sometimes critical of them. In some cases, they came up with alternative arrangements for democratic participation or acting to address human rights injustices internationally. The actions specified in the case studies are wide-ranging and are not confined to voting or volunteering. It is also clear that the development education engaged in was critical in that it asked learners to explore injustice and to critique it. It is obvious that the approach to adult learning here embraced a transformative purpose as learners analysed their own experiences of inequality and collectively addressed them through the activities they engaged in which sought to raise awareness about literacy and the challenge of engaging in participatory democracy as a result.

Conclusion

In the literature reviewed above we saw how a critical or justice approach to all three practices explored in the research allowed for projects that sought to address issues of inequality and foster actions for fundamental change to structures that cause or support inequality. Both the case study presented here and the exploration of the literature suggests that including a global dimension to learning that critiques injustice and fosters critical analysis creates a space for adult learning that can have transformative impacts at both the individual and collective levels for learners. This critical space quite naturally leads to forms of active citizenship which go beyond voting and volunteering and lead to learners acting against their own and other's inequality which is at the heart of Freirean adult learning. At the critical end of the continuum the three practices are mutually reinforcing, thus widening a space for this approach to learning.

What is also clear is that taking a critical approach to all three practices – active citizenship, adult and community education and development education – can also have the added benefit of resulting in a sense of agency for learners that can actually assist the achievement of other learning outcomes included the strategic commitments for lifelong learning at European level. In other words, taking a critical approach can increase relevance and interest for learners, ensuring their commitment to the learning. This outcome can only be of value to educators' who are interested in ensuring that they maintain the engagement of their learners and assist them to achieve their goals.

Recalling Ceccini's (2003) research, integrating development education can also helps meet Irish adults' stated desire for citizenship education. It can also hold a space for adult learning that is radical and critical. The case study and the research showed that it is a simple project to integrate development education using a critical approach into educational opportunities like the one presented in the case study, where curriculum can flow from the daily experience of learners and the tutor can make local and global connections with those themes.

The ideas presented here are part of a much larger piece of research. For those who would like to read the full research report go to www.aontas.com.

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SECTION TWO

Practice Articles

Let's talk about solutions!

GRACE FINLAY

Abstract

This article explores the effectiveness of using Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) in an adult learning environment. Within this discourse, special attention is given to show how SFBT can be used effectively to support the increasing number of adults who find themselves out of work who are now returning to education. Key ideas within SFBT will be outlined for the reader as well as the application of these ideas within the context of adult education. A summary background to SFBT will be given to show its origin and research findings on using SFBT within employment counselling will be shared. The intention in this article is to suggest that this approach has much to offer adult education practitioners, working in a supportive role, in developing the skills needed to do this work.

The impact of unemployment on the individual

"It's a recession when your neighbour loses his job; it's a depression when you lose your own". Harry S. Truman.

Feelings of anxiety and depression, negative self-esteem, and hopelessness regarding the future are heightened among those who are unemployed (Fryer, 1995; Linn, M.W, Sandifer, R. and Stein, S, 1985). Many feel helpless in their situation and believe that being in the older age bracket weighs against them in seeking work. They may come to realise how much their self-identity was tied up in their previous employment status and this can lead to them avoiding certain social settings where they no longer feel comfortable (Deprez, 2009). Newly unemployed people can experience a deep sense of loss: loss of purpose, loss of identity and loss of income. This can indeed be a lonely place to be as an individual.

Returning to education is an option many recently unemployed begin to consider. For those working in adult education, this presents particular challenges as to how best to support these learners and meet their needs. Through an exploration of SFBT, it will be suggested that SFBT offers a constructive positive approach to working with adult learners in general, and, in particular, it is effective in supporting adult learners who are unemployed.

Applying SFBT to an adult education setting

There is much within SFBT that recommends itself to being suitable to use within an adult education setting. Part of the appeal of SFBT which may seem obvious is its focus on solutions rather than problems. For an adult education co-ordinator or tutor this brings a refreshing and hopeful dimension to the process of supporting adult learners, as the emphasis is placed on the positive aspects of the learner and his/her resources and strengths, rather than past problems and obstacles to progress. The negative impact that unemployment can have on a person's self-esteem and confidence makes this strengths-based approach particularly suited to building confidence and self-belief when working with this learner group. The fact that SFBT was developed as a brief therapy also means it lends itself well to the adult education environment where the learner experience within adult education happens within a limited timeframe and with limited resources. Goal setting is a main feature of SFBT and this fits well with the objective of working with adults in becoming more focused about what they want for the future. For adults who are unemployed they can typically feel stuck within their present circumstances and this can affect their ability to visualise a hopeful future and explore possibilities for change. SFBT is particular good at freeing people in their thinking and introducing means of discovering a way forward.

Key principles of SFBT when working with adult learners
Changing patterns of behaviour
Key principles that underline SFBT thinking are: (i) If it ain't broke, don't fix it! (ii) Once you know what works, do more of it! (iii) If it doesn't work, then don't do it again, do something different! Learners can become conditioned by the familiar to expecting predictable outcomes. As a result, they can easily find themselves locked into fixed patterns of behaviour that may not be working well for them. An example of this, perhaps, could be using one approach only to finding work, e.g. distributing CVs on mass to all employers within a geographical area or, perhaps, a pattern of spending a lot of time with people who think negatively or who are unsupportive. It may be useful to look closely at behav-

iour patterns with a learner, challenge behaviours that may not be working well for the person and explore with them possibilities for making changes. By introducing change, the learner is more open to expecting something different may happen, and, in trying something different, there is the possibility of a different outcome (Reiter, 2007). It is therefore important to try to break set patterns that are not serving a learner well as allowing these behaviours to continue will reinforce negative thinking and can further erode the self-belief and confidence of the person. In contrast, by breaking these patterns of behaviour that are adding to the problem, the learner is now freed up to explore new alternatives and new patterns which will hopefully offer better ways of living (Reiter, 2007).

Focusing on the future

Solution-focused approaches are based on the premise that understanding the cause of a problem is not a necessary step in resolving it (Lethem, 2002). For example, in the case of someone who previously dropped out of a course of study due to a negative experience, it is not considered necessary in SFBT to focus on that previous experience and factors that contributed to the person leaving the course as a prerequisite to deciding on a future course of study. SFBT does not look to the past as a means to determining good choices for the future. So, in this instance, solution-focused thinking would recommend eliciting information that builds a picture with regard to the kind of course he/she might enjoy and what would contribute to him/her being happy on any future course of study. What kind of things might be happening on the course? Questions that encourage the person to talk about a preferred learning environment, perhaps teaching methods used and questions relating to the person's expectations in beginning a course could also be useful.

The person may steer the conversation towards the experience of the last course due to an expectation that the listener will want to discuss what went wrong and difficulties the person encountered previously. While acknowledging past experiences, SFBT is, however, more interested in shifting the focus to the future. The supportive role of the Solution Focused Practitioner is about helping learners find answers for themselves as opposed to directing them as to what to do (Walsh et al., 2006). The primary role of someone working from a Solution Focused perspective is to working with the learner in finding solutions. Walsh et al. (2006) suggest it is helpful to think of this process as similar to solving a puzzle. Solving puzzles require people to work in more co-operative and creative ways. In solving a puzzle nobody asks, 'Whose puzzle is it anyway?' or 'Who caused the puzzle in the first place?' In this example the task is to work with the

learner in piecing together the important components that would need to be present for him/her to be content in any future course of study based on new information and greater self-awareness.

By focusing on the positive, on possible solutions and on a future without problems, the negative feelings regarding the problems are more likely to lessen and the learner can begin to see a way forward (Burwell & Chen, 2006). As SFBT has developed, the 'problem' has become less important in SF therapy to the point that is no longer necessary to know what the problem is (George et al, 1999). When applied to working with adult learners, this means that the best way to be supportive is to affirm learner's strengths and resources, be aware of the importance of language in conveying optimism regarding the future and focus on supporting learners move forwards in achieving personal goals for change.

Goal setting

When working with learners on goal setting it is worth keeping in mind that a well-formed goal has seven qualities (Berg and Miller, 1992; de Jong and Miller, 1995): (i) the goal must be important to the person; (ii) keep goals small and achievable; (iii) make goals concrete, specific and behavioural; (iv) goals express the presence of something or of a behaviour, rather than an absence; (v) goals are expressed as beginnings rather than endings (vi) the goals are realistic and achievable within the context of the person's life; (vii) the learner sees the goal as involving 'hard work'. Learners often present a number of problems that are intertwined. It is important that there is clarity around the goal in order to increases chances of success (Quick, 1998). While a goal for the learner might be 'to get more involved in the community', a more focused goal might be 'to work voluntarily with youths aged 10-14 years in a sports related area in the local community this summer'. For a goal to be realistic and have best chance of success, the person supporting the adult learner needs to work with the learner on the detail. A detailed action plan will take into account the resources the learner has to draw on, a clear plan towards achieving the goal and strategies to overcoming obstacles the learner may encounter. It will also explore ways of helping the learner to stay motivated and keep on track and should incorporate a means to measuring progress to show the learner that they are moving closer towards reaching the target.

The miracle question – what is it?

The value of the miracle question or miracle concept, which is a key element of SFBT, is that it orients the client away from the past and the problem and

towards the future and a solution (Berg and Miller, 1992). In the case of an adult learner who is unhappy in his/her present situation of being unemployed and who wishes to discuss employment options, presenting the miracle question could be helpful in gaining information about what might be a suitable career path. In keeping with how the miracle question would have originally been phrased, the question posed would be, 'I want you to imagine that, when you go to sleep tonight a miracle happens while you are sleeping, so that, when you wake up tomorrow morning, you find yourself in a career that you love. It's exactly what you want to do and you are happy at work. What would be the first thing you notice about yourself that is different when you wake up?' 'How would you feel as you go to work?' 'In what kinds of activities would you be involved?' 'How would you describe your experience of being in the workplace?' The way the miracle question is worded needs to fit comfortably with the person posing the question and the receiver so the question can be modified to use language that fits with the person's own conversational style and still achieve the same effect. An alternative version of the miracle question might be, 'Imagine you are in a career that you absolutely love, what is the first thing do you think I'd notice that would be different about you? The miracle question involves getting learners to visualise or imagine life without the problem and to notice the differences. It shifts the focus away from present difficulties and it shows the person that it is possible to realise future ambitions (Perkins III, 1999). By spending time talking about a future where the person is free of the problem, it can impact positively in motivating the learner to push forward for change and focus on a preferred future.

Scaling questions as a useful tool

Use of scaling questions can build on the work of the miracle question. Scaling questions provide a framework (from 0-10) to work with the learner, where 10 equals the achievement of all goals and zero is the worst possible scenario (Iveson, 2002). Following on from the miracle question as presented above, which related to an ideal career path, a scaling question could be, 'You have talked about your ideal career as being a journalist. On a scale of 0-10, 0 being there is no possibility I could ever work as a journalist and 10 being I know for certain I could work as a journalist, where would you place yourself on that scale? From the answer given, an exploration can then follow regarding reasons the person has placed him/herself at that position. What has been achieved so far to get to that point? What would need to happen for the person to move up one place on the scale? What would be the first step towards making progress?

In addition to this, scaling questions can also be used to measure levels of progress or motivation. For example, 'On a scale of 0-10, where zero means you are not prepared to put in any effort towards finding a suitable career path and 10 means you will do whatever it takes to do so, where would you scale yourself?' Follow on questions can then be used to explore ways to increase motivation levels to move further up the scale. For example, 'You have placed yourself at number four, what things are you doing that make it a four?' 'What would need to happen for you to move to a five on the scale? 'Is there someone who will support you in making this happen?' 'When do you expect to reach a five on the scale?'

Using scaling questions can be a good starting point to introduce SFBT into your work as the concept is easy to grasp and the benefits of scaling as a tool can be quickly realised. With practice, use of scaling can work much more effectively and directly as a gauge to finding out where a learner is at in relation to an issue in comparison to what can be gained through the usual patterns of questioning. It can also serve as a useful method of measuring progress, both for the learner and for the tutor.

Language of expectancy

There is a connection between use of language and expectation. In SFBT, the therapist tries to use language in such a way as to create a context in which the client expects that something positive will happen. O'Hanlon (1999) describes this idea as 'positive expectancy' talk. This can be created by using such words as "so far", "yet", "up until now", "when" and "will" in the course of conversation and clients will be encouraged regarding the future in a more hopeful expectant way (Reiter, 2007). Taking the example of someone considering returning to education, language used should make reference to 'when you start a course', 'you will find on the course that …', 'while you haven't visited the centre yet…' as this encourages the learner to think about the possibilities in moving forward, where they start to visualise themselves on a course. While making what might seem tiny changes in the way we communicate may seem somewhat trivial, yet when combined with the other elements of SFBT, it works together towards creating a more solution-focused approach to working with learners.

Feedback on the use of SFBT

In evaluating the effectiveness of SFBT, a study conducted in Sweden by Knutsson et al. (1998) involved a series of interviews with clients whose cases had been closed for at least a year. Arising from the interviews the researchers made interesting discoveries about clients' experiences of SFBT. With regard to

the use of questioning, clients stated they were forced to think and, in this way, realise what they themselves wanted. Questions helped orient them towards a preferred future and they also found it helpful in working out solutions. Most clients stated they found the use of scales a helpful tool where they "got a check on the situation" and they began to see how far they had come towards reaching their goal. The miracle question was met with mixed reaction; some did not remember it or stated it had not made any great impression, one client said she found it helpful in visioning the future and several clients reported they found the question difficult to answer.

Core ideas that define Solution Focused Brief Therapy

SFBT originated in the 1980s as an enquiry into what differences make a difference in therapy (de Shazer & Berg, 1997). Its roots are found in the Brief Family Therapy tradition and it was within this context that Steve de Shazer and the Milwaukee Team first began their work in developing SFBT. SFBT was radical in its approach in moving away from the traditional psychotherapy focus on problems towards placing an emphasis on client strengths and resources in finding solutions (Trepper et al., 2006). The focus on exploring solutions rather than problems is one of its main defining features. While SFBT work originally based itself within a therapeutic setting, dealing with a range of client issues, the development of SFBT resulted in some core ideas that have been applied to a variety of settings, including some sectors within education.

The Solution Focused model understands life to be contingent, changing, discontinuous, and socially constructed (Miller & de Shazer, 1998). It is based on the premise that change is constant in people's lives. In addition to this is the understanding that problems are not constant; there are always times when the problem does not exist for an individual (Miller & de Shazer, 1998). There is a connection made in SFBT between problems and solutions and the way language is used to interpret reality. The role of the therapist within SFBT is to use solution-focused language to bring awareness to the fact that change is already happening and that the client can effect further changes in creating a better future (Miller & de Shazer, 1998). Central importance is given to relationships and there is an understanding that humans are fundamentally social beings. It is by interacting with other people that individuals grow and the process of making sense of the world is seen as socially constructed (Dallos & Draper, 2005). This underlying philosophy informs the work of SFBT and influences the therapeutic process.

Miller and De Shazer referred to SFBT as an interactional event comprising of ordinary activities such as asking and answering questions, commenting on others' statements, and evaluating possible solutions to clients' problems (Miller & de Shazer, 1998). Therapists use questions as a means of getting clients to visualise and talk about their lives in different ways (Miller & de Shazer, 1998). Within the therapeutic relationship the focus is on dialogue as opposed to individuals or problems (McNamee, 2004). The constructivist viewpoint focuses on looking for ways of being helpful to the client by engaging in conversations about a future where new realities are formed (McNamee, 2004).

The underlying ideas that inform SFBT appeal to many sectors where people are working in supportive roles: (1) focus on individual strengths and resources in finding solutions (2) understand and acknowledge that there are times when the client is unaware of their problem, and that the problem is not constantly there (3) use solution-focused language to bring awareness to the fact that change is already happening and that the client can effect further changes in creating a better future.

Research to support the benefits of using SFBT in employment counselling
While SFBT has now become an established therapeutic intervention, it has, to date, been applied mainly within mental health services, social work and school settings. Only a small body of research has been carried out using solution focused techniques within employment counselling, which is perhaps the most closely aligned area of research to supporting adults who are making the transition from unemployment to adult education. The findings are that many of the approaches used in solution focused work relate well to the process involved in supporting those who are unemployed. The key stages involved include mapping the problem, followed by developing well-formed goals, exploring for exceptions, and evaluating progress (Bezanson, 2004).

Bezanson (2004) discusses how solution focused questions can be adapted to an employment counselling context. The importance of formulating a clear goal is emphasised in employment counselling, a goal that reflects the client's skills, knowledge and needs, while taking account of environmental factors that might influence career decisions (Bezanson, 2004). The task is then to break down the goal into a specific action plan or series of action plans. Another attractive aspect of SFBT which Bezanson identifies is the fact that solution focused therapy works from a postmodern constructivist perspective. The counselling, therefore, does not attempt to assign particular values to work or career, where-

by the therapist imposes a particular viewpoint regarding specific job types or career paths, but rather works collaboratively with the client in helping him/her move forwards towards a preferred future (Bezanson, 2004).

Within employment counselling services client referrals are sometimes mandatory. While adults who are unemployed are not forced to return to education, they may feel pressurised to do so in order to maintain social welfare benefits. The Brief Family Therapy Centre was experienced in working with mandated clients as fifty percent of their clients were referred by public agencies, i.e. courts, schools, and social services (De Jong & Hopwood, 1996). A central aspect to their work was allowing clients to take the role as expert in the conversation and seeing clients as being most knowledgeable about their own lives and experiences (De Jong & Berg, 2001). By doing so, the therapist is giving back control to the client. This goes against the assumption of mandated clients that they are going to be told what they have to do to resolve the situation they are in. Rather than trying to influence the client and steer him/her in a particular direction the solution-focused therapist does not concern him/herself with achieving a particular outcome (De Jong and Berg, 2001).

Another valuable contribution SFBT makes is that, it deliberately moves away from the language of deficit which can often permeate the culture of helping agencies and services. Sousa et al (2007) discuss the value of moving away from the language of deficit towards a strengths-focused model. In their study they examine the damaging effects as a result of using the language of deficit when working with multi-problem poor families. Their findings showed that an established pattern can develop which leads to an emphasis on what is wrong, absent or insufficient in working with this client group. Combined with the language of deficit is a system where specialists and agencies are seen as having "the expertise" to sort out client problems resulting in a situation where families become "agency families" (Minuchin et al., 1967). The same can be said with regard to services and professionals who are working with unemployed, low-skilled adults, where terms such as 'non-achievers' and 'unemployable' reflect a type of culture that supports a language of deficit. SFBT contrasts with this approach as it is concerned with strengths rather than deficits and uses language that reflects this strengths-based perspective.

Summary
Beginning with the emergence of Solution Focused Brief Therapy in the 1980s as an enquiry into what differences make a difference in therapy (de Shazer &

Berg, 1997), SFBT has now found a much wider application. In this article the application of SFBT within an adult education setting has been explored. Positive aspects of SFBT include the move away from the language of deficit towards a language that reflects a strengths-based perspective and the focus on solutions rather than problems. An emphasis is placed on the more positive aspects of the individual, their resources and strengths, rather than past problems and obstacles to progress. SFBT incorporates ideas such as goal-setting, scaling and the miracle question. It looks for exceptions to the problem and uses a language of expectancy which creates a context for the adult learner to expect that something positive will happen. The fact that the intervention is brief also makes it is suitable to use in learning environments where there are limitations on the length of time that can be afforded to individual learners and group work. It offers a perspective that respects and acknowledges individual strengths and resources in the process of finding solutions to problems. It also provides practical tools which can be used to work in more effective ways when supporting adult learners. And with regard to supporting adults who are unemployed, focusing on the problem of being unemployed should not be the starting point to finding solutions – SFBT recommends that a different approach is necessary.

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Using autoethnography to explore and critically reflect upon changing identity

ANNMARIE JUDGE PRESTON

Abstract

Reflexivity is a professional requirement of the Adult Guidance Counsellor, with reflexive practice paramount to our work. From 2008 to 2010 I trained as an Adult Guidance Counsellor while working with an unemployed adult client group. During this time, I also journeyed through my first pregnancy. Towards the end of my training, I experienced a crisis, which led to a process of reflection and transformative learning. In this paper, I share personal writings from my learning journey, using autoethnography as a vehicle for reflexivity. Authoethnography is a research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalised style, drawing on his or her own experience to extend understanding about a social phenomenon. My reflections show a subjective change over time to the understanding of my changing self, and highlight the role of autoethnography as a reflexive tool for the Guidance Counsellors' Practice.

Introduction

We must write about what we really prefer not to write about. It is not about presenting ourselves in a good light – in charge, competent, controlled, organised and so on, or how we might like to be seen. Rather it is about writing rich, full accounts that include the messy stuff – the self-doubts, the mistakes, the embarrassments, the inconsistencies, the projections and that which may be distasteful. It is about writing all of it.
Tenni, Smyth, Bochner, (2001:4)

'My Story…'

On November 4th 2008, the world changed, as Barack Hussein Obama became the first African American to be elected as president of the United States of America. I lay on my bed watching the TV footage for hours, unable to sleep, late into the night. 'Change', the reporters kept telling me, 'Change has come'!

On November 4th 2008, my world had changed. I had just had confirmation from my doctor that I was pregnant with my first child. The pregnancy was unplanned and I was terrified. On the TV, Obama was happily declaring how he had 'never felt more hopeful', while, on my bed, I had never felt such despair. My husband was beside me, and numb with shock. I felt completely disconnected from him.

'This can't be happening' he muttered over and over again. He had his head in his hands.

In the background, Obama was strongly asserting how 'We will get there!'

'No, no, no...' My husband was muttering.

'Yes you can!' Obama was in full swing.

As my husband talked though his fears, I kept hearing the new President...

'There will be setbacks... but we will get there!'

I really wanted to believe him.

'This is not the right time; The next few years were supposed to be all about career... What about your Guidance Counsellor Training? My business? I don't want a baby right now. Maybe in a few years...'

I could not say anything to my husband, and I started to wonder if I knew him at all.

So the pregnancy was not planned, and career was important to both of us. I wanted him to tell me that it would all be ok, that we would all live happily ever after... but these reassurances were not coming. I vividly remember turning my back to him, blocking out his words and staring intently at Obama. His first speech (Obama, 2008) as President of the United States will stay with me forever.

'The heartache, the hope, the struggle and the progress...

YES WE CAN...

We shall overcome...

YES WE CAN!'

But I really was not sure if I could.

Background to the Research

From 2008 to 2010 I trained as an Adult Guidance Counsellor in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, while working with an unemployed adult client group. During the course of the two years of training, I also journeyed through my first pregnancy. This pregnancy was unplanned, and my son was born in the middle of the training.

A major requirement of the training is the submission of four recordings of guidance counselling sessions with clients completed over the two years. Each recorded session is accompanied by a verbatim transcript, comments of the trainees' experience of the session and skills they used; and a critique in the form of a critical reflection. I had just submitted the fourth and final recorded session, and within the safe confines of my monthly peer supervision group, took the risk of confiding that something about the client I had recorded unsettled me. I felt 'stuck', and did not know how to progress with her. The feedback I received from my peers implied that the impact of becoming a mother and adapting this to my professional identity was a struggle.

The Disorienting Dilemma

Mezirow (2000:23) stressed that only once a frame of reference (i.e., a cognitive lens through which one orders his/her world) has been broken, the transformative learning process can begin. The initial trigger for change is usually experienced through 'a disorientating dilemma', Mezirow (2000: 3-33). The painful experience of receiving negative feedback from my peers became my disorienting dilemma. Angry with my peers for their suggestion, my initial reaction was to retreat. Eventually, I spoke to my tutor, who encouraged me to write.

Write about what, I asked?

Just write, he said, *Trust the process.*

Remaining unsettled from the experience, I decided give it a try. I started to write… at first angry ramblings, then questions about myself, my place on the training course, my family, my life… I did not know it then, but my writing was being encouraged as a way of making sense of my story. I started trying to analyse other writings I had done. I began reading my course learning journal, my personal diary, class notes and assignments… everything I could find pertaining to my training and myself. Finally, I started reading the verbatim transcript of the four recorded guidance counselling sessions I had completed throughout

my training. It was only after reading these that I truly began to understand the meaning of reflexivity in practice, as my own story began to unfold.

Counsellor and Motherhood Identities

As a Guidance Counsellor working with adults in the process of developmental change, it was imperative that I understood my own identity, and in the process work through my disorienting dilemma. I began to study identity in adult development. Two of the major psychoanalytical theorists who focused on identity formation were Freud and Erikson. While Freud focused on identity formation in childhood, Erikson took it through further, to the later stages of a person's development. Erikson can be credited with giving the care of children greater visibility through his concept of 'generativity' as an important stage of adult life; yet few developmental theorists have explored how bearing or adopting and raising children causes major changes in one's self-concept and relationship to others, Liebert, (2000: 19-44). Although developmental theorists such as Bowlby and Winnicott looked at the identity of the infant in relation to the mother, they failed to directly address the notion of the changing identity of the pregnant woman. Much is written medically, but not psychologically.

Birthing and motherhood are powerful rites of passage. Anthropologists who have studied religious rites of passage in cultural contexts have observed that they are characterized by three stages – separation, liminality and reentry, Wilbur-Threadway and Miller-McLemore, (2000: 169-190). Mahdi, Foster and Little (1987) quote Turner's (1967) definition of 'liminality' within the context of identity as;

> Capturing the state of being suspended between former conventional expectations and new expectations and norms about one's identity and place… one is betwixt and between.

Neither here nor there. Therefore, in terms of the identity changes a woman experiences on her journey to motherhood, Wilbur-Treadway et al (2000: 169-190) assert that 'the duplicity of one's identity is seldom as acute as when one is simultaneously one and two persons, containing in oneself the other almost but not yet born'.

Stern and Bruschweiler-Stern (1998:3) describe the process of becoming a mother fittingly;

In a sense, a mother has to be born psychologically much as her baby is born physically. What a woman gives birth to in her mind is not a new human being, but a new identity: the sense of being a mother.

Understanding Countertransference

It became clear from reflecting upon my four recorded sessions that another drama was being played out within each session – that of my own emotional entanglement with each client, or countertransference. Countertransference is the counsellor or therapist's emotional reaction to the client. Kahn, (1997:127) defines it as;

> Much of what goes on in the minds of our clients… is hidden to them. Each person's history, each person's deepest wishes, impulses, and fears lie out of sight. Nevertheless, they powerfully influence the person's behaviours and conscious attitudes… this influence works as strongly in the therapist as in the client.

Freud originally thought of countertransference as an obstacle that the therapist needed to overcome, Clarkson and Nuttall, (2000:361); yet over the years therapists gradually came to recognise that no matter how much personal counselling or supervision they had, inevitably two complex dramas were being played out in every session – with one in the mind of the therapist. Therefore, the more aware the therapist was of countertransference, the safer the client would be.

Methodology

This study was born out of a crisis (my disorienting dilemma): the painful feedback from my peers that I displayed confusion surrounding my own development as a practitioner.

The data upon which the findings are based emanate from the four recordings with clients, conducted throughout and as part of my learning programme. However, I was to be the subject of my research, rather than my four clients. A pivotal aspect of myself being the research subject was what stage of pregnancy I was at for each recorded session. In session one, I was ten weeks pregnant. In session two, I was eight months pregnant. In session three, my son was born and was seven months old. In session four, my son was ten months old.

In developing my methodology, I was influenced by the autoethnographic style of research. Performing thematic content analysis, Smith, (1992:4) on each of

the four recordings, I read each completed assignment and made notes along the text to identify initial categories that emerged from the data. I then gradually identified subcategories related by content or context to identify themes. In line with the autoethnographical approach to research, I used vignettes to focus on personal issues and the recorded sessions to explore and illustrate practice.

Reflecting upon each completed assignment, I asked myself: Can I connect my style of intervention with each client to my feelings surrounding my own self at this time? My reflections show a subjective change over time to the understanding of my changing self. This transformative learning highlights the power of autoethnography as a reflexive means. I discuss these findings at the conclusion of the research data for each recorded session. Under the heading of *'Upon Reflection...'* I reveal my learning progression towards understanding my own development.

In order to ensure ethical research, I made use of informed consent. Homan (1992: 321) defines informed consent in research as where study participants are given a full explanation and are able to reach clear understanding of what participation involves. The clients used in the recorded sessions were contacted. I sought permission for using their words explaining that I was the subject of research for this project. Their names were removed, and identifiable details carefully reconstructed. All four clients granted permission. Permission and agreement was given by my husband and my tutor to include the parts of my personal writings where they are mentioned.

Autoethnography

Emerging from postmodern philosophy, where the dominance of traditional science and research is questioned and many ways of inquiring are legitimized; autoethnography offers a way of giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding. McIlveen (2008:1) describes autoethnography as;

> a reflexive means, by which the researcher-practitioner consciously embeds him or herself amidst theory and practice, and by way of intimate autobiographic account, explicates a phenomenon under investigation.

By writing themselves into their own work as major characters, autoethnographers have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher's voice is not included in the presentation of findings Holt, (2003: 1-7). Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, Ellis, (2004: 37). The text of auto-

ethnographic writing does not feature the traditional distanced researcher, but is written in the first person, highlighting stories of relationships and emotions affected by social and cultural frameworks.

Autoethnographers attempt to learn something about themselves through their research: they attempt to look inwards to discover things about themselves as researcher that perhaps were unknown or unexplained until examined. In praise of autoethnography, Holman Jones refers to the use of the personal text as 'critical intervention in social, political and cultural life' (2005: 763).

Yet autoethnography is not without its critics. The use of 'self' as data has been questioned and referred to as 'fiction, not science' by Denzin and Lincoln (2005:8). Autoethnographers have been criticised for being too self-indulgent and narcissistic; being too 'voyeuristic' and for 'indulging our culture's perverse curiosity about the private… peeking in on damaged selves', Ellis and Bochner, (2000:749).

Those in support however, believe that autoethnography helps to undercut conventions of writing that foster hierarchy and division by bringing us into 'lived experiences in a feeling and embodied way', Meekums, (2008:287-301).

There is a growing interest among counsellors in the therapist's embodied subjective as a source of wisdom. Meekums (2008:287-301) writes that auto-ethnography as a broad methodological approach is consistent with reflective practice in the fields of counselling, emphasising as it does self-understanding, creativity and immediacy of communication, while maintaining a critically subjective stance. Holman Jones (2005: 763-791) describes autoethnography as 'speaking in and through experiences that are unspeakable, as well as inhabiting and animating the struggle for words, and often our failure to find them'.

Reflexivity and its Relevance within Guidance Counselling
Life must be lived forward, but can really only be understood backward.
Kerekegaard, 1957, In Muncey, T., (2005:3)

Writing on the importance of reflexivity for the Guidance Counsellor, McCormack & Ryan (2011:7) refer to the process as;

A disciplined commitment to regular and skilled scrutiny to one's practice…
we all need to develop the capacity to sift through the flux of our experiences
on an ongoing basis to be able to discern what our feelings and experiences
are telling us about ourselves, our clients, our world…

Reflexivity is paramount to the practice of the Guidance Counsellor. The capacity to look at oneself and take account of what one finds represents a critical dimension of what it takes to be a good counsellor. Guidance Counsellors who continuously reflect upon their practice in their training and in their work become able to create new meanings and gain a better understanding of the guidance process.

Etherington (2004: 29-30) describes reflexivity in counselling practice as the ability of the counsellor to operate on at least two levels. The first level is the ability to reflect on ourselves, with an awareness of 'self' as an active agent in the process. The second level is knowing what we think, feel, imagine and understand of our own inner story – the story we tell ourselves as we listen to our clients' stories. So, we are moving in and out of several levels of awareness as we listen to ourselves, and our clients.

Recorded Sessions and Reflections
Recorded Session One: November 2008
This was my first recorded session with a client in Year 1 of my training. The session takes place in my office. The client, 'M', is a lone parent seeking a return to employment. 'M' arrives with her six-year old son accompanying her. I do not explain to her that it is inappropriate to allow him to be present. I am ten weeks pregnant.

'The Invisible Child'
I do not make reference to the child's presence until halfway through the session when I ask:

And what time… would he be going to school? (I point at the child)

'M' had *already* told me her child's name earlier. Yet I refer to him only as 'he'.

Later in the session, I make a judgement;

… You have young children, and can only work part time?

This was not what the client said. This was an assumption based on *my* value system that when one has a child, they are no longer available for full-time employment.

Later, I make another judgement. 'M' wants a job, and I am talking to her about a career.

My own value at this point is that children hold back careers; therefore, when the client does not want to consider re-training for a career right now, I assume she means she will retrain in a career when her children are older. This was not what the client said. She just wanted a job and not a career.

In my written reflections, I made reference to the fact that the child was in the room;

> *I needed to explain that children were not allowed to be present… Instead, I allowed the child to come in. Why was I afraid to challenge 'M'? I felt sorry for her. (It must be awful being a lone parent with no one to help you with your children?)… During the session… I did not notice the child as he sat quietly and coloured at a table. However, as I listened back to the recording, I'm surprised at the noise his colouring seems to be making and it actually sounds very disruptive.*

'Upon Reflection…'

At this point in my life I was in total denial about my pregnancy, and like the real child sitting colouring at my office table, I hoped that by not naming him, he might just quietly leave. I blocked out the children and made them invisible. I had spoken to no one apart from my husband about my pregnancy at this stage, and so my pregnancy is not mentioned in the session critique. I have not yet understood the meaning of countertransference through my training, therefore, I do not recognise its occurrence. I am preoccupied with my own problem, and have not fully understood the true meaning of the counsellor's role.

Recorded Session Two: May 2009

This was my second recorded session with a client in Year 1 of my training. The session takes place in my office. The client, 'C', is a young woman aged twenty-three years. She is an early school leaver, long-term unemployed, and has been 'directly referred'. This is when Social Welfare informs a client they are at risk of losing their Social Welfare payments unless they engage with our service and progress to employment, education or training. I am now eight months visibly pregnant.

'The Fuse is Lit…'

This was a very poor session, and my tutor recognised this in the feedback. I identify in my reflections that;

I am annoyed with the client as I feel she is wasting my time.

Throughout the session, I am in 'attack mode' and sound like I am interrogating the client. Examples of such dialogue include;

… and why, why did you not go back?

And have you been doing anything since then?

'No Space Left for Anyone Else…'

I make no reference to my pregnancy in the critique, even though I was heavily pregnant. At the time I could not see how it was relevant to the session. I did make reference to the fact that the client annoyed me, explaining;

I had… been challenging the client because I was annoyed with her… I was not present to [her] at all… there were a lot of other people present in that room with us during the session,… people she took in to discuss… Social Welfare, her Mother, her sister…

I got a poor grade for this tape. My tutor's feedback read,

You didn't at any point 'name the obvious!'

My tutor also mentions *'Liminal Space'*. I do not know what he means, and this washes over me. At the time of feedback I understood 'naming the obvious' to mean that I did not ask the client how it felt to be sent to see me under threat of losing her welfare payment. Having reflected on this now, over a year later, I realise that my tutor also meant 'naming the obvious' as giving voice to the fact that I was heavily pregnant and my baby was very obviously protruding from my belly? And what implications did this hold for me in where I was at emotionally? Motherhood was weeks away. It was all about me and not the client.

'Upon Reflection…'

I am angry because I am large, hot and bothered and about to give birth. I wonder now, as I reflect back, how much of this anger was a heightened sense of countertransference? I'm on the verge of becoming a mother, and reluctantly

so. My client is young, carefree and has no responsibilities. She is not even worried about getting a job as she was forced to come here!

I am completely disconnected from my role now, and offer no space to the client at all. The expanding physical space I now occupy myself is the only space I can consider. I am terrified of the weeks and months ahead. I have not mentioned countertransference within my critique. Do I even understand what it is yet?

Recorded Session Three: February 2010
This was my third recorded session with a client in Year 2 of my training. The session takes place in my office. I have returned to work following maternity leave. The client, 'P', is middle-aged woman, who has been in full employment until two years ago. She left her job to care for her ill mother. Her mother is now in a residential home, and 'P' is seeking a return to work. My son is eight months old and I am back in work three weeks.

'The Good Mother and the Bad Mother…'
When 'P' tells me her mother has Alzheimer's and in a home, my reflections read;

Oh, her poor mother! So sad… It must be terrible losing a parent like this!

Then 'P' tells me her mother abused her while growing up. I admit to feeling confused as I write;

This is awful… What happened to the lovely old lady I imagined..? I'd never hurt my child! I'm feeling a very powerful negative feeling towards this mother… HOW could a mother do this?

Yet I quickly recognise feelings towards the client's mother and write;

I'm able to recognise this feeling and tell myself to stop

Afterwards, I write about feeling… *deeply upset*, when I realise that my own 'stuff' had got jumbled up in the client's experience;

… My maternal instinct is very powerful and sometimes overwhelms me.

'Upon Reflection…'

I saw myself as the client's mother and she became my child. I understood the countertransference issues at play; recognised them during the session, and commented about them at length. I have also finally acknowledged being a mother.

Recorded Session Four: April 2010

This was my fourth recorded session with a client in Year 2 of my training. The session takes place in my office. My son is ten months old and I am back in work twelve weeks.

The client, 'A', is a middle-aged woman, who is a qualified professional. Since moving to Ireland from overseas, she has not worked as she has taken the primary role caring for her children. 'A' is starting to feel quite low from being at home all day caring for her family, and longs to be back in the workplace. Yet she feels her children need a full-time parent at home until they settle into the country.

In the reflexive comments I write;

She is so well qualified it should be so positive for her, and [yet] it's not.

Later in the session, 'A' is describing how she would be happy to work in a lower grade role, as long as she could feel involved in a career again. I ask her about the implications of how she would feel working at a lower grade, coming from where she was at holding a very senior professional role. She says she thinks that would be ok.

I then respond;

So what I hear you saying 'A', is you don't have a problem with status?

My reflective comments read;

'Status' is my word not hers. I have issues surrounding my professional identity as a woman, and am feeling for her because of her situation. Countertransference?

'You Can be Both…'

'A' is experiencing frustration at the loss of her professional identity. I have just recognised through this reflexive process that 'A' represents what I fear the most… a qualified professional 'stuck' at home rearing children when her

choice is to be in employment outside the home. I wonder at some level was I working harder with 'A' because she represents my biggest fear – to lose my professional identity to motherhood? Up until now I have not been able to understand that it is not about choosing one identity over another – I don't have to be a mother or a Guidance Counsellor. I can, in fact, be both.

'Upon Reflection… I am Transformed by the Learning'
I now accept that I have issues with my own identity. I fear being the stay-at-home mother; I fear ending up like my client. It becomes clear to me now that I have been resisting opening up to multiple identities – a mother as well as a Guidance Counsellor. To me it had to be one or the other. I now understand that I can be both, and more. I can accept my life history and understand why I hold the values that I do. The vital learning is not to act them out in the space with the client, but to bring them to supervision and reflect upon them. I am finally starting to understand myself.

The journey is just beginning.

Discussion
My reflections show a subjective change over time to the understanding of my changing self. This transformative learning highlights the power of autoethnography as a reflexive means for the Guidance Counsellor.

In sessions one and two, I am frightened, angry and scared, and fear the transition that is taking place and bringing me forward towards the role of mother. At the time, I do not recognise this and project the anger from myself onto the clients. I realise now the powerful message in my tutor's words - 'Liminal Space' – I was betwixt and between, neither here nor there, in;

> … the place where boundaries dissolve a little and we stand there, on the threshold, getting ourselves ready to move across the limits of what we were into what we are to be.
> Mahdi, Foster, Little, (1987: 3-22)

Being in this space affected my learning. I am unable to make the physical transition to motherhood, as my son has not yet been born. Yet in sessions three and four, having made this transition, I have not only accepted the mother identity, but have adopted the mother role with enthusiasm. This is especially prevalent in the third recording, where I have just returned from maternity leave and end up seeing the client as my own child in need of mothering. In session four, the

client is the woman I fear becoming, as I battle with my own fear of being a mother unable to return to her professional role.

Autoethnography in Reflexive Practice

McIlveen (2008:4) believes that once an autoethnography produces a narrative that is authentic, it will enable the reader to deeply grasp the experience and interpretation of this one interesting case. The experience that I write about is authentic. It holds value for professionals involved with adults in developmental change, and where reflexive practice is vital to their practice. Mine is a real and genuine story, yet writing myself into my story was not an easy process. I had difficulty disclosing many pieces of myself. These difficulties emerged firstly as denial, as I refused to believe that someone who was good at their job, as I believed myself to be, could be carrying such confusion surrounding their own identity. It dented my confidence and many times I felt like the fraud within. I also worried about how I might be seen by friends, family, and even work colleagues who may read this. Would my son grow up and one day read what his mother had written, and wonder was he a child who had not been wanted? Would readers understand the deeper meaning within my story?

Clients often enter into career guidance counselling in order to learn or to change in some way, and this may be their main motivation. Much research work in counselling has therefore focused on client experiences of counselling, aiming to discover how client change may be best facilitated, McLeod, (1990:17). Less research seems to have been carried out on the counsellor's experiences. This research focused on the learning and change that I, as an Adult Guidance Counsellor experienced as a result of my client work; which happened to occur as I journeyed through my first pregnancy. My own story signified a crisis in my life, which had to be dealt with before I could progress.

What I wrote about was very real, and I'm inviting the reader into what was my own lived, felt experience. Using autoethnography as a means for reflexivity allowed me to construct a critical understanding of myself, in relation to the influences of my own life with my clients. It allowed me to understand my own experience to extend understanding of my role. I was transformed by this learning. Within the field of counselling, self-understanding is vital. For if I cannot understand my own ever-changing self, how will I be able to facilitate my clients' change?

Conclusion

Autoethnography is a methodology I found to be of significant value as a tool for reflexivity while training as an Adult Guidance Counsellor. Reflexivity is paramount to critical practice. As my reflections have shown, unless as practitioners we are able to achieve our own self-awareness through critical reflection, we are not going to be able to assist our clients. We won't be able to clear a space for the client unless we first know how to first clear one for ourselves. The ability to reflect on this experience is of significant knowledge to me, as I can go forward as a trained Adult Guidance practitioner knowing more about myself, my clients, and the power of reflexivity within my work. Fundamentally, I have learned that we have to understand and experience complex change ourselves through the cyclical nature of life, before we can assist others in the process.

'My Story… One Year Later'

In two weeks time my son will celebrate his first birthday. The son I initially did not want to have; whose birth was going to destroy my career ambitions; whose announcement of arrival sixteen months ago nearly broke up my marriage; and now, whom I could not live without. My husband and I are like children ourselves, bubbling with the excitement of planning his birthday party. From all the worry and heartbreak and tears, has emerged an understanding of unconditional love; a life that feels so complete; and a love that I think I would kill for.

I am a Mother.

Yet, I'm also an Adult Guidance Counsellor.

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Charting the learning journey of a group of adults returning to education

DES MOONEY

Abstract

Using a qualitative case study method the researcher studied a group of adult returning students completing a childcare course. Methods used included focus groups, a questionnaire and observations. Using a holistic analysis approach (Yin 2003) of the case the researcher then focused on a number of key issues. From this analysis the themes of identity, education as a facilitator of positive risk taking, education and perspective transformation, and, connectedness emerged.

This study has shown that there is a need for a wider study in the area of returners to education with implications for teaching methods access to information and student involvement in the classes.

The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (Hooks, 1994, 207).

Introduction

Lisa's husband left her for another woman and after a while she decided to go back to education to get herself out of the rut she had got into. Sophie was cajoled into returning to education by her relatives who thought she could do better for herself. Sophie was, by the way, quite happy being a stay at home mom. Theresa spoke about meeting people from all walks of life and exchanging ideas, information and learning while Georgina thinks that being involved in education has helped her become more focused in all aspects of her life.

This study concerned a group of fifteen adult 'returners' (Bird, 1999) to education; and the learning journey they undertook as they completed a child care course. The study group consists of a group of women, of all ages, who undertook a Further Education and Training Awards Council Level (FETAC) 5 childcare course. Qualitative in nature this case study was bounded by time (six months) and by a single case (one college). The main themes that emerged from this study include identity, education as a facilitator or risk taking behaviour, perspective transformation, and, belonging.

Carl Rogers (1969, 1994) writes of education being a facilitator of personal growth and change, while Knud Illeris (2003) discusses the motivations that adults have to return to education. In Illeris's viewpoint most adults do not want to go back to education but do so because of personal or career pressures. Many participants in the study said that they had learned much by attending adult education, but that much of this learning was about facilitating change and adapting to new ideas about themselves.

Malcolm Knowles (1980) sees andragogy; the art and science of helping adults learn; as 'learner centred' and 'constructivist' in nature. This study examined the role of the student in the construction of knowledge. Also significant are communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within which learning takes place as a product of social participation. The study looked at the work of Jack Mezirow (1991, 1998) and his ideas on critical reflection and perspective transformation and how this resonated with the students. Finally the study looked at 'women's ways of knowing' (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) and discusses the relationship between belonging and learning. In addition this study examined some of the criticisms the students had about the educational process and suggests ways in which these criticisms can be addressed.

Context

This small scale study concerned a group of students currently completing a child care course in a Vocational college in the South East area of Ireland. The course; 'Certificate in Childcare'; is a FETAC level five course. The course consists of eight modules; six compulsory and two elective. The compulsory modules include; Caring for Children 0-6 years; Working in Childcare; Child Development; Early Childhood Education; Communications and Work Experience. The elective modules include; Arts and Crafts; Safety and Health at work; Social Studies; Book-keeping; Payroll; Computer Aided Design; Desktop Publishing and ECDL. The college runs a full time day course and also part time night course. This study focused on the night students.

The course is aimed at people who work or wish to work in preschools, playgroups, nurseries, private families, or, as au pairs. Some of the students on this course use it as a way of achieving a stand-alone certificate in childcare or as a stepping stone towards further study, for example, a social care or social studies degree qualification. This course also attracts people who wish to study the subject of childcare for their own personal reasons and have no career ambitions in the area, and as such they can study whatever modules they want. A further number in the class are requested by their employer to attend this course as a means of either retaining their jobs or achieving promotion within their workplace. There were twenty-five female students on the course of which fifteen took part in the study. There were no males studying the subject. The ages of the students ranged from nineteen to forty-eight years. Approximately half of the study group had no previous experience of adult or third level education. Many in the group had not worked outside of the home for many years while others in the group were working full or part time, mostly in child care positions. As the course is set up in modules there was a mixture of student and learning experience with some of the group having completed up to 6 modules while others would be starting their first module.

Jean Piaget (1963) writes of cognitive conflicts brought about by new learning and of the disequilibrium or destabilisation of existing ideas. In order to return to a state of equilibrium the learner must assimilate these new ideas into existing thinking or accommodate "the process of changing internal mental structures to provide consistency with external reality" (Bhattacharya, K. & Han, S., 2001.). Peter Alheit (1994) argues that "living a life' has become more problematic and unpredictable. It is a laboratory for developing skills whose usefulness is unknown" (as cited in Antikainen, 1998). In his study 'In Search of the Meaning of Education' (1995) Antikainen examines the meaning of education and learning in the lives of Finns and uses the term 'significant learning experience'. This is defined as, "those which appeared to guide the interviewee's life-course, or to have changed or strengthened his or her identity (Antikainen, 1991). Antikainen notes that significant learning experiences consist of; a certain sort of life-event, a change-event, and may include a creative achievement or a meaning which is new from the learners' standpoint. This study is concerned with how education contributes to those significant learning experiences. It is also concerned with how the different teaching methods complemented or otherwise the various skills the students already had.

Rationale

My interest in this study has come about because of my own experiences of adult education, both as a learner and a teacher. As part of a career change I returned to education after many years away. I found that I was far more interested in learning than I had been when I had first attended school/college. This curiosity has continued and led me to become a teacher. I am now equally curious why other adults return to education and what they get out of it. My role with the course is to participate in program development and delivery. I also have other tasks such as supervision and marking of papers. I teach two modules on this course; Child Development and Working in Childcare

Methodology

This qualitative case study concerned a group of female adult education students as they completed a childcare course. Bromley defines case study as "a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest" (Bromley, 1990, p.302, in Zucker, 2001). Both Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) base their approach to case study on a constructivist paradigm (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 545). Studies show that one of the advantages of this approach is the "close collaboration between researcher and participants, while enabling participants to tell their stories" (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). Critics of the case study method believe that the study of a small number of cases offers no ground for establishing reliability of findings (Soy, 1997). However, through case study participants are able to "describe their views of reality and this enables the researcher to better understand the participants actions" (Lathher, 1992; Robottom & Hart, 1993, in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545).

This case study is descriptive in nature. Robson (2002) notes that the descriptive approach is used to portray an accurate profile of person's events or situations, requires extensive previous knowledge of the situation to be researched or described so that you know appropriate aspects on which to gather information, and, may be flexible or fixed design (p. 59). This type of case study is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred (Yin, 2003). The analysis of the data incorporated a holistic approach; as the "researcher examines the entire case (Yin, 2003) and presents descriptions, themes, interpretations and assertions related to the whole case" (Creswell, 2007, p. 245). The study also incorporates narrative approaches so as to allow the students explain their experiences. As is the nature of qualitative inquiry, findings are not representative of all women (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008, p. 460).

The first part of the study consisted of discussions with both the class and the college administration, to obtain permission to conduct the study. The second part of the study consisted of a questionnaire. This was responded to by twelve students. The questions asked in the questionnaire were:

- Since coming back to education what changes have you noticed, if anything, about yourself?

- In what way have social contacts contributed to your experience of adult education?

- What has been the impact of education on your awareness of social and political structures?

- What contribution has class discussion and group work made to the learning process?

- What teaching methods empowered you and why?

- What teaching methods hindered you and why?

The questionnaire was followed by two focus groups consisting of a total of fifteen students. These focus groups followed up on issues raised in the questionnaire and also consisted of a general discussion about the reasons for attending the course, the learning journey to date, and further expectations and hopes from the course.

In addition I also used participant observation and current literature to guide me. From this research themes of identity; education as a facilitator of positive risk taking behaviour; education and perspective transformation; and, connectedness emerged.

Themes
Identity
For many in the study group, who have worked as child care workers for years and have much life experience, the classroom situation may seem to hold little value. Knud Illeris (2003) writes of most adults approaching education in very ambivalent ways. Their motivation is closely related to the need to keep their jobs or improve their possibilities of getting one (p. 14). In some stories the social motives are dominant, "but they are always mingled with other motives for qualification

or personal development and with elements of passive resistance and perplexity" (p. 14). What they conceived of as stable factors in their lives have become uncertain or simply no longer exist. They have to find new life orientations in addition to the ones that already exist. In addition the development of a new identity means discarding parts of the old and the latter is often a painful process (p. 16).

Sophie, a participant in the research, explained this identity dilemma:

> This is my second year attending adult education classes. I do feel better about myself and for some reason feel more acceptable to other people, because I'm doing more than just staying at home. I feel these classes have given me an awareness of life outside my little world. I'm mixing with people other than my friends and family. I know nothing about my classmates and they know nothing about me. Nobody has an expectation of me, it's nice to be unknown(ish). I really did feel pressure from members of my family to go back to work or education and although I resented this I nevertheless enrolled in this course. I feel that working in childcare would give me the type of hours in which I could still be there for my kids. I consider this to be the first step of my return to work, but not until myself and the kids are ready. The funny thing is that now I am back at college I feel under more pressure because the same people are asking me what I am going to do next!

A number of the students spoke about the changes that had taken place to their personal situations so that along with attending adult education other changes had occurred simultaneously. Some developed more friendships outside their normal circle and talked of engaging in deep conversations with people who they had not previously known. Others spoke of 'thinking about things differently'. Many spoke of a growth in confidence and self-belief and of having more focus. Still others spoke of feeling more knowledgeable and independent and of having a better sense of their own worth. One or two of the group spoke of being nervous before classes, and of feeling overawed initially by the class, the subject and the other students. Dolores put it this way;

> I was shy and nervous about coming to class but as weeks went by, seeing the same faces, the hello's and "see you next week", I felt welcomed and now look forward to coming each week.

Education as a facilitator of positive risk taking behaviour

Carl Roger's sees the role of education as being one that facilitates change and learning, and writes of two types of learning (1969, 1994). The first, learning by rote, or as Rogers puts it, the learning of nonsense syllables (1994, p. 35), has no meaning in their lives and is therefore quickly forgotten. Such learning involves the mind only. It does not involve feelings or personal meanings. It has no relevance for the whole person (p. 35). The second type; significant, meaningful or experiential learning takes place in everyday life and has personal meaning. Roger's defines experiential learning as involving the whole person, both feeling and cognitive aspects. "While the impetus or stimulus to learn comes from outside the sense of discovery and comprehending comes from within" (p. 36). Another element is pervasiveness, that it makes a difference to the behaviour, attitude or personality of the learner. Yet another is the learner's evaluation of the event. "The locus of evaluation, we might say, resides definitely in the learner. Its essence is meaning. When such learning takes place, the element of meaning to the learner is built into the whole experience" (p. 36).

Malcolm Knowles developed the theory of andragogy in the 1970s and 80s; and noted that andragogy is "learner centered and constructivist in nature because it assumes that the defining feature of adult education is the meaning that individuals attach to their learning" (Jordan, Carlile and Stack, 2008, p. 130). Knowles (1980) writes of three ultimate needs and goals of fulfillment of individuals; the prevention of obsolescence; the need of individuals to achieve self-identity through the development of their full potentialities, and thirdly, the need for individuals to mature. Abraham Maslow (1943) arranged human needs in a hierarchal order. He proposed that gratification of one need, starting from the lower level; survival or physiological needs, frees the person for higher levels of gratification; esteem needs or need for self-actualisation. Furthermore healthy persons are those whose basic needs have been met so that they are principally motivated by their needs to actualise their highest potentialities (Knowles, 1980, p. 29). Knowles writes that this concept implies that the role of the educator is to assist the learner in learning what is required to satisfy that need at whatever level they are struggling.

For example, Lisa is a separated woman in her early forties. She has four children. Throughout the term Lisa said very little. When asked to contribute to the class discussions she would be nervous but would contribute. Lisa however did enjoy the group activities and made a real effort in group situations. When I spoke with Lisa I was quite surprised that she had so much to say and had enjoyed the class

so much. I feel as an educator that Lisa was definitely engaging with the subject on a personal level and that her experience of adult education was involving, as Rogers would put it, the whole person. Furthermore I feel that Lisa was well aware of her needs, was seeking to have them met and was coming from a perspective of not having her needs met for a long time, and believing that this was her lot. She describes her situation and the changes she experienced in the following way:

> I felt nervous when I started; I've had a horrible few years on my own. My husband left and moved in with a younger woman. Today I am a stronger woman, memories will always be there … I decided to make a life for myself and the kids. Do course, get job and be happy. I picked child care because I love kids. I enjoyed the course, found it difficult but enjoyed it … My tutor did a great job. I think it's about the teachers too, how interesting they make it for you … Adult education, yes, is brilliant for the likes of me; a mother who wasn't able to get education in earlier years. To have every type of person, young or old, to come and learn and to socialise with others and get an education. I'm socialising with people my own age and older. I'm more confident. I feel my brain hasn't shrunk and I'm waking up and believing there is life as well as rearing children. I liked getting into groups, meeting other women and discussing topics. I'm delighted I started this course and I hope to get a job from it.

In addition Lisa spoke about the setting in which the learning was took place. Antikainen (1998) writes that with each significant learning experience, personal and social relations that support learning are easily detectable, and, "that the attempt to link learning in its social context led us to notice that learning has both its local environment and distant environment … The former are always concrete human beings, the latter are often symbolic or representational images" (Antikainen, 1998, p. 231).

Jane Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) put forward the 'situated learning' model of learning. "Rather than asking what kind of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, they ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place" (in Hanks, 1991, p. 14). Learning is not seen as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals but as a process and product of social participation. Lave and Wenger's model of situated learning proposed that learning involves participation in a 'community of practice'. Lave and Wenger argue that we are all part of various communities of practice be it in the home, in social circles or, in our civic or leisure interests. In some groups we are the leaders and in others we are at the margins. At the core of communities of practice are

three characteristics;

- The Domain: A community of practice is something that has an identity defined by a shared interest.

- The Community: In pursuing their interest in their domain members build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.

- The practice: They develop a shared repertoire of resources, experiences, stories, tools and ways of addressing recurring problems. This takes time and sustained interaction (Wenger, 2006).

Theresa, a woman in her late forties with an almost grown up family, expanded on this subject of communities of practice and collective learning:

> The social contacts have made it easier to attend class. When you know the people and having completed many of the modules with the girls we talked, gave out and helped and supported each other throughout the course … It has also given me a greater awareness of social structures. Many different types of people do these courses. Some are unemployed, some single mothers wishing to go back to work, but all hoping to achieve one goal … Having discussions and group work helped me understand the topic better. It was easier for me to learn the subject by remembering the stories that I heard when we discussed the topic than during the actual class work.

Education and perspective transformation

Transformational learning is defined as "learning that induces more far-reaching change in the learner than other kinds of learning, especially learning experiences which shape the learner and produce a significant impact, or paradigm shift, which affects the learner's subsequent experiences" (Clark, 1993, in Cooper, 2009).

The study of transformational learning emerged with the work of Jack Mezirow (1978). Transformation theory maintains that human learning is grounded in the nature of communication; to understand the meaning of what is being communicated requires critical reflection of assumptions (Mezirow, 1997). The theory of transformative learning has "evolved into a comprehensive and complex description of how learners construe, validate, and reformulate the meaning of their experience" (Cranton, 1994, P. 22). Common themes in Meziorw's theory include centrality of experience, rational discourse and critical reflection (Mezirow,

1991). For learners to change their beliefs, attitudes and emotional response to situations they must engage in critical reflection of their experiences, which in turn leads to perspective transformation.

> Perspective transformation is the process whereby we become more critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about the world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating and integrating perspective, and, finally making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167).

Many of the students spoke of being more connected with the world in general and of having a better understanding of their experiences of childhood and parenthood through a process of critical reflection. Mezirow (1998) describes reflection as "a "turning back" on experience, a simple awareness of an object, event or state, including awareness of a perception, thought, disposition, intention, action or of one's habits of doing things" (Mezirow, 1998, p. 48). Critical reflection on the other hand "may be either implicit, as when we mindlessly choose between good and evil because of our assimilated values, or explicit, as when we bring the process of choice into the awareness to examine and assess the reasons for making the choice" (p. 49). Through critical reflection of our world and the way we interpret our experiences, transformative learning occurs when new meaning schemas or meaning perspectives are constructed. This critical reflection causes people to redefine and re-evaluate experience from new frames of reference (Mezirow, 1991).

Georgina, a married woman in her late twenties, describes her experience of critical reflection thus:

> I feel I have more educated arguments and thoughts on certain issues. I also realise the depth of topics once considered easy or uncomplicated … I feel more focused on this course in all aspects of my life … I feel that the interaction with all age ranges in adult education allows for a build-up of respect for different generations in terms of thoughts feelings and self-expression and of the idea of no wrong answer and of different points of view … I wouldn't say this course has made me more aware of social issues but it has heightened and enhanced my feelings and opinions about these issues.

Tom Inglis's (1997) article on 'Empowerment and Emancipation' makes the point that since the appearance of 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (Freire, 1970, 1983) learning to challenge existing systems of adult education has been a dominant issue. Freire is adamant that freedom from oppression can only take place through theory and praxis (Inglis, 1997, p. 7). Freire defines praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1983, p. 48). Inglis writes that when it comes to people becoming empowered Mezirow closely follows Freire. Mezirow stresses that praxis is necessary for transformative learning, arguing that transformative learning all too frequently remains at the level of individual development and does not move into the task of "learning to successfully overcome oppressing power in one's external world through social action" (p. 7).

There was much evidence of increased critical reflection and perspective transformation among many in the study group. In addition the students who were in their second year appeared lot more confident that those in their first year. They questioned and debated and are engaged in a high level of critical thinking including both critical reflection and critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1998). Somehow the fear the students had in first year had been replaced by a curiosity and confidence. They questioned the way the classes were presented, asking for less reading of notes and more group work and class discussion, as one student put it "we can read at home". They were effectively contributing to their own learning by being open and correctly reasoned that group work, especially in the context of a child care course, was the best way for them to learn. A significant criticism voiced by the group was that there was not enough cross referencing between modules, and that tutors were not "teaching from the same page". Others spoke of being over-awed by too much information being squeezed into a twelve week module, while another student remarked that some of the modules were too long, "we were looking for things to do", and others too short, and that if there was more communication between tutors this would not have been the case

Antikainen (1998) notes that, "we discovered also that rarely or hardly ever, had a significant learning experience event taken place when an interviewee was studying in a compulsory school or in general education" (p. 222). Many in the group spoke of how nervous they had been at school and of how intimidated they had felt at the notion of questioning the teacher. The move to adult education, and the freedom and increased confidence to challenge both the teaching methods and the subject matter, was keenly felt. Many of the students were surprised to be so involved in their own learning having half expected adult education to be similar to school. Grainne, a mother of one expanded on this:

I like when a topic is discussed and people disagree, unlike in school when we all just went with the flow! (sheep!). I enjoy when people argue their case. I don't enjoy speaking out myself, but feel a sense of accomplishment when I do. Although I may not know the person, when someone who doesn't normally speak up, does speak, I feel a sense of pride in/for them.

Students also highlighted examples from personal experience; variety in classroom instruction, the use of handouts, group work and the use of the computer among their favoured teaching methods. It appeared that the students felt much more involved in the learning experience by their involvement in group work and were able to recall the information far better as a result. In addition the group of students I spoke to all seemed to agree that they were a support to each other in times of distress. Patricia, a mother of two in her early thirties, spoke of finding the class difficult and of contemplating giving up and of finding support in knowing that she was not the only one who was having difficulty;

I have come back numerous times *(to adult education)*. I am a bit more outspoken now; a bit more confident … social contacts at least there always a second-hand back up. You always feel stupid in some classes but then you say "I don't get that" and find out that half the class don't get it either … It's enjoyable, it's great to know people and it's like a sounding board so we can bounce ideas off each other … referring to everyday life, the life of the person helps understand the point being made.

Belonging

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, in their 1986 study, 'Women's Ways of Knowing', set out to understand why women, (a) spoke so frequently about problems and gaps in knowledge, and (b), doubted their intellectual competence (Lunney, 2005, p. 1) The researchers evidenced that ideas of knowledge and truth have a male-dominated bias and that a male dominated emphasis was evident in perspectives on thinking (p. 1). Belenky et al. were influenced in their writings by Carol Gilligan's book 'In a Different Voice' (1982). Gilligan writes of male and female approaches to morality; that the male approach is that individuals have certain rights and you have to respect the rights of others. So morality imposes restrictions on what you can do. While the female approach is that people have responsibilities towards others. So morality is an imperative to care for others (Gilligan, 2009).

Belenky et al. (1986) examined women's ways of knowing and describe five different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge and authority. These are silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge and constructed knowledge. Each phase is a unique training ground in which problems of self and other, inner and outer voices and silence can be worked through. Women experience transitions from one phase to the next (Lunney, 2005).

Jeela Jones in her 2007 article 'Connected Learning in Co-operative Education' describes a connected learning approach where knowledge is gained by connecting with other people and things and writes that, to enter this sphere of self-development learners must engage in relationship and relationship building, feel emotion and perceive the other as "a person on the same level with different but equally valuable experiences and perceptions" (Jones, 2007, p. 264). Significantly learners must value real-life experience as a tool in building knowledge. "With each of these elements in place learners have the opportunity to enhance their personal growth and development and, therefore, gain more than a support system" (p. 265). Relationships among the students and a mutual support system emerged as key factors in this study. Students spoke of the cultural differences between some of the students and of this being a significant learning experience for them while reference was made to the age differences frequently. A majority of the students spoke of their experience as being enhanced through the forming of friendships and mutual support systems. Jennifer spoke of these friendships;

> It has made it easier to attend when you know the people there. The class are a lovely inspiring group of women from all social and opinion holding groups and there was a sense of being in it together.

While some of the students stayed apart from others and worked independently a much greater percentage formed groups. Also significant is that of the students who dropped out of the course all tended to stay by themselves and did not align themselves to one group or another prior to leaving. However two women who declined to take part in the study and pretty much kept to themselves also attained distinctions in the modules that I was teaching on. Of note was the fact that both had had previous third level (university) experience.

Discussion

It appears that the strength of relationships was a key factor in many of the students enjoying their learning experience. Belenky et al. (1986) describe this as "connecting rather than separating from others" (Jones, 2007, p. 269). Many within this study spoke of the comfort of the group, and spoke of 'looking forward to going in to see the girls', of the support they got from each other, of comparing themselves to others in the class and realising that they were just as clever as the next person, and of this being a catalyst for them to achieve academically. Some spoke of lasting friendships being made, others of having discussions and an openness they had never imagined previously, and of their sense of pride in this. Also it became clear that it was the 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) that existed within the group that was a huge support for many in the class, with some students saying they may have left without it. For us as educators there appears to be an onus on us to promote this sense of community more through listening and the involvement of the students in the teaching and learning process and curriculum design.

Many of the students spoke of 'feeling differently' about themselves. Illeris (2003) writes of 'Identities at risk' (p.16), while at one level the students have managed to build up a stable identity accompanied by a strong identity defence, on another level many of the students spoke of the changes that have been brought about by their entry into higher education and of the challenges this posed to this very identity. Illeris write of students trying to use elements of their old personality in circumstances where it no longer fits. "The problems of identity are part of the baggage participants bring with them into adult education institutions" (p. 16).

A number of the student's spoke of the positive changes they were experiencing in relation to their feelings of identity while others spoke of this change as being 'scary' as they now had to live up to what they perceived as other people's unrealistic expectations. One student was clear when she spoke of using education as a stepping stone to change her identity; "do course, get job, and be happy". Another woman spoke of feeling aggrieved as she had been perfectly happy with the identity she already had only for others to influence her to return to education. She said she had not changed but during discussions it became apparent how aware she had become of some of the changes; from loving being away from the home and family in order to attend college; "they're there so I'm here!"; to realising that she had become a strong 'voice' within the class. This study shows that while the group acknowledged changes to their identity many

within the group find this a troubling change with increased expectations and the fear of stepping out of their comfort zone. However over time this 'fear' lessens as the new identity takes root. At the level of 'returners' to education tutors need to be aware of the complex shifts in lifestyles and challenges to identity that many of the students are experiencing. Being available and honest as well as encouraging and listening to the students is essential to aid this process. What did become clear during the study was the significant learning (Antikainen, 1998) the students experienced was not confined to education alone; that identity shift, peer group relationships, thought processes, self-confidence and decision making were all affected. Pieterse (1992, in Antikainen, 1998) describes the core of empowerment being found in a participatory approach; "transformation in the individual's self-identity and transformation of social environment through participation (p. 221).

Studies show that many mature students are in periods of transition and use education as a stepping stone towards some kind of recovery (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). For many of the students returning to education is the catalyst that supports the taking of significant personal and professional risks. For many of the study group this was the first time they had been in a classroom situation in a long time, and a number of them had negative feelings around education received in school and were initially nervous about the teaching methods employed. Almost all of the students were suspicious of behaviourist approaches of old which "views the mind as a 'black box' in the sense that response to stimulus can be observed quantatively, totally ignoring the possibility of thought processes occurring in the mind" (Mergel, 1998, p, 3). Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the importance of the 'more knowledgeable other' and proposes that learning is a social event and that we need people around us who can scaffold our experience of learning (Kelly, 2009). This study shows that for many of the students it was important to their own learning processes that they be involved in the construction of their knowledge. Consequently class discussion and group work were by far the most favoured teaching methods. Many of the students spoke of these as being of great educational value.

Conclusion

This study looked at learning journey of a group of adult returning to education. Certainly the role of 'others' is significant with many in the study group suggesting that they not only enjoyed the company of their colleagues but at times needed them. Relationships and their place in the teaching and learning process was highlighted by this group as was the role of education in the area of positive risk taking.

Rogers (1994) writes of experiential learning as not being about the end product but about the conditions for learning and of learning involving the 'whole' person. Identity issues were significant with many in the study group saying they enjoyed the changes but had struggled with them. These changes included a renewed confidence and self-belief in themselves and their abilities.

The study showed that many in the class had engaged in a high level of critical thinking and this had in turn led to a high level of debate and subsequent learning in class. It was notable that the perspectives of many in the class had changed as their confidence grew. The students' initial fear in their first year of adult education had by the end of the second year been replaced by a curiosity and high level of critical thinking and reflection (Mezirow, 1991). Also of note were the students' criticisms of teaching methods employed and of their need to be heard in this regard. The tutor meanwhile has a role beyond imparting information to others. Particularly with a class where there is quite a wide range of educational experience it is imperative that the tutor is mindful of Knowles' concept of assisting the learner satisfy the educational need, at whatever level they are struggling.

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SECTION THREE

Book Reviews

Habermas, Critical Theory and Education

The sociologist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas has had a comprehensive and noteworthy impact on understandings of social change and social conflict. Evidently however, up until now, in this readers opinion, there has been no focused endeavor to introduce his ideas to the field of education in a broad sense .

This book in my belief takes cognizance of this indiscretion and presents an authoritative contribution to the understanding of Habermas' work as it applies to the field of education. Interestingly the editors tell the reader that *"when developing the format of this book the key objectives was to incorporate the work of a range of academics that could represent as wide range of sectors, subjects and issues in education as possible"* (p9)

This has certainly been achieved while also ensuring that the variety of interests and theories covered by Jurgen Habermas are also duly integrated.

Notably the target audience in my opinion is an academic and postgraduate reader but this is accordingly recognized by the editors. Fundamentally the authors and editors analyze Habermas' contribution very well especially in relation to learning and pedagogy. The relationship between education, classroom interaction, civil society and the state, forms of democracy, reason and critical thinking, and audit cultures and accountability are also discussed in a comprehensible and interesting manner.

The book itself is divided in to four distinct sections which include those that engage more with key issues and debates in Habermas and Education (Section 2) and those contributions that are indeed concerned with applying Habermas to particular forms of provision (Section 3).

While all chapters apply Habermas to education, section 3 for this reader is most interesting as it includes a range of valuable case studies. In addition Section 4 provides a concluding chapter that brings together some of the more significant issues raised across all contributions in the book.

Additionally, the book answers an array of specific questions including, what are the implications for pedagogy of a shift from a philosophy of consciousness to a philosophy of language? And how can Habermas' theories of reason and colonization be used to explore questions of governance and accountability in education?

This book in my opinion it is not a very easy to read book. However, it is indeed "readable" considering the complexity of Habermas' work particularly for the academic audience

On the negative side, most of Habermas' work on education was written during or immediately after the student revolts in the 1960s. This is a point, which I believe could have been detailed more.

Overall I enjoyed the book which is indeed very well written and edited but it must be also stressed that the target audience is indeed an international academic one.

DR. JUDITH BUTLER
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Gendered Choices: Learning, Work, Identities in Lifelong Learning

Gendered Choices deals with the reality faced by different groups in availing of the lifelong learning opportunities that are increasingly available in contemporary societies. It deals with transition points, points at which different groups make decisions about higher education, for example, or workbased learning. Policies promote such opportunities, but there are still features of under-participation by particular groups. Common sense may tells us that women, for example, participate more in adult education. Research, on the other hand, shows that the choices available to women are very restricted. If they are based in a workplace, women are more likely to be in a learning-poor environment rather than a learning-intensive one, and so are less likely to be offered and supported in good learning opportunities. The discourse of the 'responsible learner' means that adults who do not avail of lifelong learning are regarded increasingly as responsible for their own failure, and this ignores the fact that their original educational experiences were poor in the first place. Lack of supports for lifelong learning will further widen the gap for such groups. We've moved well beyond the deficit model of educational failure, where the individual is deemed lacking in some way, and these chapters explain the gaps in terms of policy and provision failures.

The various contributors are concerned with *praxis*, using reflection and research for the purpose of action. The aim is to gather and use information to bring more benefits to women's lives. They show the limitations of equal opportunity policies throughout Europe. Many EU countries form policies based on male norms. Studies of choices made by young females show that they perform to occupational stereotypes at the school-leaving age, but in later years have more confidence in their interests and abilities and are ready to make non-traditional choices. Yet the focus of policy is younger groups rather than older

ones. Policies focused on encouraging women into non-traditional occupations need to take this into account.

There are sites of informal learning, on the other hand, where women can participate. Research shows that these are valuable sources of informal learning, and they address the personal and social needs that, when met, enable further learning activities. The authors of articles dealing with this issue advocate strong resistance to the idea that learning supports need to be for the knowledge economy, as this ignores less obvious learning sites. The European trend of supporting only certified programmes is pushing out and ignoring the value of informal, non-accredited learning.

The book is a very rigorous analysis overall of how gender, when combined with other factors such as class, age/lifestage and race impacts on choices, and how policies to encourage the participation of under-represented groups miss these vital factors that would enable participation. The emphasis appears to be about participating in higher education, yet there is welcome consideration of other sites for lifelong learning. Naturally, because of the policy emphasis, workbased learning receives research funding, yet I would encourage community-based providers to read these chapters as they draw on very relevant theories and give recognition to new or under-recognised and undervalued forms of provision. The chapters range from micro-level studies, meso-level, and macro level., encompassing the relationships between these levels.

There is still a considerable participation gap. We still have gendered occupational structures. One very interesting insight in relation to the latter is that it is younger women who look to the traditional occupational structures (and the reasons why are identified) and it is older, more mature women who are more open to working and studying in areas that more reflect their interest and abilities rather than 'how things are done' or 'how things should be done'.

All EU countries are called to account for how they are encouraging adults to gain qualifications and upskill for the sake of the 'knowledge economy'. This means an undue emphasis in various countries on using available funds for skills-based and vocational education and training. This neglects the social cohesion and social purpose role of adult education. We need to do both. We need to fight for both. Lifelong learning has been shown to be a splendid vehicle for lifewide, horizontal learning, with many choosing to investigate, explore and draw on other aspects of their lvies. If this is neglected in funding, we will all be the poorer.

The language and theoretical framework of most of the authors place them in a poststructuralist framework and many use Foucault's idea of discourse as shaping identities and experiences. This is what allows the circulation of power to become visible, and enables the different levels involved in adult education, the individual, the provider, and state policy and funding, to be connected.

The context for all European lifelong learning policies is neo-liberalism, that contemporary form of ideas of freedom, equality of opportunity, competition and meritocracy we can hardly imagine living without. Education makes these ideas a reality, but only for some, not for all. The discourse of lifelong learning represents these opportunities as open to all. This ignores the gendered, classed and racialised structures of European societies. Globalisation expects social mobility, with workers expected to travel to where work is: this is a very gendered and classed idea that expects workers to detach from their families and communities. Each author shows, in a different way, the difference between the policy rhetoric, the funding structure, occupational structures, cultural ideas, and what women can, in fact, feel able to do, and feel safe in doing. Intelligence is universal: opportunities are not, however much they are presented as available under the discourse of equality of opportunity.

Choices are dependent on class and culture, with gender a main constraint. The writers show how this is a feature of societies worldwide. The authors argue for attention to be paid to the situation of women in order to counteract the perception that the fact that women are outperforming men in education, that there is equality between men and women in education. There isn't. They provide evidence of that to show that access to certain occupations are limited, roles are still gendered, and women still carry the double burden of work and home responsibilities. The figures are provided to show that men have access to high-level knowledge work, and women are still confined to low-paid and low-skilled jobs.

MAEVE O'GRADY
Waterford Women's centre

Community Education: more than just a course: Exploring the outcomes and impact of Department of Education and Skills Funded Community Education

This publication outlines the findings of research which examined the character, delivery and outcomes of government-funded community education. Community education has a long and varied history; different models and approaches have emerged in different locations, responding to differing circumstances. What all of these examples tend to have in common is a focus on and interest in addressing the needs of those experiencing educational disadvantaged and the lack of access to full citizenship that can flow from this.

This places community education in a different place from more formal educational provision. Its emphasis on outcomes related to social justice allows it to make an important contribution in closing the gaps the more rigid formal education structures help to create.

One significant finding from the research was the importance placed on the social dimensions and outcomes of community education – both in terms of the gains experienced by learners and some of the gaps identified. One such gap highlighted was the differing opinions around accreditation – with learners keen that their learning receive this affirmation, and the suggestion that the fewer qualifications learners started with, the more they were inclined to want this recognition. The lack of prioritisation by community educators may be understandable in the sense that they see the value of re-engaging in education for the very real social benefits that accrue. However, they should not be afraid to advocate accreditation – as and when learners are ready – after all it is something they have gained so why shouldn't their learners? In addition, they should not be afraid to see this as somehow giving in to the neoliberal human capital agenda of 'credentialisation' but recognise that while society continues to value 'particular' learning these learners, often failed in the past by a rigid

mainstream system of education have the right to gain recognition for their talents and endeavours.

The findings of the research also seem to suggest that this social focus for community education often acts as a pre-requisite for other more vocationally orientated learning, principally because an important aim (recognised by learners too) is the re-building of self-esteem and a sense of efficacy which learners can then translate into further education and training engagements. This is significant in an era when increasingly government and other funders want 'vocational' outcomes – without much evidence of understanding the road many disadvantaged people travel to get there.

This publication is divided into a number of sections each with a very specific focus on, for example, subjects such as defining both the models and practices of community education as well as the target audiences (the research identifies the extent to which government-set target groups have been successfully engaged); civic and social engagement, health outcomes as well as management and structural issues.

The key focus for the research reported here is on the important notion of identifying outcomes and impact of community education, in particular it identifies the important contribution of ethos to this form of education– as embodied in the attitudes and approach of tutors, in the learning environment and the collaborative learning approach.

This publication adds to the literature around the outcomes of community education, which have in the past been sparse. One difficulty, acknowledged by this book and addressed comprehensively, is the fact that community education, of its very nature, does not stem from a rigid concept of curriculum but instead prioritises engagement and collaboration. This necessitates a more flexible approach to 'curriculum' compared to more 'mainstream' forms of educational provision. Inevitably this leads to the evaluative problem of how to measure outcomes when in practice this flexibility would appear to demand a comparison of 'apples and oranges'.

It might have been useful to include an outline of the bigger educational context within which community education operates. For example, early school leavers are identified as a priority group for government targets, but the absence of statistics around early school leaving and qualifications levels means that the

group sits somewhat 'context-free'. The stark gaps in equality of educational outcomes can only lend weight to the strategic importance of community education, not only in terms of WHAT it delivers but HOW it delivers.

The qualitative nature of the research methodology has allowed the voice of learners (as well as providers) to come through but the specific quotations used could have benefitted from a degree of editing which would have prioritised coherent remarks over verbatim comment, perhaps by editing down the volume of quotation used.

This publication is very clearly set out, with summaries and 'headline' findings to make the document easy to navigate – summaries providing an overview of the main points and findings should the reader have limited time. However, the detail is worth spending time on as it provides very useful information for anyone interested in establishing, maintaining or re-energising community education to be as effective as possible with as big an impact as possible. It also contributes to the literature on the forms and priorities of community education as well as impact and outcomes.

http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/community_education_more_than_just_a_course.pdf

BARBARA MCCABE
School of Education, Queen's University Belfast

Innovations in Lifelong Learning: Critical perspectives on Diversity, Participation and Vocational Learning, Critical Perspectives on Diversity, Participation and Vocational Learning

The aim of this book is to provide a critical review of the concept of lifelong learning, exploring the meaning of the term from the perspective of international developments and recent innovation. The book is well presented, systematically structured and written in a clear, accessible language. It contains contributions from several authors and is structured into three parts. Part 1 is concerned with learning communities, Part 2 discusses formal structures and institutions of lifelong learning along with the extent of participation and non-participation of marginalised groups and individuals and, Part 3 focuses on the theme of work-based learning and learning through work. At the core of these three parts is a review of the concept of lifelong learning and innovative practice across different contexts – America, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom. At a time when the discourses of lifelong learning are predominantly situated within the development of economically orientated skills, training and employment agenda, this book is a timely contribution to debates in the area of lifelong learning. It provides an insight into the diverse historical contexts and analytical frameworks to deepen the reader's understanding of the concept and aims to highlight that informal learning, voluntary work, care and social interactions do indeed still matter.

In Part 1 of the book the theme of 'learning communities' is explored. The authors highlight that responding to the culturally diverse needs of lifelong learners in diverse learning communities is a challenging process. As such, in Chapter 1 the authors explore issues of cultural diversity and discuss a number of relevant frameworks ('intercultural education model', 'multicultural education model',

'anti-racist education model') which they argue are more sensitive to democracy, social justice and include principles of equitable participation. Throughout the text they highlight that the challenges for promoting inclusion include, for example, a fear of diversity and the lack of readiness to respond to diversity. In turn, Chapter 2 focuses on community learning with attention to informal and contemporary lifelong dimensions within the context of African education. Chapters 3 and 4 extend the discussion, highlighting that lifelong learning is also about the development of social capital, including the development of extended networks, norms and trusts which all contribute towards social cohesion and greater inclusion. The contribution of Chapter 4 is particularly valuable focusing on men's informal learning and wellbeing beyond the workplace within the Australian education context. The author poses questions such as: What are the forms of informal learning men engage in outside of work hours, What are the benefits of informal learning to the overall wellbeing and social inclusion and What is the potential and value of informal learning to men'?

Part 2 of the book focuses on formal structures and institutions of lifelong learning, presenting the debates on participation and non-participation amongst marginalised groups of learners and older learners. Chapter 5 draws upon three recently conducted research studies in Canada. It argues that, for women, the issues around learning and equity, in addition to many social and structural barriers, include financial constraints, diverse backgrounds and experiences of women's lives, lack of self-confidence and non-linear learning trajectories. Chapter 6 explores, through personal stories the ways in which racism and white privilege influence higher education participation within the US educational context. A further insight into the processes and content of learning for older adults is presented in Chapter 7. The discussion highlights that while older adults have been increasingly more able to access learning opportunities in the UK, it is evident that new pilot programmes, continuous evaluation and experimentation will be necessary to increase the provision of higher education to senior citizens in the future. In turn, in Chapter 8 the authors explore how adult learning has been influenced at policy level over the past three decades in the UK (1970-2000). In particular, they focus on one important area – adult literacy and numeracy.

In the final part of the book, Part 3, all four chapters specifically discuss work-based learning and learning through work. As such, Chapter 9 provides an overview of the policy and practice of lifelong learning policies in New Zealand with the detailed attention to the issues of 'access', 'equity', 'participation' and 'diver-

sity'. Chapter 10 discusses the organisational context in which university programmes operate. In particular, the author uses a case study of one university in the UK to examine contested power relations between university tutors, learners, employers and other stakeholders. Chapter 11 highlights the contexts of 'gender', 'race' and their role in the context of workplace learning among immigrant adults. And finally, Chapter 12 proposes a different conception of lifelong learning. It takes a holistic approach and highlights the role education plays in personal development and self-awareness of an individual. As such, the author first introduces the concept of capacity links it to the lifelong learning in general. The author then suggests the ways in which the capacity of workers can be supported through their work practices and activities.

I would recommend this book to all engaged with lifelong learning and adult learning in particular, to policy makers and all those who are newcomers to adult learning education area. Once again, this book is a timely edition which highlights the value of informal learning, learning with peers and from peers in the development of flexible skills and empowerment of individuals and their local communities.

DR. EKATERINA KOZINA,
Office of the Vice-President for Learning Innovation, Dublin City University

The Adult Learner:
The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education

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

The journal invites papers as follows:

1. *Academic papers for an internally and externally refereed section which should be no more than 5,000 words in length (including references).* Papers will engage with critical debate and analysis ideas on concepts, theories and/or practices of the field. These papers are often based on the findings from ongoing or recently completed research. They may be policy or practice focused and provide a forum for adult and community educators to become involved in critical analysis of policy and practice. They may also suggest ways to inform and improve the work of the sector. Papers should NOT exceed the word limit.

2. *Shorter papers and case studies for an internally refereed section of the journal which should be no more than 3,000 words in length (including references).* Papers will share examples of good practice and exchange ideas

about what works in various programmes, innovations and contexts. These papers will engage in a critical analysis of the practical aspects of adult and community education. Papers should NOT exceed the word limit.

3. *Reviews of approximately 600-1000 words* providing a review of books, materials and resources that help identify and evaluate a wide variety of teaching and learning resources that may be of interest to adult and community education participants, providers and anyone interested in adult and community education.

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

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

Outline and explain any methodology used

Be contextualised for both an Irish and international readership

Be submitted in the outlined format (see separate guidance).

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

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

Papers should be typed, 12-point Times New Roman, double line spaced on one side of A4. Headings should be in bold and in same format. They should include all references cited in the article in a reference section. Only those cited in the article should be included. The papers should begin with a short abstract (maximum 6 lines proceeded by a 'key words' statement). All papers should be presented in a style as outlined in the *Style Guide for Contributors, page 161*.

The name, address, and email address of the author should be submitted on a separate attached sheet rather than on the manuscript and where appropriate should include the work-place of the author. The number of words should be stated at the end of the article and should conform to the word limit.

Please note we cannot accept papers which do not conform to the guidelines. The editor welcomes queries from writers who may wish to discuss possible subject matter and approaches.

Contributions for consideration should be sent by email or on disc latest by *30th January 2012 for the attention of*:

The Editor, *The Adult Learner Journal*,
AONTAS,
2nd Floor 83-87 Main Street,
Ranelagh,
Dublin 6,
Ireland.

Please send all correspondence to Ms Elenora Peruffo, Secretary to the Adult Learner. The Adult Learner Secretariat can be contacted at: eperuffo@aontas.com

2012 style guide for the Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education

All articles should have attached a statement to include name of the author; institutional affiliation; contact email, telephone and address for correspondence and title of article. They should include up to 60 words on the background/interests of the author.

An article or paper submitted for publication in the referred section of the journal should have 'author details' on a separate page so that the paper can be reviewed anonymously.

The author should state clearly as to which of the three sections they are submitting: Refereed articles, practice articles or resource reviews.

All papers should follow the style guidelines outlined below:
Use one-and-a-half line spacing and 12-point Times New Roman font on one side of page only. The exception will be indented quotations where single spacing will be used. Justify the left hand margin only.

Do not use headers and footers. All pages of article should be numbered consecutively and the page number inserted on the right hand foot of each page.

New paragraphs in text should be ***one-and-a-half line spaced*** from previous paragraph and ***indented five spaces.***

An ***abstract*** of no more than ***100 words*** in italics should be inserted at the beginning of the article.

Titles of article, subtitles and subheadings should be selected so that there are no more than three levels of headings, as illustrated here:

TITLE OF ARTICLE: CENTRED & BOLD Upper and lower case.

AUTHOR'S NAME AND WORK PLACE IN BOLD.

12-point Times New Roman font.

In text:
Main Headings: Upper and lower case, Bold, Justified to left margin.

Subheadings: Italics, Upper and lower case, Left justified.

12-point Times New Roman font.

Articles to be submitted by 30 January 2012.

All articles may be submitted to:
The Editor, *The Adult Learner Journal,*
AONTAS,
2nd Floor 83-87 Main Street,
Ranelagh,
Dublin 6,
Ireland.

Or by email to: eperuffo@aontas.com

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

Its aim is to serve the needs of the adult education and lifelong learning community both in Ireland and internationally by providing a forum for critical discussion and reflection. The journal seeks to make new knowledge easily accessible to the widest possible audience through emphasising the importance of describing and critiquing practice and through publishing the results of research. The journal gives priority to subject matter that addresses issues of community, citizenship and learning and which focus on disadvantage, literacy and equality. It also includes contributions on how adults learn in formal, non-formal and informal settings including life and work contexts.

The journal provides a forum for publication and dissemination of reflections on research, policy and practice in the broad field of adult and community education which are relevant to the Irish context.

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

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Adult Education Officers' Association