FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION

AND

LEARNING FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

A case study of the experience of introducing a social change agenda into further education programmes within Vocational Education Committees

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ABSTRACT

Further Education refers to education and training that occurs after second level schooling but is not part of the third level system. (Ireland, 1995; Department of Education and Science, 2004b). It encompasses a complex and diverse range of provision involving a range of players. Vocational Education Committees are the main providers of further education under the remit of the Department of Education and Science.

Further education is situated within the european and national policy context for adult education, which demonstrates commitment to lifelong learning and social inclusion. The White Paper on Adult Education (Ireland, 2000) sets out a number of priorities that together promote individual advancement and collective empowerment and promote an active role for all in shaping the direction of society. But the manner in which resources are allocated tells another story as the bulk of state funding is provided for programmes that meet employability and labour market objectives.

This study explored the tensions explored experience by those working with and within VECs in inserting a social change agenda into further education programmes given the priority focus on economic competitiveness. It considered this against the transformative learning espoused by Freire, Mezirow and Habermas. The main research consisted of one-to-one interviews and a group interview using qualitative interviewing to draw out peoples' feelings, thoughts and meanings. These were supported by a review of relevant literature and documents. The main research found a lack of consensus on concepts and meanings in relation to anything other than meeting labour market needs. The role of further education, educators and institutions was contested with respect to other functions such as promoting community action and social change.

In conclusion, it suggests that VEC and community and voluntary interests need to reflect on their practice and how they can work towards a philosophical vision for further education that goes beyond meeting the labour market agenda. It especially calls for the implementation of structures promised in the White Paper on Adult Education to support the co-ordinated development of policy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
Acknowledgements		1
Abstract		2
Table of Contents		3
Abbreviations		6
List of Tables		8
CHAPTER ONE	**SETTING THE SCENE**	
	Further Education – What is it?	9
	Adult Education: Historical Developments	10
	Aim of the Study	17
	Conclusion	20
CHAPTER TWO	**FURTHER EDUCATION POLICY CONTEXT**	
	Introduction	21
	Trends in European Policy	21
	Policy Context	21
	Implications for Practice	24
	Trends in Irish Policy	27
	Policy Context	27
	Implications for Practice	31
	Conclusion	37

CHAPTER THREE TRANSFORMATIVE LEARING THEORIES

Introduction 39

Freire, Mezirow and Habarmas on Transformative Learning 40

Transformative Learning: Some Issues and Concerns forAdult Educators 51

Conclusion 63

CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODS

Introduction 66

Choosing a Strategy and Method 67

Validity, Reliability and Objectivity 70

Interview Process 73

Selecting Interviewees 73

Conducting the Interview 76

Analysis 78

Conclusion 80

CHAPTER FIVE PERSPECTIVES OF POLICY MAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Introduction 82

Shared Understandings and Meanings 83

Community Education 87

Community Education - Its Nature and Potential 87

Community Education Facilitators 90

Structures and Systems 93

National and Local Structures 93

Internal Systems 95

Bureaucracy 96

Labour Market Focus of Programmes 98

The Role of the Individual Educator 102

General Factors Affecting the Role of Educators 102

Qualifications and Staff Development 105

Conclusion 108

CHAPTER SIX **KEY MESSAGES FOR FURTHER EDUCATION**

Introduction 112

Vision and Philosophical Stance 113

Messages for Community Education 122

Institution and Individual Power 125

BIBLIOGRAPHY 128

APPENDICES 139

APPENDIX ONE **DEFINITIONS OF FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING** 140

APPENDIX TWO **EXTRACTS FROM VEC ACTS** 141

APPENDIX THREE **FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION** 143

APPENDIX FOUR **GOVERNMENT ACTS RELEVANT TO EDUCATION PROVISION** 153

APPENDIX FIVE **QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND FURTHER EDUCATION AWARDS** 155

ABBREVIATIONS

ADM Ltd	Area Development Management Limited
AEO	Adult Education Officer
AONTAS	The National Association for Adult Education
BIM	Bord Iascaigh Mharaigh
BTEI	Back to Education Imitative (Part-time Programmes)
CEFs	Community Education Facilitators
CEO	Chief Executive Officer/ Deputy Chief Executive Officer, VEC
C&V Sector	Community and Voluntary Sector
CSF	Community Support Framework, European Union
DCR&GA	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Science
DET&E	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
EU	European Union
ESF	European Social Fund
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FÁS	Foras Aiseanna Saothair - The National Training and Employment Authority
FETAC	Further Education and Training Council
JMB-AMCSS	Joint Managerial Body -Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
LAEB	Local Adult Education Boards
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NALC	National Adult Learning Council
NDP	National Development Plan
NESC	National Economic and Social Council

NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
OECD	Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
PO	Principal Officer Government Department
VEC(s)	Vocational Educational Committee(s)
VTOS	Vocational Opportunities Training Scheme

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: **Government Departments Involved in Further Education Provision**

Table 2: **Research Sample : Interviewees and Organisations Involved**

CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE SCENE

Further Education -What is it?

The White Paper on Education *Charting our Education Future* (Ireland, 1995) proposed the establishment of a Further Education Authority

> ....to provide a coherent national developmental framework, appropriate to the importance of vocational education and training (outside the third level sector) and adult and continuing education.
>
> (Ireland, 1995, p. 81)

This was the first formal recognition of further education as a discrete sector. Since then "Further Education" has come to mean education and training "which occurs after second level schooling but which is not part of the third level system" (Department of Education and Science, 2004a, p. 21). While the official recognition of a further education sector in the White Paper was widely welcomed, relevant statutory and community and voluntary interests called for a more comprehensive policy framework for adult education, embracing further education as a component. This led to the publication of the first Green Paper on Adult Education (Ireland, 1998) in the history of the state, followed by a wide and intensive public consultation process. *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* was published in 2000 (Ireland, 2000) marking Government commitment to a sector, which had received inadequate attention up to that point.

Defining adult education as " *systematic learning undertaken by adults who return to learning having concluded initial education or training*", the White Paper on Adult Education (Ireland, 2000, p. 27), together with the *Report of the Taskforce on Life Long Learning* (2002b), sets out the national policy framework for adult education, whatever the context. The term adult education encapsulates re-entry to further education and

higher education by learners who exited at an earlier stage. It includes all systematic and deliberate learning undertaken by adults in a wide variety of settings and includes formal, non-formal and informal learning (Appendix One). Therefore, while this study focus on further education provision, inevitably, it frequently refers to adult education.

Adult Education: Historical Developments

Embracing a broad range of programmes and supports, the complexity of further education is well illustrated by the historical development of adult education since the inception of the Irish Free State. The 1930 Vocational Education Act provided for the establishment of Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) to establish, maintain and develop a suitable system of continuation education and to supply, or aid the supply of, technical education (Ireland, 1930, p. 6). For the purposes of the Act continuation and technical education are underscored by an explicit relationship with occupations and employment (Appendix Two). Alongside this, County Committees of Agriculture were established in 1931 to provide training for farmers and rural women (now provided by Teagasc[1]).

On foot of the *Investment in Education* Report (Department of Education and Science, 1965) major educational expansion in the 1960s was directed at widening access to second level education. However, in recognition that not all young people would complete second level education up to Leaving Certificate Level, ANCO (now incorporated into FÁS[2]), was established in 1967 to provide vocational training.

[1] Teagasc, the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority is a semi-state organisation established to provide integrated research, advisory and training services for the agriculture and food industry in Ireland (http://www.teagasc.ie/aboutus/index.htm).

[2] ANCO was later incorporated into FÁS, (Foras Áiseanna Saothair) the National Training and Employment Authority, a state agency set up in 1988 to provide a range of services for the Labour Market in Ireland including training and re-training. (http://www.fas.ie/corporate_structure/index.html).

The *Murphy Report* (Murphy, 1973) that emanated from the Committee on Adult Education in Ireland (1969-1973) identified that Government funding for adult education was unacceptably low. It proposed an administrative structure comprising County Education Committees, Regional Education Committees and a special section in the Department of Education, now called the Department of Education and Science (DES)[3]. This was followed by the *Report of the Kenny Commission on Adult Education, "Lifelong Learning"* (Kenny, 1984), which further assessed the status of adult education and the potential of the various agencies involved. Like the *Murphy Report* it reflected the need for greater co-ordination but proposed a different model comprising, Adult Education Officers at local level, Adult Education Boards with a separate budget at county level and a National Council.

While the National Council was not established a number of pivotal outcomes emerged from these reports. Adult Education Organisers (called Adult Education Officer since 2004) were appointed in 1979 and although attached to VECs their terms of reference include a role with non-VEC providers[4]. An Adult Education Section was established in the Department of Education in 1980 (later to become the Further and Adult Education Section[5] and Adult Education Boards were set up by VECs in 1984, albeit on an adhoc basis. These developments provided a stronger base for the development and expansion of adult education provision during the 1980s and 1990s leading to the proposal for a Further Education Authority in the White Paper on Education (Ireland, 1995). This, however never emerged.

[3] The Department of Education and Science is referred to in this document as DES except in references. Prior to 1997 it was called the Department of Education.
[4] Examples of non -VEC providers include Community and Comprehensive Schools, Community Organisations (Ireland, 1998, p. 64; 2000, p. 197).
[5] The Further and Adult Education Section is generally referred to as the Further Education Section.

From the mid 1980s onwards statutory involvement in the provision of adult and therefore further education became more intense. The growing employment crisis of the 1980s which peaked in the early 1990s (19.6% in 1991 and 15.7% in 1993)[6], and an increased emphasis on social inclusion in the 1990s provided the platform for expansion. Availability of resources from the European Union under the Community Support Framework (CSF)[7] aided development and emphasised investment to build up the long-term human capital of the work force (European Commission, 1993; OECD, 1997). Essentially human capital theory sees "...the key to economic growth and, therefore, development in individual characteristics such as the "need for achievement" and entrepreneurship" (CORI, 1999, p.1; Schulz, 1961). The case for this approach was strengthened by the facts that since the 1980s studies have shown a strong inverse correlation between educational qualifications and the probability of unemployment[8].

Ronayne (Area Development Management Ltd, 1999, pp. 134-136) acknowledges that European and national policy draws attention to the importance of education in addressing social cohesion and supporting the realisation of human potential beyond the skills and competencies required for the labour market. But he argues that when practice is examined, that is the allocation of resources and the nature of programmes and curricula, there is clearer evidence of the human resource and employability

[6] Central Statistics Office.

[7] The Community Support Framework covers all EU Structural Funds payments to Ireland excluding projects funded under the Common Agricultural Policy. The European Social Fund (ESF) plays an important strategic and value-added role in contributing towards labour market and human resource development objectives. Of the total ESF assistance of €1,056.59 million available to Ireland for the period 2000-2006 under the Community Support Framework €901.09m (85%) has been allocated to the Employment and Human Resource Development Operational Programme under the National Development Plan 2000-2006 (Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, 2000, p. 59).

[8] In 1992 for example, only 15% of those with no educational qualifications were at work, while 48% of those unemployed for more than twelve months had no educational qualifications (Labour Force Survey, 1992). More recently an ESRI *Employability* Study concluded that reduced employability tended to be concentrated amongst older persons, people with limited attachment to the labour market and low levels of education (ESRI, 2001).

rationale. This policy context for further education provision in Ireland is explored further in Chapter Two.

Primary statutory responsibility for further education provision rests with two Government Departments, the DES and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DET&E). Thus the bulk of the expansion has taken place under these Departments (Ireland, 1993; 1999). The DET&E has delivered mainly through FÁS, the National Employment and Training Authority, which has expanded training opportunities to re-integrate the unemployed into the labour market. Its community, employment and guidance service have also been strengthened.

Expansion under the DES has taken place primarily through VECs most of which also has a labour market focus. This has culminated in a suite of programmes that includes the *National Adult Literacy Programme*, The *Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)*[9] that comprises two elements - full-time options including the Post Leaving Certificate Programme, Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and part-time options, *Community Education* and *Self-Financing Adult Education*[10]. (See Appendix Three for more detail information on programmes under VECs).

Further developments over the period of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006 include the establishment of an Adult Guidance Initiative and the appointment of Community Education Facilitators within VECs to support the development of

[9] The *Back To Education Initiative (BTEI)* provides for a merging and continuation of full-time courses under the Post Leaving Certificate Programme, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres allied with an expansion of part-time courses under the Back To Education Initiative (Part-time Programmes) in order to increase access to learning opportunities (Ireland, 2000, p. 98). The *BTEI (Part-time Programmes)* was launched in 2002 (Department of Education and Science, 2002).

[10] Self-financing refers to courses where the provider is expected to fund all aspects of the provision from participant fees.

community education (Ireland, 1999; 2000; 2002b). Measures to promote access to and participation in programmes, especially those leading to certification and with an employability and labour market focus, have also been introduced. These include guidance and counselling support, childcare support, financial incentives [11].

Statutory provision has been significantly enhanced by the efforts of the Community and Voluntary Sector (C &V Sector). Addressing a range of economic, social and cultural issues organisations such as Munitir na Tíre, the Gaelic Athletic Association, Macra na Feirme, The Irish Farmers Association, Trade Unions, the Irish Countrywomen's Association and the Irish Housewives' Association all have a history of involvement in educational activities (AONTAS, 1978, unpublished; Ireland, 1998). Further local innovative, community based training and development programmes emerged from funding available from the European Union (European Anti-Poverty Programmes, 1974-1994; LEADER and the Local Urban and Rural Development Programmes, 1990's; Regional Programmes, 2000-2006).

Grant aid opportunities for short-term courses through the Community Development Programme under the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCR&A), a number of other Government Departments, state agencies and private sources allow for on-going provision through the C&V Sector. A host of other organisations and agencies include adult education in their remit for example the public library service, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and its affiliates, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation, Enterprise Ireland, the Institute of Public Administration and private colleges (Kenny, 1984; Ireland, 2000; 2002b).

[11] Training allowances including travel and meal allowances are paid to participants in Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres and VTOS by the DES. Some participants may have entitlements under the Back to Education Allowance operated by Department of Social and Family Affairs. Other participants may be entitled to a means tested grant under the Local Authority (Ireland, 2000).

Provision of further education within the statutory sector, the C&V Sector and other arenas is now so broad that it is not possible to indicate exact numbers of organisations and groups involved or the exact number of courses on offer with any accuracy. In fact, a distinctive feature of further education is its diversity and breadth of provision and its linkage with other services such as employment, training, local development, welfare, youth, juvenile liaison and community development. So while the DES and DET&E have primary statutory responsibility for the provision of adult and further education and training historical developments have paved the way for the involvement of other Government Departments. In fact, currently ten out of a total of fifteen Government Departments and a range of statutory agencies are involved in some way in course provision or related support. (Appendix Three sets out the main Government Departments involved, indicating the primary state agents or partners).

Benefits arising from this diversity include the availability of wide-ranging resources, more flexible and varied provision across the range of subjects available and within geographical areas, and improved certification and progression opportunities for learners. This all guards against 'a one size fits all approach'. However, it can also lead to poor co-ordination and unnecessary duplication of effort thereby reducing the effectiveness of resources. Indeed national and international reports[12] highlight such concerns. In addition, while the involvement of a significant number of Government Departments and state agencies has benefits it can blur lines of responsibility frustrating policy development by letting everyone 'off the hook'. For example no Government

[12] The Murphy Report (Murphy, 1973); the Report of the Kenny Commission on Adult Education, (Kenny, 1984); The Green Paper on Adult Education (1998); The White Paper on Adult Education, (2000); Education and Training in Europe: diverse systems, shared goals for 2010 (European Commission, 2002); Education and Training 2010: the achievement of the Lisbon Goals hinges on urgent reforms (European Commission, 2003).

Department has overall responsibility for designing or implementing a comprehensive national strategy to underpin the development of community education.

In response to increased developments within the statutory sector and also the C&V Sector the National Association of Adult Education (AONTAS) was founded in 1969 as a co-ordinating body "...a clearing house for ideas, a creative and innovative centre and a think tank for adult education" (AONTAS, 2005, p. 2). It was intended as a vehicle where adult educators could identify gaps, and discuss mutual needs and thus develop their own work but also take action about the changing position, status and state of marginality of adult education. It now draws membership from the statutory and voluntary sector and plays a key role in lobbying for change in adult education policy. It is also involved in providing development support to further education providers especially community based organisation and groups (AONTAS, 2005). The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) was established in 1980 to co-ordinate literacy activity at national level. It too plays a strong role in national policy development and is involved in providing support to providers delivering literacy programmes including materials and staff development initiatives (Ireland, 1998a, 2000).

In addition a wide number of professional associations attached to services and programmes within the statutory sector and voluntary and community networks (too numerous to detail here) provide fora for policy makers and practitioners to consider adult and further education developments and organise staff development activities. Yet structured mechanisms to support on-going communication between these are non-existent or very informal reducing capacity to influence national policy. Various reports (Murphy, 1973; Kenny 1984; Ireland; 1995; 1998) have drawn attention to the need for formal structures at national and local level to improve linkage and co-operation

between the key stakeholders (policy makers, service providers, the C&V Sector, employers, learners etc) and to co-ordinate policy development and implementation.

Building on earlier ideas the White Paper on Adult Education proposed the establishment of a National Adult Learning Council and Local Adult Education Boards. Although the DES launched the National Adult Learning Council in 2002 (Department of Education and Science, 2002) following a review, it was suspended in 2004 pending a redrafting of its terms of references, which has not yet been completed. This indicates a lack of vision and commitment at Government level and within the statutory sector generally to move towards a more integrated and co-ordinated approach to the development of adult and further education across the various Government Departments, state agencies and other players involved.

Aim of the Study

Developments to date demonstrate the complexity of further education provision in Ireland. Given the size of this study it confines itself to further education within the remit of Vocational Education Committees (VECs) under the direction of the DES. Two key factors influenced this decision. Firstly, for most of my professional life I have been involved with the VEC sector. In the early stages of my career I gained experience as a tutor with special interest groups such as Travellers and Offenders and on further education programmes such as VTOS and PLC. Later I became involved in the Local Development Programme (now the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme[13]), working at local and national level. This involved developing and supporting a wide range of alternative approaches to further education provision aimed

[13] The Local Development Social Inclusion Programme is designed to counter disadvantage and to promote equality and social and economic inclusion. It is funded by the NDP 2000-2006 under the Regional Operational Programmes and implemented 38 Area-based Partnerships Community Partnerships and Employment Pacts (http://www.adm.ie/Pages/LDSIP/ldsipfront.htm).

at addressing unemployment and social inclusion issues. Both posts involved liaison, development and policy work involving VECs and the DES. More recently I became a Co-ordinator of Further Education Development for the Further Education Section of the DES. The role encompasses a mix of policy, development, co-ordination and administration functions and involves a high level of interaction with VECs.

Secondly, VECs are the main providers of further education under the DES commanding 90 per cent of funding available for service provision Together the thirty-three VECs provide the widest range of further education programmes targeting a larger number of participants annually than any other provider of further education or training[14]. In addition the DES and VECs have greater statutory responsibility than other providers for delivering programmes that have a general as well as occupational focus. Other state agencies such as FÁS, Teagasc, Fáilte Ireland and An Bord Iascaigh Mharaigh (BIM)[15] involved in further education and training provision have a specific occupation and labour market focus.

This career path and experience have given me a deep insight into further education services within VECs and nurtured an interest in education as an agent of social change. It has also influenced my understanding and interpretation of further education policy and practice and adult education theory. Like many I was encouraged that the White Paper on Adult Education identified six overlapping priorities for adult and further education provision. These included consciousness raising, citizenship, cohesion,

[14] Funding profiles, statistics and data available from the Department of Education and Science (2005); FETAC Statistics (2005); FETAC Directory of Awards (FETAC, 2005); (www.FÁS.ie).

[15] See footnotes 2 and 3 for explanation on Teagasc and FÁS.
Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Authority is state agency established to support strategic development of the Irish tourist industry. It develops and provides a range of training and continuing professional development courses (http://www.failteireland .ie/education_training.).
An Bord Iascaigh Mharaigh (BIM), the Irish Sea Fisheries Board is the state agency established to develop the Irish sea fishing and aquaculture industries and provides a range of service including training supports (http://www.bim.ie/templates/about_bim.asp?node_id=79).

competitiveness, cultural development and community building underpinned by a systemic, equality based approach. Together these see education as contributing to the realisation of human potential drawing on the links between personal experiences and wider structural factors; enabling an active role for all in shaping the overall direction of society; supporting individual empowerment and a collective sense of purpose; enriching the cultural fabric of society and promoting prosperity, employment and economic growth (Ireland, 2000, pp. 28-29).

The aim of this study is to explore the tensions experienced by personnel involved with and within VECs in inserting a community action and social change focus into further education programmes. These are examined in light of the fact that key objectives underpinning the majority of further education programmes show that the primary focus is on the promotion of competitiveness. In tandem, most state funded programmes must offer certification and support the acquisition of skills and qualifications that improve employability and increase adaptability to labour market needs (Appendix Three). It is assumed that if these are achieved the other priorities will also be realised.

Chapter Two considers further education provision within VECs and the current policy context within which it is located in greater detail. An abundance of literature now exists on the theory and practise of adult education. Specific theories that the author considered relevant to the topic under discussion are examined in Chapter Three -"the creativity in research review enters when reviewers are asked to make sense of many related but not identical theories or studies (Cooper, 1989, p. 19). The research strategy and methodologies used to collect primary and secondary data are described in Chapter Four. This involved a case study approach incorporating qualitative interviewing. Sixteen people in senior management and co-ordination positions within the DES,

VECs and Voluntary Organisations were interviewed. Relevant documents were also reviewed. Together these provided rich and interesting data. As my own experience and understandings undoubtedly underscore the analysis of research findings I give this some attention. Chapter Five presents and interprets the research findings. Finally, the findings are analysed against other research and general literature, conclusions are drawn and recommendations for future action are outlined in Chapter Six.

Conclusion

Further education refers to education and training which occurs after second level but which is not part of the third level system (Ireland, 1995; Department of Education and Science; 2004). Primary responsibility for further education rests with the DES and the DET&E. Encompassing a complex and diverse range of programmes and services local delivery is managed by designated state agencies. A host of other organisations and groups under the C&V Sector, the business sector and private interests are also involved in service provision. This study focuses on further education within VECs. It explores the experiences of personnel involved with and within VECs in inserting a community action and social change agenda into further education programmes in light of the Government's priority attention to meeting labour market needs. The next chapter profiles the programmes and service within VECs and considers the current policy context within which these are located.

CHAPTER TWO

FURTHER EDUCATION POLICY CONTEXT

Introduction

Further education provision within VECs is regulated by the 1930 Vocational Education Act, associated Amendment Acts and an array of other acts (Appendix Four) that allocate functions to VECs and regulate their operation in particular ways. It is underpinned by the european and national policy context for adult provision, which is heavily aligned to discourses on employment and lifelong learning. In this chapter I consider the current policy context for further education provision that emphasises a balance between social, cultural, personal and economic objectives (Ireland, 2000; 2000b; European Commission, 2000; 2002). However contested viewpoints on how best this can be translated into practice and an over emphasis on human capital development and employability limits potential for wider personal and social outcomes. I come to the topic as an adult educator, committed to the idea that adult and further education can support more democratic participation in communities and wider societal change. In exploring the policy context I draw on my own experience and insights along with academic research.

Trends in European Policy

Policy Context

In 1992 education became formally recognised as a legitimate area of EU responsibility. Prompted by a growing unemployment crisis in the EU that peaked in 1994 at 18.7 million, employment became a matter of common interest (European Commission, 2004). Successive European Councils[1] have attested to the human capital approach consolidating education and training as a central element of employment policy.

[1] The Amsterdam Treaty (1997), the European Employment Strategy (1997), the Lisbon European Council (2000), the Stockholm European Council (2001), the Copenhagen Declaration (2002), and the Barcelona European Council (2002) all endorsed and consolidated this approach.

Human resources is recognised as the Union's main asset and investment in this area continues to be acknowledged as a determining factor of growth, productivity, competitiveness, social inclusion and social cohesion (European Commission, 2004; De la Fuente and Ciccone, 2002).

Europe is deemed to have indisputably moved into the knowledge age, with significant shifts in cultural, social and economic life leading to a more complex society (European Commission 2000; 2002). According to *The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* more than ever before "individuals want to plan their own lives, are expected to contribute actively to society ..." (European Commission, 2000, p. 5). In addition they must live positively with diversity and adapt rapidly to the demands of an ever-changing labour market. Official policy sees these features of contemporary social and economic change as underscoring two equally important aims for lifelong learning: promoting active citizenship and promoting employability. While the *White Paper on Education and Training: Teaching and Learning Towards the Learning Society* (European Commission, 1995) aimed at putting Europe on the road to the learning society the Lisbon Agenda[2] (Council of Europe, 2000) set a new strategic goal:

> ...to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and greater jobs and greater social cohesion. (European Commission, 2002. p. 7)

Notwithstanding that education and training are seen as crucial instruments for employability and economic development broader responsibilities to citizens are identified. Education and training are considered to contribute to personal development for a better life primarily through economic gain, social cohesion and active citizenship in democratic societies. Active citizenship in this context refers primarily to whether and how people participate in all spheres of social and economic life, and the extent to which

[2] Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council. (Council of Europe, 2000, March).

they feel they belong to, and have a fair say in the society in which they live. Employability refers to the ability to secure and keep employment (European Commission, 2000, p. 5). In essence what is being promoted is being employed, paying taxes, participation in local and national elections, upholding the law, involvement in community activity and protecting the environment.

In keeping with this making education and training systems a world reference for quality and relevance by 2010[3] and the creation of a cohesive, open european education and training area is seen to be of "utmost importance for the future of Europe and its citizens in the knowledge era and the globalised world" (European Commission, 2002, p. 9). Employability, social inclusion and active citizenship are all considered to be dependent upon having adequate, up-to date information, knowledge and skills, to take part in and make a contribution to economic and social life. Therefore lifelong learning is to become a reality for all citizens. Defining lifelong learning as "all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence" (European Commission, 2000, p. 3) the Memorandum embraces a life wide dimension involving formal, non-formal and informal learning in a range of settings (p. 8). It also acknowledges the need for improved participation supports including childcare and information, guidance and counselling to assist learners make suitable choices.

A shift towards integrated policies, combining social and cultural objectives with the economic rationale for lifelong learning is advocated. The need for significant cultural and attitudinal change on the part of providers, learners, and the public service is stressed. A variety of partnerships including ministries, public authorities, social partners, private-

[3] Conclusions of Barcelona European Council. (Council of Europe, 2002, March).

public initiatives and local communities are considered essential to the mobilisation and effective use of resources. This will create greater fluidity within the education and training sectors and between these and other domains of life. Community based and civil organisations that "...provide services that are close to the citizens and are better adapted to the need of the local communities" are viewed as particularly important partners (European Commission, 2000. p. 9-10). Some of the above policy trends are encouraging. But the overall direction and how policies are translated into practice is somewhat problematic in the context of the official perspective on issues such as social inclusion, citizenship and lifelong learning.

Implications for Practice

A number of writers (Howarth and Kenway, 1998; Oppenheim, 1998) claim that social exclusion is about processes leading to loss of power, status and personal expectations. In turn this excludes individuals and sometimes large sections of communities from the systems that facilitate social integration, including the labour market and its associated benefits and hampers their economic contribution to society. Barry (1998) says the term social exclusion is culturally defined, economically driven and politically motivated. The converse - social inclusion - is an attempt to re-integrate and normalise the excluded, which is the unemployed and disaffected. Education and training is a tool to achieve this. Implicit is the assumption that increased educational participation will contribute to economic, competitive and personal advancement, which is true in some instances[4]. But like other inclusion strategies education and training measures can mask issues that

[4] The direct link between low levels of education and unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, is well established. In 1999, the Central Statistics Office indicted that nearly three quarters of the long-term unemployed had no, or low, levels of education attainment. Only 17.3% of those unemployed for more than one year had attained the Leaving Certificate. The ESRI (2001) highlighted that reduced employability tended to be concentrated among those with limited attachment to the labour market and low levels of education. The OECD (2004) found that in general the higher the level of education individuals have the higher their potential earning power. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (2005) drawing on a series of national reports indicate that less educated workers are likely to be unemployed for longer periods, less educated workers will earn less over their lifetime and less educated workers' earnings will peak early in their working life.

constitute the problem of exclusion for example, structural unemployment, age or disability. Social change is framed in terms of social inclusion and a belief that once economic growth is maintained there will be jobs for everyone who needs them with adequate income and a better quality of life for all. This is despite the reality that the benefit of such growth has largely gone to the better off (Healy and Reynolds, 1998). Therefore, the systems and status quo that contribute to exclusion in the first instance are further legitimatised.

Citizenship is not a new concept but there is no universal understanding of what it means. In a paper on *Learning for Citizenship in Ireland: the Role of Adult Education* Keogh (2003) highlights the complex and contested nature of citizenship and holds that "...concept and language appear to be straining to capture a shifting and diverse reality that is constantly changing for individual, communities and societies"(Medal-Ahonuevo and Mitchell, 2003, p. 9). The liberal political tradition emphasises the individual and sees citizenship in terms of rights and status including civil, political and social rights. The civic republican tradition emphasises wider society and sees citizenship in terms of obligation or practice embracing active involvement in political and civic affairs, community activity and an obligation to take up paid employment (Oliver and Heater, 1994; Oldfield, 1990).

Healy and Reynolds (1998) claim that increasingly more emphasis is being placed on duties and obligations as opposed to rights. For example the obligation to work by those unemployed or experiencing exclusion is often presented as "...uniting all citizens in making a contribution to the common good" (p. 13). This trend is reflected in many of the current european polices and strategies that promote a return to work. For example, *The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* speaks in terms of paid work underpinning

independence, self-respect and well being for much of most peoples' lives. Employability is therefore viewed not only as a decisive condition for improving competitiveness, adaptability and economic prosperity but also a core dimension of active citizenship (European Commission, 2000, p.5). Employability and active citizenship are woven together as if one does not exist without the other.

The european concept of lifelong learning places a focus on the individual learner rather than learning systems and institutions. This challenges traditional boundaries within and between the different levels of education and training (Deane and Watters, 2004), which is welcome because it places value on learning in a wide range of contexts. But what do policy makers mean by knowledge, skills and competence required for active participation in the knowledge society and economy? Generally these refer to foundation skills in literacy and numeracy and basic competencies in information technology, science, foreign language, technological culture, entrepreneurship, 'learning to learn' (problem solving, evaluative skills) and social skills. These are seen as interdisciplinary with vocational skills and general education overlapping in content and function (European Commission, 2000; 2002). Inclusion of social skills such as self-confidence and self-direction and 'learning to learn' is laudable but are linked to people behaving more autonomously and adapting rapidly to change in the knowledge society and economy.

Some critiques (Edwards, 1997; Hake, 1997; Korsgaard, 1997) claim that this self-reliance and competitiveness model is being advanced at the expense of wider societal goals. Traditional boundaries between education and training are not just being challenged but are being blurred, reconstituting what represents valuable learning. Employability dominates, dictating how resources are deployed. Learning programmes are primarily vocationally oriented, defined in technical, operational and instrumentalist terms that aid

compliance with the neo-liberal agenda. There has been no discussion on the kind of citizen that education should foster outside the skills and mobility needed for the labour market. Consequently education for our modern risk society on which the more critical thinking aspects of lifelong learning should concentrate is diminished. (Healy and Reynolds, 1998; Preece, 2000). Education for education's sake or education in search of understandings and meanings outside work and the status quo is not explored; it is simply left to chance.

Trends in Irish Policy

Policy Context

Coupled with directions in european policy, dramatic economic growth and social changes in Ireland over the last decade have contributed to significant developments in Irish adult education policy. Influenced by a number of national and international reports[5] that addressed economic and social development the White Paper on Education (1995) embraced a strong connection between further education and employment. Mirroring european policy emphasis, initial and recurrent education and training programmes for school leavers were recognised as having a vital role in the enhancement of economic performance. In addition it identified the following primary objective:

> ....to maximise access to suitable programmes for adults who wish or need to update their occupational skills and to continue their personal development, irrespective of their educational and training attainments
>
> (Ireland, 1995, p. 77).

Strategic concerns to further advance Ireland's economic and social development are set out in the *National Development Plan* (NDP) 2000-2006 (Ireland, 1999) and endorsed by

[5] OECD Reports including *Education and Economy in a Changing Society* (1989) and *OECD Jobs Study Facts, Analysis, Strategies* (1994); Reports of the National Economic and Social Council including *Education and Training Policies for Economic and Social Development* (1993) and *A Strategy for Competitiveness, Growth and Employment* (1993) and The European Union's *White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* (1993).

Sustaining Progress: Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005 (Ireland, 2003) and the *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* (Ireland, 2002a). A significant feature is a growing concern with inequality, poverty and social inclusion with particular reference to the re-integration of the socially excluded and long-term unemployed into the open labour market. This is underscored by a key objective that "employment is open to all sectors of society as this is the best way to counter poverty and social exclusion" (Ireland, 1999, p.11; Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, 2000, p. 15).

Current adult education policy is profiled in the White Paper on Adult Education (Ireland, 2000) and the Irish *Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning* (Ireland, 2002b). In keeping with the European Union (European Commission, 2000; 2002) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1995; 2004; 2005, forthcoming) both of which promote lifelong learning as the foundation for adult education and training policy, the White Paper shows "...commitment to the establishment of a national policy for lifelong learning" (Ireland, 2000, p. 54). Policies are underpinned by three core principles (pp. 30-33):

- a systemic approach recognising the interface between different levels of education, the importance of a community dimension to provision, the lifelong, lifewide cycle, a multiplicity of learning sites, and the need for appropriate methodologies, supports and assessment.
- equality of access, participation and outcome, embracing strategies to counteract barriers such as socio-economic status, ethnicity and disability and leading to improved personal skills and/or qualifications that support progression to other learning or employment.
- a proactive approach to inter-culturalism acknowledging an ever-increasing diverse population.

Adult education is presented as contributing to six priority areas including consciousness raising, citizenship, cohesion, competitiveness, cultural development, and community building (pp. 28-29). Together these see adult education as promoting individual and collective development, social responsibility, proactive engagement in community and societal decision-making, civic ownership, social inclusion, economic development and prosperity. A role in the development of structural analysis and a collective sense of purpose amongst marginalized people who share common problems and enhancing social capital[6] is also evident. Community education is presented as having a significant contribution to make to increasing social capital and advancing community development. It is credited with a particular capacity to reach large numbers in disadvantaged areas; pioneer new approaches to teaching and learning in non-hierarchical community-based settings and to taking the lived experience of the participants as a starting point (p. 10). A number of strong characteristics are identified including:

> ...its collective social purpose and inherently political agenda – to promote critical reflection, challenge existing structures, and promote empowerment, improvement so that participants are enabled to influence the social contexts in which they live;... (Ireland, 2000, p. 113)

Acknowledgement of the important contribution of community education does not end there. A key role is envisaged for the community education sector as a provider in its own right, in engaging in partnerships with the statutory sector and as an important voice in shaping and reviewing policy and practice locally and nationally (pp. 118-119).

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[6] Social capital is a set of resources inherent in communities and is defined as "*networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within and among groups.* Properly applied and developed, it can play a role of leverage in linking to public agencies, bridging across to other disadvantaged groups, and bonding in terms of developing crucial community level supports and mutual care at local level (National Economic and Social Council, 2003, p. 3; also OECD, 2001). It is one resource among others that can be used to support community development and social inclusion.

In parallel, the *Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning* holds that in addition to the economic imperative a number of social concerns drive the lifelong learning agenda. Embracing the definition and directions underpinning the European Memorandum, it poses that lifelong learning should be framed in the context of "individual development, active citizenship, social inclusion and the economic well being of society as a whole" (Ireland, 2002b, p. 6). The potential of lifelong learning to develop active citizenship and empower people to contribute proactively to the development of society whether through "politics, community development, business, the arts or sciences" is highlighted (p. 5). Interestingly, the majority of education and training measures are located under the current National Employment and Human Resource Development Operational Programme within employability and adaptability measures[7] (Ireland 1999, pp. 17-18). Even where education and training measures are supported under other Operational Programmes such as the Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development 1994-1999 or the current Regional Operational Programmes, preventing and combating unemployment is a central objective (Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, 2000; Area Development Management Ltd, 1995).

In this context Lifelong Learning is:

> ....aimed at improving the ability of the population generally to relate more effectively and profitably with the ever-changing needs of the labour market and society at large through providing a flexible framework for learning
> (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2000, p. 55).

[7] The National Development Programme (NDP) 2000- 2006 comprises three National or Inter-regional Operational Programmes, two Regional Programmes (South and East Region and Border, Midland and West Region) and a PEACE Programme which operates in the border counties and Northern Ireland (National Development Plan, 2000, p. 11). Within each Programme there is a series of "Priority" areas and "Measures" for investment. Typically education and training measures are located within the Employment and Human Resource Development Operational Programme. the national programme that addresses the labour market and human capital needs of the Irish economy. Even where education and training measures are supported within other Operational Programmes promoting and enabling labour market participation is a key objective (Ireland, 1999).

Current Irish adult education policy sees the promotion of a life of learning as a core objective, recognises the importance of a balance between social, cultural, personal and economic objectives and proposes individual and collective development. But practice tells another story. An over emphasis on the human capital approach, employability and economic progress is evident, reflected in how resources are allocated and programmes are designed.

Implications for Practice

Programme objectives across programmes (Appendix Three) illustrate that excluding community education, state resources are primarily directed at enabling learners gain knowledge, skills, competencies and qualifications relevant to labour market needs. The force of the economic and labour market argument is well demonstrated by the results of the first OECD International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1995 and the follow-on survey *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* (1997). These found that about 25% of the Irish population experienced functional literacy difficulties[8]. Notably the report highlighted an association between low income and lower educational levels. It further highlighted an association between low levels of literacy and low levels of participation in second-chance education and training and found that people who are literate are also much more likely to participate actively in the political processes that shape civil societies. This triggered year on year increases in Government funding for literacy provision, which has increased tenfold since 1995 from 1 million euro in 1997 to a current annual budget of approximately 22 million euro[9].

[8] The IALS (1995) document scale tested the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats such as official forms, timetables, maps and charts. The survey *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* (1997) found that on a scale of 1-5 about 25% of the Irish population scored at the lowest level -Level 1 (the highest in any country studied except Poland) and a further 32% at Level 2 in the document scale.

[9] Budget profiles (Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science, 2005).

Labour market needs also provided the main thrust for launching the *BTEI (Part-time Programmes)* in 2002. Primary objectives include providing a wide range of flexible and certified learning options that tackle low education levels among the adult population, addressing specific skills shortage and offering a bridge to further education and training and labour market participation (Department of Education and Science, 2002). The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) identified a strong role for community education in addressing education needs among those most marginalized from mainstream services. Disappointingly while the appointment of Community Education Facilitators to promote and support community education is very positive, budget increases to support other actions have been significantly less than increases for the development of literacy services. Currently the community education budget is about one third of that available for literacy. Although ten percent of the budget under the *BTEI (Part-time Programmes)* must be made available annually for community education activity (approximately 1.5million euro), courses must meet the primary objectives indicated above[10]. In this regard it is important to note that a wide range of Government Departments support community education activity (Appendix Three).

Positive employment trends over the past five years, while very welcome serve only to re-enforce strategies to date. It is now widely argued by those in public administration and private enterprise that it is the investment in developing human capital through a range of education and training measures that has created today's successful economy and it is what will maintain and strengthen it into the future. Recent publications by the National Competitiveness Council (2004) and Irish Congress of Trade Union (2005), remind us that education and skills are among the key ingredients of competitiveness providing a strong economic and social progress justification for strengthening a market driven agenda.

[10] Budget profiles, Further Education Section (Department of Education and Science, 2005).

Government policy expects that all programmes address general education as well as personal and social development as these are central to competitiveness (Ireland, 1995; 2000; Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2002). But they are also presented as entwined with the overlapping priorities of consciousness raising, citizenship, community development, cohesion and cultural development (Ireland, 2000). Together these embrace a view of education as contributing

> ...to the development of a structural analysis and a collective sense of purpose among marginalized people and communities who share common problems and who aim to become actively involved in solving these problems.
> (Ireland, 2000, p. 29)

Education is seen as an empowering process of self-discovery towards personal and collective development, enabling individual members of society to grow in self-confidence, social awareness and social responsibility and to engage proactively in community and societal decision-making (Ireland, 2000, pp. 28-29). However, there has been no further debate on what these concepts really mean. Likewise mechanisms have not been explored to as to how they can be truly embedded into further education programmes alongside a strong labour market agenda.

A further difficulty arises in that general education and personal and social development are not well defined. They can include a vast range of learning modules and very varied subject content. Where these are a component of a wider programme of study they generally refers to interpersonal skills, computer familiarisation, communication skills, mathematical skills and promotion of adaptability, initiative and a positive attitude to learning (Department of Education and Science, 1995, p. 74). Content and themes for exploration are often linked to the main subject area being studied. Where independent modules are being studied they may also embraces arts and crafts, cultural activities, music, practical skills, literary studies, community studies, health studies and a host of others topics. What is implied is that these, to varying degrees, all contribute to

individuals functioning more effectively in employment, society and their personal life. Indeed there has been many personal success stories where learners have verified that returning to basic education, literacy or specific skills programmes was the first step in gaining the confidence and skills required to become more involved in community activity or seek employment[11].

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and Further Education and Awards Council (FETAC) advise that the new national framework of qualifications (Appendix Five) and awards system [12] will ensure more flexibility. Providers and tutors will have greater autonomy in relation the design, delivery and assessment of programmes, which is positive and encouraging. Therefore it could be argued that there will be an opportunity within all courses and modules to introduce content of a political nature and use teaching strategies that promote critical thinking (problem solving and analysis). However, the focus in the early levels of the framework is primarily on enabling learners achieve certification in specific technical skills and subject expertise with particular reference to facilitating access to, and mobility within the labour market. (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2003a; 2003b; Further Education and Awards Council, 2005b; 2005c). Levels 1-6 of the framework (at which further education and training awards are made), support incremental development of practical and cognitive skills, theoretical concepts, ability to formulate responses to well-defined abstract problems and capacity to express an internalised personal worldview reflecting engagement with others. It is within Levels 7-10 (higher education) that the capacity to exercise appropriate judgement in a range of operations and processes, transfer and

[11] See Department of Education and Science, 1998; Judge, 1998, unpublished; Bynner and Parsons, 1997; Du Vivier, 1992 and the Read Write Now 4 TV literacy series 3 Evaluation Report, NALA, 2003 all of which show evidence of positive outcomes and learner empowerment.

[12] The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 provided for the establishment of the NQAI and two awards councils FETAC and the HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council). The NQAI has responsibility for establishing and maintaining a national framework of qualifications. The awards councils develop and implement award systems in further education and higher education respectively.

apply diagnostic skills in a range of settings, self-evaluate, critique broader implications of knowledge, reflect on social norms and lead action to change them emerge. Draft policies (Further Education and Training and Awards Council, 2000b; 2000c, 20005f) for new awards at Levels 1-6 under the framework are currently under discussion but are in the same vein as current practice, where general education and personal and social development will only account for between 15 per cent - 20 per cent of content in most courses[13]. This confirms that official policy sees further education as meeting more mechanistic, technical and operational ends albeit playing an important platform for the more critical thinking required at higher levels.

These factors and trends are likely to place constraints on how VECs as providers will interpret the apparent new freedom they have in designing programmes. There is considerable risk that the behaviourist agenda and the reductionist, prescriptive approach that emanates from this will prevail. In either case it is not always appropriate that the kind of critical thinking that relates to community activity and political participation is subject to assessment and certification. However, unless there is increased funding for community education and programmes that do not have to lead to certification in specific skills the autonomy of providers will be constrained.

VECs are state funded institutions and although self-managing are ultimately controlled by the state. They are highly bureaucratic to the extent that their behaviour and actions are predetermined or predictable. Studies show that outside control of an organisation tends to encourage greater than usual reliance on rules and regulations in order to justify certain behaviour (Mintzberg, 1983). In the context of further education this is reflected

[13] For a general analysis of current FETAC Awards, see www.FETAC.ie and also www.fess.ie. Foundation Level and Levels 1, 2 and 3 Awards under the previous National Council for Vocational Awards (no longer in existence) have been placed at Level 3,4,5 and 6 respectively of the new framework for qualifications.

in what is now referred to as the programmatic nature of funding. Each programme (Appendix Three) is funded separately and has to meet particular objectives. In turn, providers report separately on each programme to the DES. This exaggerates the bureaucracy, restricting fluidity of provision locally and leaving little room for manoeuvre. Keogh (1994) argues that the focus on a programmatic approach rather than building service infrastructure has given rise to a compartmentalised 'egg carton' model (AONTAS, 2004, p. 18). This contributes to limited co-operation, pooling of resources and staff mobility across programmes thereby reducing flexibility and restricting learner progression within and between provision.

Institutions of Government present themselves as rational entities designed to deliver collective goals. They and their related systems are bigger, stronger and tend to live longer than the people that make them up (Capra 1997; Healy in Healy and Reynolds, 1998). They "carry the criteria which people use to assess a policy's success, or the procedures for assessing alternatives to it, or the methods for implementing decisions that flow from it" (Healy in Healy and Reynolds, 1998, p.63). These criteria may become so taken-for-granted that they appear to be the only realistic and rational way of doing things affecting the range of alternatives that can be considered. Therefore the relative permanent, naturalised setting provided by institutions affect how individuals think and make decisions (p. 63). In this way, VECs as state institutions, function to reproduce the status quo more or less automatically. Their remit, in particular under further education, is generally closely linked to the economic life of the country and a key function is to be directly responsive to the needs of employment nationally and locally (Deanne and Watters, 2004). Managers and teachers who are committed to wider more liberal goals for further education do the best they can to implement these goals but face an institutional obstacle course. New requirements to produce education

plans based on local consultation with stakeholders including the community, learners, and staff may provide some opportunity to introduce a wider dimension to course provision. However, such opportunity will be heavily dependent on some rethinking of the rationale for the development of further education and the current funding system.

The Irish Vocational Educational Association (IVEA) is significant in the context of this study. It is the national representative body of Ireland's thirty-three VECs and negotiates on their behalf with the DES. The Chief Executive Officers and Education Officers (Deputy Chief Officers) in VECs, Adult Education Officers, Adult Literacy Organisers, Community Education Facilitators, Co-ordinators of VTOS and Youthreach Centres and Directors of Senior Traveller Training Centres are all aligned to separate associations. The interesting thing about these is that they all revolve around particular roles and programmes within VECs. While there are informal mechanisms for sharing ideas there is an absence of structured relationships between these associations reducing the potential to develop a cohesive approach to influencing national policy.

Conclusion

Extensive european and national policy commitments and national legalisation underpin VEC service provision. These demonstrates that successive Irish Governments and EU Commissions consider a primary objective of further education to be supporting and sustaining employability and ensuring economic development and competitiveness investment. The fact that narrow economic indicators are widely accepted as measures of progress further excludes those not part of the immediate labour market and limits a balance between a liberal and vocational focus.

Education is presented by the EU and national government as a key to learning and understanding how to meet the challenges facing the new Europe. But the agency of providers and individual tutors while central to whether and how the development of critical thinking in its broadest is promoted is limited by the institutional and bureaucratic nature of VECs. The problem is that the economic agenda limits a wider debate on education. Education and knowledge for the sake of it is left to chance and so is likely to become the preserve of a few.

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORIES

Introduction

During my career in education and personal life journey I have found myself in varied roles – learner, citizen, teacher, adult education tutor, examiner, assessor, co-ordinator of development projects, policy worker and administrator. All of these have shaped my thinking on education. As a young, novice tutor working with Travellers and unemployed teenagers without the constraints of set syllabi and certification I had the freedom to shape programmes around learner interests and explore a wide range of methodologies. I became aware that engaging learners in selecting course themes and methodology can lead them to invest more in the learning process. Experience taught me that learners bring past experience, referred to as a stock of knowledge by Schutz (Collins, 1998), to learning situations and often learn more when content is relevant to their everyday lives.

Notwithstanding this, when invited to teach a programme in family studies to adult male prisoners I was terrified, as I had no experience of working with adults at the time. I faced my first session with some trepidation, took a leap of faith and threw it open to the participants to select themes for discussion. Having reached consensus, I set about sourcing material to clarify facts and support concepts and urged course participants to bring material and ideas to each session. In the ensuing weeks we examined facts, and posed questions to explore issues about family law, the justice system, free legal aid and societal attitudes. Views changed, interpretations shifted and I became a co-learner with the participants, reflecting on and reforming my ideas based on new insights I was gaining through the group discussion. I had discovered that dialogical and other participative approaches can make learning and teaching lively, challenging and

reflective. I had discovered how to introduce a political dimension to education (Brookfield, 2004; Freire, 1972a; Shor, 1996; Mezirow, 1978). By this I mean encouraging learners to discus and evaluate the structure, systems and discourses that shape the society in which we live. Against this backdrop I developed an interest in education as an agent of social analysis and social change, although I had little understanding at that point of the concept of transformative education and the problem-solving, dialogical approach that underpins it.

Freire, Mezirow and Habermas on Transformative Learning

Freire recognises the importance of meaning in society. He shows how peoples' understanding of fundamental issues can be changed and how this change in meaning can be combined with action to change the actual reality in which one lives (1972a; 1972b; 1973). He argues that oppressed people are kept in an oppressed state by a process of education because the oppressors or the 'elite' - a class of power and privilege - organise formal education and determine its aims (1972a, pp. 45-51). Using the banking method of education they perpetuate their own values and maintain the existing social order and dominant value system. Knowledge is a gift bestowed by "a narrating Subject", the knowledgeable teacher, on "patient listening objects", the students who know nothing (pp. 45-46). The more students store this knowledge the more they passively accept and adapt to the world as it is and the more easily they can be dominated. The less they develop the critical consciousness that underpins transformation, the more they serve the interests of the oppressor whose aim is to maintain a dominant position. "...who neither care to have the world revealed nor see it transformed" (p. 47).

Oppression can be overcome but Freire argues that the oppressed must become aware of their oppression, reflect on their position and take action to change it. He advocates

education as a process of interacting thought and action, a transforming process that leads to conscientization and critical reflection (1972a; 1972b). The epitomy of human consciousness, this is "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality" (1972a, p. 15). Conscientization is reached through praxis - cycles in which people act thoughtfully and reflect actively leading to further action, through which people transform reality. Educators, he claims, "must refuse to "domesticate people". Their task is *communication,* not *extension*" (Morrow & Torres, 2004, p. 35). They must not act as extensions to government propaganda but instead through mediating communication move students towards knowing and liberation.

Freire proposes that the 'banking approach' to education needs to be changed if permanent liberation from oppression and domination is to be achieved. To make conscientization work, Freire advocates problem-solving education, which involves " the posing of the problems of people in their relation with the world" (Healy, 1984, p.120) and demands the engagement of dialogue. According to Freire (1972a; 972b;1973) knowledge constructed in dialogue makes students critical thinkers, eliminating myths that support oppression. It considers the reality in which we live ever changing; it has a past, a present and many possible futures. Action leads to new situations that pose new problems to be reflected and acted on. The educator's task is to challenge the students and the reality to be studied using dialogical methods and problem solving approaches. Freire believes that students need to become "critical co-investigators" (1972a, p.54) in dialogue with the teacher and this can only happen in situations where everyone (teacher and students) has equal power. He does not deny that there are power dynamic and power relations within learning situations. Rather as authorities in the learning situation educators have a responsibility to use processes that ensure learners have equal power to participate in mutual

communication. Educators must exercise their necessary authority without "becoming authoritarian" (Shor and Freire, p. 91.).

The approach reflects Gramsci's concern with mitigating hierarchical relations between those who educate and direct and those who learn (Mayo, 1999). Like Freire and Mezirow, Gramsci advocated an active and reciprocal relationship between teacher and student. He saw the teacher acting in a directive capacity on the basis of their "theoretical formation" but at the same time allowing learners some directive capacity, whereby, "…. every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher" (p. 47). However, teachers must apply rigour to dialogue (or other forms of participative learning), grounding it in valid information, so as to avoid vacuous, ineffectual rhetoric.

The core of Freire's philosophy is that the educational process must be a liberating one. I am however unconvinced that conscientization by itself can lead to the complete eradication of social class structures and oppression in society, in fact there is little evidence that it does. I am also unconvinced that education alone can achieve conscientization. But dialogical, problem-posing approaches to education can develop critical thinking, increasing the capacity of individuals to participate in debates in wider social contexts. In turn this can contribute to the kind of social analysis needed to oppose exploitation, challenge social inequities and keep oppressive elements of society in check. Such approaches can be incorporated into most further and adult education programmes. But the degree to which it happens depends on organisational ethos and the expertise and the willingness of individual adult educators. Effects are difficult to measure since formal education is but one part of the social and political system and one aspect of peoples' lives.

Mezirow (1995a) concedes that Freire's concept of conscientization forced him to significantly modify norms he had accepted without question, causing him to re-direct his work in adult education. According to Mezirow (1978; 1990) what we perceive or fail to perceive and what we think or fail to think are powerfully influenced by uncritically assimilated habits of expectations. hese he refers to as meaning perspectives, which act as boundaries in our lives and structure the way we interpret our experiences. When we meet with experiences that our current perspectives cannot comfortably deal with and that cannot be resolved by simply learning how to cope with them more effectively, we are challenged. We must critically reflect, assess our presuppositions, consider new modes of behaviour and adopt new meaning perspectives that are "progressively more inclusive, discriminating, and more integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 1978, p.107). When this happens we undergo a transformative learning process and experience a perspective transformation which:

> ...implies a conscious recognition of the difference between one's old viewpoint and the new one and a decision to appropriate the newer perspective as being of more value.
>
> (Mezirow, 1978, p.105)

Perspective transformation, Mezirow (1991a; 1995) believes is an essential component of and should be an emancipatory process. He argues "Transformation learning experiences are emancipatory in that they free learners from the constraints and distortions of their own terms of reference" (Mezirow, 1995, p.2). Rational or reflective discourse in search of a "common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief " is a lynchpin of Mezirow's theory (Mezirow, 2000, p.10-11). Facts, evidence, beliefs and interpretations are explored. Bias and prejudices are set aside. Assumptions are critically assessed. Alternative perspectives are examined. Like Freire's conscientization this involves problem posing -"making a taken-for-granted situation problematic and raising questions regarding its validity" (Mezirow, 1991a, p. 105).

He sees perspective transformation as having far reaching implications for adult education. Drawing on Habermas's ideas , Mezirow (1995a; 1995b) holds that the ideal conditions of undistorted rational discourse is implied in the nature of human communications. These embrace social values such as freedom, equality, participative democracy, tolerance, inclusiveness and solidarity , values that also promote ideal conditions for effective adult learning. Conceding that ideal discourse seldom exists he purports that it provides us with a standard against which to judge our efforts as learners and educators. Fostering critical reflection, he sees, as an essential component of adult education. Like Habermas and Freire he advocates that "dialogic methods of education" (Mezirow, 1990a, p. 307), to promote mutual communication between the educator and learners which enables them reflect on the meaning of their experiences and their knowledge are essential. Shor refers to this as student-teacher mutuality (Shor, 1996, pp 85-87). This provides opportunities for re-evaluating and re-thinking situations in light of real life experiences. As learners become more aware, through reflective participation in collaborative discourse, of how oppression has restrained or distorted their beliefs they become motivated towards collective action to change the system to suit their needs. Consequently, learning to participate openly and critically in collaborative discourse is crucial for adult learners. Learning to facilitate this kind of learning and creating the conditions for effective adult reasoning and perspective transformation is an on-going challenge for adult educators (Mezirow 1990a, 1995a, 2000).

Mezirow (1978), Freire and Shor (Shor, 1996) all agrees that learners require assistance in acquiring relevant skills and knowledge, as evidenced by Mayo's assertion "...a certain degree of instruction needs to be imparted to render any dialogical educational process an informed one" (Mayo, 1999, p. 48). However, they strongly argue that concepts such as behavioural objectives, competency-based education, skills training and criterion-reference evaluation require fundamental revision as they restrict the development of reflective,

critical thinking. Mezirow also argues that the constricted aim of adult education as one of fostering behaviour change requires "fundamental revision" (1978, p. 107). As he sees it adult education is concerned with community development. This involves fostering critical reflection on social conditions, practices, institutions and systems and helping adult learners who have already become aware of the need for collective action to learn what they need to know to act effectively.

> Transformation theory envisions an ideal society composed of communities of learners engaged in a continuing collaborative inquiry to determine the truth or arrive at a tentative best judgement about alternative beliefs, a communication cemented by emphatic solidarity, committed to the social and political practice of participatory democracy, informed through critical reflection, continuously engaged in collaborative discourse and collectively taking reflective action, when necessary, to assure that social and local institutions, organisation, and practices are responsive to the human needs of those they serve. (Mezirow, 1995, p. 5-6)

In summary Fleming (2002) describes transformative learning as a process of becoming aware through critical reflection of the frame in which one thinks, feels and acts. It involves becoming aware of its genesis in one's individual history and /or culture, the search for a new more developed frame and resulting action on the basis of the new frame of reference. Citing a number of theorists (Collard & Law, 1989; Clarke & Wilson, 1991; Inglis, 1997), he proposes that transformative learning, as advanced by Mezirow, is "overly concerned with individual change" (Fleming 2002, p. 2) and fails to explore the relationship between the individual and external contexts (i.e. sociocultural, political, historical). Such over reliance on the individual rather than social movements as an agency of social change can result in "a false sense of emancipation" (p. 2). Fleming notes that Mezirow highlights the connection between individual transformation and social action by suggesting that learners can be helped to analyse common problems through participatory research and encouraged to build solidarity with others in order to take social action. Drawing distinction between fostering critically reflective learning and fostering social action Mezirow (1978; 1989)

asserts that even after restructuring reality and seeing the need for change one may also decide not to act.

> When learners come to identify with others who have been similarly oppressed collective social action may develop and it is desirable and appropriate that it do so. But this is the learners decision not the educator's. (Mezirow, 1989, p. 172)

Social action he perceives as crucial, but he does not see it as the only goal of adult education. Action is seen as individual or social but not exclusively one or the other. His challenge to adult educators is that we embrace dialogical methods that ultimately enable learners to have that choice.

Referring to models of cognitive development[1], Merriam (2004) cautions that engagement in rational discourse requires individuals to operate at the higher levels of cognitive development, levels at which many adults do not operate. Studies based on these models suggest that "construction of knowledge via critical inquiry" and "mature dialectical thought" (p.63-64) are age and even education related, appearing only as people mature into their thirties and beyond. She highlights that Mezirow concedes that preconditions for rational discourse include maturity, education, safety, good health, economic security and emotional intelligence. Consequently some individuals are less likely to participate, especially those for whom basic survival (hunger, shelter, safety) is a primary focus. Tisdell (2002, 1999) also notes that Mezirow's theory on how adults develop new ways of knowing is primarily driven by rationality, neglecting the role of unconscious thought processes in learning other than those constituting reasoning. Image, symbol and spirituality, she claims, also contribute significantly to the construction of knowledge, ways of living in communities and working for justice. Merriam's (2004) challenge that Mezirow expand his transformative learning theory and place affective and

[1] Piaget,J. (1972). Intellectual evolution from adolescent to adulthood. *Human Development, 16*, 346-370; King, P.M., & Kitchener, K.S. (1994). *Developing Reflective Judgement.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Perry, W.G. (1970). Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years. Austin, TX:Holt,Rinehart &Winston; Kegan, R. (1994). In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

intuitive dimensions on an equal footing with cognitive and rational components is welcome. In presenting her challenge she cites Freire's work with illiterate peasants and studies by Kovan and Dirkx[2] of environmental activists that found transformations rarely indicated a strong reliance on critical reflection and self-analysis. Instead transformation was grounded in affective, emotional, spiritual and transpersonal dimensions of life. This approach makes transformative learning more relevant and accessible. It emphasises a broader range of contexts and age groups, acknowledging the capacity of many more individuals (learners and educators) to develop new understandings and meanings. It gives greater recognition to the multiplicity of factors that affect development and learning and the multiplicity of circumstances in which individuals can impact on social change.

In the context of transformative learning, Habermas's ideas on civil society are interesting. Weber (Murphy and Fleming, 2005, forthcoming) claims that the process of capitalist modernization, alongside the secularisation of religious views caused the inevitable institutionalisation of instrumental rationality, that is a utilitarian form of reason focused on outcomes rather than the processes involved in achieving these outcomes. In reconstructing Weber's analysis Habermas agrees that capitalism goes hand-in-hand with one-sided instrumental rationality, leading to a world of bureaucracy in which the political and economic imperatives of the state become all pervasive. But he proposes that another form of rationality also exists - communicative rationality connected to processes of mutual understanding (Habermas, 1984; Murphy and Fleming, 2005, forthcoming).

In his work Habermas refers to two key concepts; the lifeworld and the system. The lifeworld reflects the vast stock of taken-for-granted definitions and understandings of

[2] Kovan, J.T., & Dirkx, J.M. (2003). "Being called awake": The role of transformative learning in the lives of environmental activists.

the world that give coherence and direction to our everyday lives. The system reflects the aspect of society where imperatives of technical efficiency and bureaucracy prevail that is the state and economy (Murphy and Fleming, 2005, forthcoming; Fleming 1998). He asserts that problems arise when the state and the market overstep fundamental boundaries and invade or colonise the lifeworld. In the process, communicative rationality that underpins mutually agreed understandings and the reproduction of the lifeworld is displaced by an external framework of values, ideas and language based on systems. Discourses and concepts at systems level such as monetarization, bureaucratisation, labour market and the knowledge society take precedence and are indifferent to the lifeworld of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation. In this scenario, more and more decisions that affect the lives of citizens are based on economic gain and advancement of power at system level. (Murphy and Fleming, 2005).

Increasingly, individuals "become invisible" (Kemmis, 1998 in Fleming 2002, p.6) and seeing themselves as consumers, voters, or clients, define themselves and their aspirations in system terms (Habermas, 1987). In Habermas terms the lifeworld and the system have been uncoupled and are in need of transformation (Fleming 2002; Morrow & Torres, 2004; Murphy and Fleming, 2005, forthcoming). The implication for state funded further education programmes is that they become driven by economic competitiveness and related labour market demands. The question for educators is whether or not they believe that education should include a wider social change agenda.

Radical educators (Habermas, 1996; Fleming 1998; 2002; Mayo, 1999; Gramsi in Mayo 1999) regard civil society as a vehicle for transformation, a site for de-colonising the lifeworld and resisting further colonisation. While definitions of civil society are

contested there is some agreement that it can be seen "in terms of activities that are undertaken for the public good by groups or individuals in the space between the family, the state, and the market" (Naidoo, 2004). Fleming (1998; 2002) says civil society is composed primarily of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the associational sphere (voluntary organisations), social movements, and forms of public communications. Civil society, he contends, operates on the basis that the government is not fully representative of the people, instead there is a democratic deficit. Therefore it has the "dual function of ensuring those who exercise power do not abuse it and of transforming the system to regenerate more democratic practices" (Fleming, 1998, p. 7).

By actively sustaining a public sphere for discourse, civil society has the capacity to insert, what Murphy and Fleming (2005, forthcoming), call, moments of democratic accountability into the system. This parallels Gramsci's (Mayo, 1999) thinking that civil society for the most part enforces existing hegemonic arrangements through dominant institutions but contains pockets, even within the dominant institutions, where hegemony is contested and re-negotiated. Through public discourse and involvement in politics, associations or organisations people engage with facts and events, learn about the opinions and perspectives of others, debate matters of mutual concern and redeem the power of reflection. This plays a crucial role in the formation of the needs, interests and aspirations of individuals. Dominant free communication, free of coercion and inequalities that incline people to be silent or acquiesce, is central (Hart, 1990; Habermas, 1996). Involvement is a learning process with personal and social dimensions. Individual autonomy is developed creating a more informed and politically relevant public opinion – which underpins the quality of any democracy (Fleming, 2002; Murphy and Fleming, 2005, forthcoming).

But Habermas believes that the public sphere and public discourse have been eroded by the activities of politicians, advertisers, public relations, and the media in general (Murphy and Fleming, 2005, forthcoming; Fleming, 2002). The re-vitalisation of autonomous public spheres located in civil society that are capable of asserting themselves against power is viewed by Habermas (1996) as a key solution to the process of colonisation and addressing the consequences of uncoupling. Power is key in Habermas's conception of communicative rationality; the state is held in check by legitimate law, which is the medium through which communicative power and consensus is translated into administrative power. Accordingly, important agendas for adult education include developing learners' communicative competencies and working towards re-creating a vibrant and critical public sphere.

Fleming (1998; 2002) argues that this poses a major challenge. Adult educators are part of the apparatus of the state through the delivery of state services and often limit the education debate to technical issues. Adult education is heavily reliant on state resources and support. Civil society itself is a vehicle through which the state and dominant classes achieve their hegemony (Fleming, 2002, p. 11). Most people working in adult education may not feel in a position to promote radical social action in an overt fashion. I see a number of pertinent and difficult questions emerging. Do adult educators acknowledge the political nature of education as proposed by Gramsci and Freire and others? Do they see themselves as agents for socially transformative education, and if so, where and how can this be achieved? What role can they play in favour of social transformation both outside and within statutory and non-statutory institutions? Are they willing to engage in what Gramsci calls a "war of position" (Mayo, 1999, p. 38), a process of wide-ranging social organisation and cultural activity to counteract hegemony? Mayo calls this a "language of critique" (p. 24) - analysis that

exposes the contradictions behind dominant discourses. Answers to these questions raise a plethora of issues for adult educators some of which I consider below.

Transformative Learning: Some Issues and Concerns for Adult Educators

One could be forgiven for enjoying a 'we have finally arrived moment' when examining the emphases of current European and Irish adult education policy. But in practise this will continue to test educators who support the view that adult education has a role to play in the radical transformation of society. True, the language implies a commitment to democracy, participation, active citizenship and social cohesion. Participatory approaches and methodologies and investment in staff development to enable change are advocated (Ireland 1998; 2000; 2002b; European Commission 2000; 2001). Unlike primary and post primary education where schools undergo whole school evaluation by the DES[3], official inspection of adult and further education is minimal. The focus on lifelong learning takes account of the multiplicity of sites for learning during the life journey. The national qualifications framework provides more accessible accreditation opportunities. The difficulty is that it focuses on assessing learning outcomes against agreed national standards that run the risk of a prescriptive approach to programme content. Increased part-time courses, free of charge to many, under the BTEI (Part-time Programmes), has led to wider and more flexible provision. Supports such as guidance and childcare enable greater access to and participation in education. Further expansion of adult literacy provision and the employment of CEFs to support community education are also very encouraging (Ireland, 1999; 2000).

But the overriding focus is on the acquisition of skills and qualifications that have a value in the labour market. This is borne out in the primary objective underpinning

[3] Section 13 of the Education Act 1998, provides for whole school evaluations of schools by the DES under its Inspectorate. (Ireland, 1998).

state funded further education programmes (Appendix Three). Lynch refers to this as the neo liberal 'new right view', where the citizen is viewed as an "autonomous economic maximiser" (AONTAS, 2004b, p. 7). She contends that education and training providers, and educators therein, knowingly or unknowingly collude with this. The BTEI (Part-time Programmes) illustrates this. A clear objective is to increase qualifications and skills among particular cohorts within society in certain subject domains i.e. Junior or Leaving Certificate and qualifications in areas of critical skills shortages such as construction, and childcare. (Department of Education and Science, 2004). Acquisition of skills and qualifications at one level places the individual learner in a position to progress to the next level, leading eventually to a qualification that has a value in the work place. An underlying condition of funding is that certification opportunities are offered, although learners may choose not to pursue this. All this places restrictions on how providers select, design and deliver programmes and limits developmental activities. Similarly, adult literacy provision concentrates on the acquisition of basic skills in reading, writing, information technology and communications. Shor's words aptly capture the official priority "First learn the skills and then you can get a real education! First get a real education and then you can get a good job" (Shor and Freire, 1987. p. 5).

In general within further education programmes attention to personal development is framed within basic skills and specific qualifications. Developing critical literacy and thought is not a definitive objective. Emphasis on responding to enterprise development and labour market needs is borne out elsewhere. It is particularly visible in the quick response of Government to the recommendations of The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs[4]. Established in the late nineties the group is involved in analysing labour market

[4] The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs is a committee of ForFás, the National Policy and Advisory Board for Enterprise, Trade, Science, Technology and Innovation. Set up in 1997, it advises the

supply and demand. On foot of four reports to date the number of places in further and higher education courses such as chemical engineering, town planning and construction has increased. Strategies to promote in-company training and generic work related skills among low paid workers are also under consideration.

So despite shifts in emphases within policy, adult education provision continues to be restrictive. There has been no fundamental structural change and little rethinking of the how and what of education. Individual development is of central importance and strategies to promote collective action towards social change are not explicit. CORI, the Conference of Religious of Ireland (1999) and Roynane (1999a) claim the education system is primarily market-driven and based on human capital theory. This sees the key to economic growth and development in individual terms. Actions on foot of policy changes may be taking a broader notion of human potential on board but social cohesion is still neglected. As a result the common good is not promoted directly; rather it is seen as being achieved indirectly through individual self-advancement within the dominant values of freedom, individualism and competition.

A consequence is that when problems are identified solutions are not sought through fundamental systemic change but through a process of adjustment to promote continuous improvement and expansion within the status quo, "more of the same only better"(p. 2). And so the BTEI (Part-time Programmes) and other interventions of a similar nature , despite being perceived as positive, may simply provide immediate, limited gains for some but neglect permanent long-term gains for all. Personal and employment outcomes must, of course, be accepted as an important outcome of education. Many educators hold the view that acquiring basic skills and qualifications is the first step toward an individual becoming more actively involved in community

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Government on labour market supply and demand.

issues and wider society. There is some evidence to support this (DuVivier, 1992; Finglas Partnership Company, 1993; The Basic Skills Agency, 1997) but as much more evidence to suggest that the results rest more in personal and individual gain.

In my own experience, many educators, even those in community settings, do not approach their work from the transformative perspective proposed by Friere, Mezirow and Habermas. One-to-one and group interviews undertaken as part of this study indicate that content and styles are heavily influenced by assessment processes and standards dictated by certifying bodies. Primary emphasis is on the learners' acquisition of certain knowledge, skill and techniques as opposed to teaching people to be critical of the society in which they live. Collins (1998) warns that the new era of the knowledge society and economy is guided by a resurgence of the behaviourist agenda and the trappings that go with prescriptive practice - standardised curriculum, examinations and certificates. Coming from this stance uunwittingly, adult educators train learners to observe the world without judgment, as if the official consensus is a given; not to be challenged.

Is the transformative learning advocated by Freire, Mezirow and Habermas somewhat out of reach? Not entirely. Shor and Friere (Shor and Freire, 1987; Shor, 1992; 1996) show how individual educators can embrace a social transformation agenda, even when official policy and ensuing actions do not actively promote it. They consider that each distinct learning situation and topic presents an opportunity to introduce and unveil a political and historical context. By introducing critical dialogue and other interactive methods that create the 'ideal speech situation' promoted by Habermas, educators can 'illuminate reality' (Shor and Freire, 1987, p.13), offering students a critical stance on society instead of an uncritical immersion in the status quo. Of course, it is not just a question of changing techniques and

methodology. The issue in more whether the content and dynamism of the session is effective in critically re-orienting the learners and helping them reflect on and rethink reality. But the limits of education must be recognised. Many learners and adult educators are immersed in the status quo. This is to be expected. They are a product of the system and many are avid supporters of the current neo-liberal agenda. They do not see the need to challenge or change. Learners may simply resist attempts at creating a critical thrust in pursuit of transformative learning, interfering with the ability of educators to build critical culture separate from the dominant mass culture (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 26).

According to Fleming (2004) how to be an active and critical citizen has to be learned. This implies it can be taught. Among others, I argue the need for state supported staff development that expose adult educators to new understandings, approaches and methodologies. But such programmes are unlikely to avidly promote the transformative learning advocated in this paper although tutors and organisers can carefully insert the ideas. A key issue is that official support for critical thinking and empowerment is associated with enabling participation in the status quo as against opposing it. Many of those working within the state sector as policy makers, administrators and educationalist agree with this. In reality the power of the majority and machinery of the system outweigh the personal interest and commitment of individual managers and programme co-ordinators. Therefore, state programmes need to be supplemented by individuals independently participating in networks, associations or personal study where they can look more critically at how to exercise individual and collective power to create more opportunities for transformative learning.

Brookfield (2004) argues that anyone who sees adult education as a site for empowerment and liberation through "respectful, democratic and open discussion"

(p. 117) should engage with Foucault's analysis of power. Foucault's argument (Brookfield 2004, pp.117-135) is that power is universal and power relations are infinitely diverse. Where they exist repression and liberation co-exist to different degrees. But potential for resistance also exists – individuals are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. He draws our attention to disciplinary power; that is power exercised by people on themselves in their specific every day practices or in other word their self-surveillance. In modern society this has replaced sovereign power, which is exercised by a clearly discernible authority, that is overt surveillance. In this arrangement both Gramsci and Foucault (Brookfield, 2004, p. 45) believe we learn self-discipline and undertake self-surveillance, thereby censoring our thoughts and behaviours in line with the dominant discourse and common ideologies of the day.

Foucault argues that discussion groups and other methodologies thought to be liberating and transformative, run according to dominant discourses and regimes of truth, these are "the types of discourses which it (society) accepts and makes function as true" (p. 118). Learners are under surveillance by themselves, tutors and peers. Participant involvement is guided by a norm "regarding the "correct" and "appropriate" form of participation" (p. 121). This is reflected in practices and gestures that show preference for certain language and terminology or acknowledges some contributions above others. Consequently, supposed democratic processes can be oppressive, functioning very effectively to bolster peoples' willingness to submit to power and thus reproducing the dominant culture (p. 121).

Marcuse's (Brookfield, 2002) work in also interesting in that it challenges the notion that the road to critical thought begins with discussing and analysing everyday

experiences and situations. Developing critical thinking that is potentially revolutionary, he argues, is best assisted when people remove themselves from the familiarity of everyday experiences and immerse themselves in individual artistic experiences and abstract thought (Brookfield, 2002, p. 266-270). To demonstrate this he uses the idea of repressive tolerance. Inclusion of diversity and opening up to many alternate voices, he says, can simultaneously marginalize those voices and unwittingly legitimise the very domination it seeks to repress, reinforcing the status quo. Many others (Collins, 1998; Greene, 1995; Tisdell, 2000 and Merriam, 2004) support the thinking that aesthetic experiences enrich our sense of perception thereby promoting critical reflection. Therefore, learners should be offered opportunities for the isolation and privacy considered necessary for authentic immersion in the arts and abstract thought which promotes political critique.

Society shapes education, playing an important role in cementing the existing hegemony (Shor and Freire, 1987; Mayo 1999; Brookfield, 2004). From the viewpoint of the dominant power the main task of education is to reproduce the dominant ideology, to "...educate people to believe certain ways of organizing society are in their own best interest when the opposite is true" (Brookfield, 2004, p. 31). Hence, Brookfield claims we need to explore how adults, learners and educators, recognise that they are agents and "vehicle of power" (p. 128), perpetually channelling disciplinary power but also possessing the capacity to subvert the dominant power relations (p. 143). Policy decisions to promote more effective democracy and participation are important but the contribution and power of educators and learners are also significant. They have individual and collective capacity to provide multiple opportunities for transformative learning in all learning settings. But in reality only a small number of educators

approach their work from this perspective or have a deep understanding of the power they choose or choose not to exercise.

Brookfield (2004) advocates that adult educators should engage with critical theory in order to comprehend why people accept massive inequities and the systemic exploitation of the many by the few, as normal. Engagement in this critical approach, he purports, will allow us see adult learning as comprising "crucial tasks such as learning how to perceive and challenge dominant ideology, unmask power, contest hegemony, overcome alienation, pursue liberation, reclaim reason and practise democracy" (p. 2). Developing theoretical perspectives allow educators validate, question, and re-evaluate their own judgements and reasoning; a process that helps explain the world and suggests ways of working towards change for the better (p. 6-7). Educators it appears, have to go beyond understanding their work within the subsystem of education in order to promote real liberation. They need to be critical of the capitalist society that shapes the provision of education and the world we live in. They have to come to grips with the difference between transferring knowledge through didactic methods and using critical dialogue and other participative methods to pose questions and challenge official knowledge, the dominant classes and the system.

Some proponents of community education, a constituent part of adult and further education, claim it is a significant site for creating 'public spheres' and promoting discourse aimed at social transformation (AONTAS, 2004; Connolly, 2003; WERRC, 2003; CORI, 1999). European and Irish policy acknowledges community education as a driver in promoting participative democracy and collective social action, but issues and dichotomies abound. Definitions and understandings presented by those involved are not consistent and considerable confusion exists as to what community education

really is. The White Paper on Adult Education on the one hand implies that it is a separate sector, on the other hand sees it as a movement. Some consider community education to be a process driven approach located in the radical social transformation agenda. Others, in particular statutory providers but also some in the C&V Sector, see it as providing courses outside of formal educational institutions where methodology may be different but content is not.

Proponents of community education in Ireland (AONTAS, 2004; Connolly, 2003; CORI, 1999; among others) suggest that the transformative potential of community education rests in the fact that it is designed to initiate and develop activities and processes to enable and empower people in disadvantaged communities to take more control of their own lives. This focuses on individual and collective advancement involving analysis leading to social action which is aimed at changing societal structures. But in reality only a small portion of community education activity lives up to this. Often the courses provided are more closely aligned to personal and labour market needs than collective social action for example, childcare, information technology, crafts, parenting and flower arranging. Learners and communities may identify courses offered, methodologies and processes may be informal, but many tutors are subject experts and the content rests on this. And so the potential for transformative learning is limited to the few groups and tutors who embrace this as part of their agenda.

Lovett (1988) highlights the danger of community education projects, treating community problems as the result of inadequate education provision on the part of institutions and the state to be remedied by locally controlled education networks. This ignores the fact that many community problems are national, structural problems. Uncritical actions taken to meet perceived community needs may reach sections of the

population not already catered for and assist individual advancement, but collective action and solutions are neglected.

Disappointingly, while current policy promotes community education as contributing to social analysis and collective action, it does not propose a range of mechanisms to make this happen. The appointment of Community Education Facilitators to advance community education is welcomed. However, the absence of financial resources to meet costs other than salary and administration costs suggests immediate constraints. The plethora of public funding sources for community education activities including a range of government departments, national agencies, local development agencies and European Initiatives is another problem. Despite references within policy to integrated polices and co-ordination there is little evidence of this happening. Duplication and fragmented effort is the result leading to further confusion as to ' what is really happening?', 'who is doing it?' and 'what should be happening?'. This, in tandem with failure to put in place new local and national structures promised in the White Paper prevents strategic advancement of community education activity in promoting a more participative, democratic society for all.

To date community education activity is almost exclusively associated with disadvantaged communities. This is a considerable weakness as it excludes large parts of the population. Learning for participation in communities and society should be recognised as important for all members of society, and not limited to those who are experiencing high levels of social, economic or educational disadvantage. Thornhill (1998) claims that:

> The pace of economic, social, scientific and technological change is now so rapid, and the effects on individuals, communities and societies so pervasive and profound (in Ireland), that research in the humanities and social sciences is of increasing importance in equipping us to explain, interpret and evaluate our society and our role as individuals and as members of that society.
>
> (Thornhill, 1998, p. 57)

Irish statistics[5] show that 80 per cent of the adult Irish population does not generally participate in any kind of structured learning. A Cedefop survey (2003) shows that Ireland performs poorly by international standard in terms of participation in lifelong learning ranking eight out of 15 european union countries and well behind the leading countries. Interestingly, the study also found that when to compared to their european counterparts the Irish are more inclined to see lifelong learning as a above all, a shield against unemployment (92 per cent against 81 percent) and for social inclusion (92 per cent against 77 per cent). In tandem an OECD Report (2005, preliminary report) indicated that the Irish place a high value on certified learning when compared to other countries. For example the folk school tradition in Denmark and the study circle tradition in Sweden have nurtured a culture of learning for learning's sake.

If adequately resourced community education initiatives are well placed to find creative ways to engage more adults in education activities that promotes a love of learning, supporting transformative education and more democratic participation in society. Advocates of community education for social transformation have a difficult task in hand. While targeting extra resources at those most disadvantaged is justified they must also argue for sufficient resources to engage with society at large. They must push for consensus among policy makers, academics, practitioners and funders on the political dimension of community education. They must also argue for broadening the target base if it is to be effective in creating a critical mass of public spheres aimed at

[5] Central Statistics Office

'decolonising the lifeworld'. Otherwise it is in danger of operating in much the same way as formal education, promoting the existing order as opposed to challenging it.

Workplace education initiatives also require examination. Government and European policy both promote the increased investment in workplace education and training. However the focus is on skills upgrading and ensuring adaptability to the changing nature and structure of work. This is supported by reports of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance and Irish Congress of Trade Union showing that the trade unions and the social partners collude with a strong human capital approach for education and training provision.

A word of caution, there is no public or academic consensus on what constitutes real democratic participation, active citizenship or good civic values and to date the debate has been limited. Development of democratic participation, citizenship and civic values in the past was largely left to the general socialising process of the school curriculum, and what Rowe (1995), has identified elsewhere as conscious patriotic and religious models. Informal learning through community involvement, the media or chance has also played a key role. A framework for the Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE) is under development at second level and there is no tradition of *explicit* development of democracy, civic participation and citizenship or collective action towards social change in adult education. So there is no consistent framework and no solid research base in which to posit discussion of the topic and facilitate judgements about whatever practice there may be. Perhaps the best we can hope for is that the current policy messages at European and Irish level at least provide a starting point and impetus for further deeper debate.

Conclusion

Transformative learning, through dialogical democratic processes enables learners to critically reflect on current 'meaning perspectives' through collaborative enquiry, and empowers them to consider new ideas and act on the basis of new frames of reference. This promotes individual development and ideally leads to collective social action. Theorists who advance the concept of transformative learning believe that most learning contexts offer the potential to promote critical reflection through rational discourse and other participative methods. Some highlight the limitation of such methods given that they can reinforce the status quo. Others note that some learners resist critical reflection. My own experience tells me that the degree to which the social transformation agenda is embraced is largely dependant on individual adult educators, and the ethos of particular organisations and groups.

Mezirow's assertion that, even when we are successful in developing critical thinking in learners, action is individual or social but not exclusively one or the other (Fleming, 2002, p. 2), seems realistic to me. At minimum, adult educators have a responsibility to enable learners develop the communicative competence required for participation in rational discourse within organised programmes of study, the workplace and civil society. This is perhaps the most valuable contribution of adult education as participation in rational discourse has lifelong and lifewide applications of immeasurable consequence. As advocated by Habermas, it is essential for those of us allied to the system to show commitment to fostering critical reflection, working collectively for change both outside and within institutions and to "inoculate lifeworld values of caring, ethical concerns and democratic principles into the system, and so resist and reverse colonization" (Fleming and Murphy, forthcoming 2005). This requires us to understand the system and recognise its institutions as offering spaces where the struggle

for change can occur. It implies a willingness to take on the personal demands and tension this brings which is perhaps the greatest challenge of all.

Transformative learning experiences underpin the creation of public spheres within civil society which assert themselves against the systematizing effects of the state and the economy. Free, open public debate and discussion insert democratic accountability into the system world, thereby limiting its power, resisting colonisation and decolonising the lifeworld. Proponents of transformative learning theories as presented by Friere, Mezirow, Habermas and others have good reason to feel optimistic. At last there is documented evidence, through consultation with a range of stakeholders, that adult education has a role in supporting active citizenship, social responsibility, participation in communities and a democratic society. The new policy context for adult education suggests new opportunities for transformative learning. Individual development is a priority but collective advancement of community and societal issues is also a key message. In this regard community education activity and the role of adult educators is significant.

However, there are limitations. There is no consensus among policy makers, academics and adult educators on what terms such as participation, democracy, citizenship or transformative learning mean. It is not agreed that all further education programmes should include a political dimension towards social change. Community education remains a contested space. Labour market needs continue to command the greatest slice of resources and remain the priorities for immediate investment. Although adult educators are located in multiple locations they are part of the apparatus of the system (Fleming, 1998) by engaging in policy making and delivering programmes. Many are not aware of the power they have to contribute to transformative learning. Many more do not see it as part of the role of the educator or are not interested because they

uncritically support the status quo. Perhaps the best we can hope for is that further debate begins. In Chapter Four I describe the research strategy used to explore the experiences, feelings and thoughts of personnel involved with and within VECs in inserting a transformative learning agenda into further education programmes.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODS

Introduction

Researchers are faced with a variety of options when selecting research approaches, strategies and methods. The two main research paradigms are the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach. Quantitative research tends to be associated with large-scale studies with a focus on specific factors as they relate to other factors. It generally aims to measure phenomena using facts and figures that are analysed through statistical procedures (Denscombe, 1998; The Open University, 1998). Assumptions of this positivist, empirical approach are that: data is objective, existing external to the researcher; the researcher describes, interprets and explains events without making any judgement and there is a discrete body of knowledge that is appropriate for each situation (Eisner, 1993; Robson, 1993). Typically, it also assumes determinism, as Cohen and Mannion (1994, p. 13) state, "events are explicable in terms of their antecedents".

Qualitative research on the other hand tends to be associated with small-scale studies and a holistic perspective (Denscombe, 1998,). It relies on transforming information into words and descriptions, dealing with meanings or patterns of behaviour and how these are related and interdependent (p. 175). In contrast to the positivist, empirical approach the data are produced by the way they are interpreted as opposed to existing to be discovered. "Interpretative researchers seek systematically, critically and self critically, to describe and interpret phenomena..."(Bassey, 1990, p. 16). The researcher in this paradigm sees language as a more or less agreed, symbolic system from which different people may take different meanings. "Because of differences in perception,

interpretation and in language it is not surprising that people have different views of what is real" (p. 42). Consequently the sharing of accounts of what has been observed is always to some extent problematic. A further key distinction is that in quantitative research a hypotheses establishes the exact nature of the question from the outset, which is accompanied by a definite sample or experimental procedure. Qualitative research on the other hand tends to be associated with emergent research design where theories are developed and tested as part of the on-going process. This position is supported by Glaser and Strauss's idea "of theory 'grounded' in data rather than presumed at the outset of a study" (Silverman, 2000, p. 62).

Choosing a Strategy and Method

Simple quantitative measures can be a feature of good qualitative research and insights gained from qualitative interviewing may improve the quality of a survey design and interpretation (Bauer and Caskell, p.39). Therefore, qualitative and quantitative approaches are not mutually exclusive. Good social research (Denscombe, 1998; Silverman, 2000; Robson, 1993) is a matter of considering factors such as relevance, feasibility, coverage, accuracy, objectivity and ethics and then selecting appropriate strategies and methods. "The general principle is that the research strategy, or strategies, and the methods or techniques employed, must be appropriate for the question you want to answer"(Robson, 1993, p. 38).

This study considers the experience of personnel working within and with VECs in trying to support community action and social transformation through further education programmes. It explores how they negotiate the relationship and contradictions that exist between policy and practice, and how they experience the processes that underpin the implementation of further education programmes. Surveys aim to detail tangible,

quantifiable things that can be measured. Experiments aim to discover new relationships or properties associated with the material being investigated or test existing theories. Action research requires that the researcher reflects in a structured way on his/her own practice as they engage in that practice. Ethnography literally means a description of people and cultures. These were deemed to be inappropriate research strategies for this study. According to Denscombe (Denscombe, 1998, pp. 30-31) a case study focuses in detail on one instance of the thing to be investigated. It examines naturally occurring situations that exist prior to the study and continue after the study is finished. Additionally, the situation under investigation is not artificially constructed but relies on the day-to-day experience of relevant people. Thus it explores relationships and processes and the interconnectedness and interrelatedness between these in a holistic manner as opposed to treating them as separate parts.

> A case study is a strategy for doing research, which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence. (Robson, 1993, p. 52)

Accordingly, a case study was considered the most suitable investigative strategy. One might see confining the case study to VECs as a weakness. However, VECs are the largest statutory providers of further education in the country and command 90% of the resources available under the DES. Together (33 nationwide) they offer a broader range of courses and target a larger number of participants annually than any other provider of further education. They also carry a remit for general education as well as vocational education which distinguishes them from other providers whose remit tends to focus on job specific training and specific occupations.

Broadly, whatever the research strategy there are four potential methods of collecting data - questionnaires, observations, documents and interviews. While some methods are better suited to certain situations, methods can also be used to complement each

other (Denscombe, 1998; Silverman, 2000). Each method used produces different kinds of data assisting the researcher to look at different perspectives and understand the topic in a more complete way. But Silverman cautions that simplicity and rigour are preferable to "the often illusory search for the 'full picture'"(Silverman, 2000, p. 100). Having considered a number of factors such as time, resources, access to sources of data and the size and aim of the study, qualitative interviewing was selected as the most appropriate source of primary data.

The study was concerned with how people interpret and experience the tension between the policy and practice underpinning further education programmes - policy that shows commitment to promoting citizenship, community development, consciousness raising, cultural development, cohesion and practice that sees economic competitiveness as the primary objective. It is therefore concerned with meanings and "with attempting to document the world from the point of view of the people studied" (p. 8). I wanted to uncover peoples' experiences, thoughts and feelings. In-depth unstructured interviews were considered best to serve this purpose. I adopted a dual role as interviewer. On the one hand, in keeping with unstructured interviewing, I operated in a manner that was not intrusive, introducing a theme and "letting the interviewee develop his or her ideas and pursue his or her train of thought" (Denscombe, 1998, p. 113). On the other hand, I worked from a discourse model or what Holstein and Gubrium (1999) call active interviewing, where both the interviewer and respondent use interpretive resources to co-construct meaning. In line with this I sometimes suggested ideas, positions, "resources, orientations and precedents" (Holstein and Gubrium 1999, p. 123) in order to explore alternative perspectives and contradictions at ease. This was helpful in guarding against some interviewees being over cautious in sharing ideas with me

because of my involvement in policy development and resource allocation within the DES in my current role.

Validity, Reliability and Objectivity

Issues of validity, reliability and objectivity are fundamental issues in an enquiry of any kind. Validity is concerned with truth. A credible claim to truth relates to the extent to which an account accurately represents the phenomena to which it refers. (Denscombe, 1998; The Open University; 1998; Silverman, 2000). Some validity issue fall under the heading of reliability, in other words unless research strategies, methods and processes are reliable the results will not be valid. In this study I wanted to extract meaning from peoples' viewpoints. To enhance reliability of findings, and therefore validity, I conducted unstructured interviews on a one-to-one and group basis with people involved in managing and co-ordination roles within further education. I wanted to establish the relevance of certain ideas and issues to people in different organisations, geographical locations and roles. I was interested to see if there were consensus views on certain issues and to identify similarities and differences.

The limitations of content analysis to deal with the meaning of what is said, or indeed not said, are acknowledged but a "text carries some clues about a deeper rooted and possibly unintentionally message that is actually being communicated" (Denscombe, 1998, p. 168). Relevant written documents pertaining to further education provision within VECs were examined to supplement and cross check the data collected through the one-to-one and group interviews. These included research, conference and progress reports, programmes guidelines, policy documents, DES memos and minutes of meetings, some of which contained relevant quantifiable data. This approach of using a number of research techniques is known as methodological "triangulation" (Robson, 1993,

p. 290; Denscombe, 1998, p 85; Silverman, 2000, p. 98). It means examining and corroborating the findings from one method against another method to verify and strengthen the validity of the data and analysis, thereby improving the quality of the research.

Generalizability, also referred to as "external validity" (Robson, 1993, p. 72), relates to the extent to which the findings are more generally applicable to other situations, contexts or people. Some, like Alasuutari, take issue with the term generalization arguing it should be reserved for surveys only.

> What can be analysed instead is how the researcher demonstrates that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand... *extrapolation* better captures the typical procedure in qualitative research.
>
> (Alasuutari in Silverman, 2000, p. 111)

If one sees qualitative research as purely descriptive, generalizability is not an issue, as the particularity of the case is believed to be of interest (Silverman, 2000). But many argue that qualitative research should seek to "produce explanations which are *generalizable* in some way, or which have wider resonance" (Mason in Silverman, 2000, p.102). Even Glaser and Strauss who nurtured the concept of grounded theory encouraged researchers to think about how formal theory might be developed out of isolated substantive, inductive studies. In this scenario, although the qualitative case study approach has the potential to deal with subtleties and intricacies of complex social phenomena, the problem of representativeness occurs and researchers need to give it due attention.

A review of literature and relevant documents proved important in this regard. This allowed for comparability of ideas emanating from interview findings with established theory, other research and other data to illustrate the generizability of some issues.

Theoretical sampling also contributed to representativeness and generizability. This is purposive sampling, which seeks out groups, settings, and individuals where the processes or events being studied are most likely to occur. It is also theoretically defined in line with the researcher's theoretical position. Accordingly, some sampling choices are more appropriate than others.

> Theoretical sampling is concerned with constructing a sample ... which is meaningful theoretically, because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria, which help to develop and test your theory and explanation.
> (Mason in Silverman 2000, p. 105)

In keeping with theoretical sampling, interviewees were selected because they had a broad knowledge and understanding of further education and VECs. In addition they were considered to have some special contribution to make because of their experience, insights or position (Denscombe, 1998, p. 119).

When using the quantitative, empiricist approach in pursuit of objectivity techniques are designed so that the researcher is separate from the data. "Such artificiality is lethal" Robson claims (Robson, 1993, p. 74), in terms of any real understanding of phenomena involving people in social settings. In such cases, which apply in this study, an alternative criterion for objectivity is intersubjective agreement. Objectivity can be established if a number of individuals, including the researcher, can be seen to agree to phenomena, as opposed to relying on the subjective experience of a single individual. This interpretation of objectivity is supported by methodological triangulation and an involved researcher, both of which I applied to the collection and analysis of data. According to Denscombe (1998) and Silverman (2000) it is now widely recognised the role of the researcher cannot be eliminated in qualitative research.

> ..the researcher's self (his or her social background, values, identity and beliefs, identity) will have a significant bearing on the nature of data collected and the interpretations of that data. (Denscombe, 1998, p. 176)

Denscombe advises that there are two ways researchers can deal with this involvement of the self. At one end of the spectrum they can try to suspend personal beliefs to allow them operate in a detached manner in order to produce and analyse data. At the other end they can take the stance that personal knowledge, opinions and insights are a crucial resource. I found a combined approach helpful. Sometimes my understandings and insights that had evolved from my varied roles in further education (tutor, examiner and assessor, co-ordinator of development projects, policy worker and administrator) were helpful in unravelling and interpreting the data. However I was conscious of the pitfall that my own knowledge and experience could overshadow the opinions of others so at times I suspended my own views in order that they did not blur my sense of what others were saying.

Interview Process

In order that readers may assess the validity, reliability and objectivity the researcher must make explicit the procedures and processes that underpin data collection. Above, I have justified my approach, strategy and methods. Hereunder, I give an account of the process and subsequent data analysis.

Selecting Interviewees

This study set out to explore specifics within a particular situation in detail and produce results that had some generalizability. The following questions guided the selection of interviewees to constitute the theoretical sample:

- who is involved in policy development and implementation?
- who decides on the allocation of resources?
- who supports the implementation of programmes and initiatives?
- who shapes programme guidelines and supports?
- who influences the ethos underpinning service provision?

Hence, the main criterion for participant selection was that they had experience of one or more of the following:

a) senior management within VECs for overseeing further education services, that is Chief Executive Officer or Deputy Chief Executive Officer (referred to as CEO) or Adult Education Officer (AEO) (referred to as Service Manager)
b) co-ordinating specific further education initiatives within a VEC, for example the BTEI (Part-time Programmes) or VTOS (referred to as Programme Co-ordinator) or working in the role of Community Education Facilitator (CEF)
c) senior responsibility within a Government Department for overseeing adult and further education provision, that is Principal Officer (PO) within the DES and the DCR&GA
d) national co-ordination of further education initiatives and policy development on behalf of the DES (referred to as National Co-ordinator)
e) management of a national organisation involved in further education within the C&V Sector (referred to as Director of National Voluntary Organisation).

Although interviewees differed in the level and nature of their professional responsibilities and experience they shared a background in the management or co-ordination of further education services. Some had been in a variety of the above roles adding depth to their understanding of the complexity of further education provision. In order to represent the national and local perspective personnel working in both contexts were included. Excluding Principal Officers within Government Departments, all had been involved in direct delivery of courses at an earlier stage of their careers and two continued in this role. This was important as, due to the size of the study and time restrictions I had to limit the number of people to be interviewed.

I considered it important to include senior personnel from NALA and AONTAS. While these organisations have a working relationship with the DES and are involved in providing support to VECs they are attached to the community and voluntary sector. Silverman calls this choosing 'deviant'cases (Silverman, 2000, p. 107), whereas Denscombe refers to this as including special instances, ones that are extreme or unusual allowing the "researcher to get the 'maximum variation' in the data that are collected" (Denscombe, 1998, p. 26). Quoting Miles and Huberman he suggests that this "...not only tests generality of the findings but also protects you against self-selecting bias, and may help you build a better explanation" (p. 26). I expected these interviewees to come to the topic with different perspectives than those working within the statutory sector although I suspected some similarity of viewpoint would also emerge.

Bauer and Caskell (2000) point out there are a limited number of views on a topic in a particular milieu. In total sixteen people were interviewed from across two Government Departments, five VECs and two national organisations attached to the C&V Sector (Table 2). Theoretical sampling allows for the manipulation of analysis, theory and sampling interactively during the research process to a much greater extent than in statistical sampling. Accordingly, I selected additional interviewees, three in total, as the interviews progressed. These included a second Principal Officer in the DES, a Principal Office from the DCR&GA and a third National Co-ordinator in order to cross check and corroborate certain ideas that were emerging, contributing to the reliability and validity of the findings.

Table 2

Research Sample: Interviewees and Organisations Involved

Position in Organisation	Organisations Involved				Total
	DES X 1	DCR&GA X 1	VECs X 5	C&V Sector X2 NVGs	
Principal Officer	2	1			3
National Co-ordinator	2			1	3
CEO			2		2
Director				2	2
Service Manager			2		2
Programme Co-ordinator			2		2
CEF			2		2
Total	4	1	8	3	16

DES: Department of Education and Science
CEO: Chief Executive Officer of Deputy Chief Executive Officer in VEC
NVGs: National Voluntary Organisations
CEF: Community Education Facilitator

This range and number of organisations and interviewees provided ample opportunity to explore a variety of opinions and different interpretations on the research issue increasing the degree of credibility of findings. Participants for the group interview were subject to the same selection criterion. However due to time, cost and travel constraints this was confined to one VEC and included a senior manager, programme co-ordinators and a community education facilitator. As with the one-to-one interviews all had also been involved in direct delivery of courses in an earlier stage of their career and some continued in this role.

Conducting the Interview

One-to-one interviews lasted between one hour and one and half hours. The group interview lasted two hours. In both contexts the data collected were audiotaped for

transcription later. Permission was sought from each interviewee to refer to their respective organisations and position and use quotes in the presentation of findings. However, they were assured that their individual identity would be concealed. In the event of this not being possible I offered to return to them to verify that I was citing them appropriately.

Typically, unstructured interviewing is opened ended, but as Denscombe indicates many researchers approach the interview with some agenda in mind and with some idea of what issues might arise (Denscombe, 1998, p 118). Silverman (2000) referring to work by Miles and Huberman notes that no matter how unstructured or inductive a researcher approaches a study she/he comes with "*some* orienting ideas, foci and tools". He further suggested, "... without some conceptual orientation, one would not recognise the field one was studying" (Silverman, 2000, p. 62). To gain maximum benefit from the interviews, I designed what some people call a "topic guide" (Bauer and Caskell, 2000, p. 40). This captured the aims and objectives of the research and what I perceived to be key related concepts and issues. My own theoretical framework and sensitivity and a review of appropriate literature and discussion with experienced colleagues informed this. The topic guide was not a set of specific questions but prompts to help get the interview started, raise the same range of issues with everyone and re-orient the interview if it was losing focus. In summary it referred to the following points:

- Perception and understanding of current policy context for and objectives of further education provision
- Consensus on terminology, definitions and language

- Opportunities and challenges for promoting community action and social change, for example, flexible resources, new award systems, co-operation across programmes and agencies
- Obstacles to promoting a community action and social change agenda for example lack of support for staff, poor management structures and systems
- Familiarity with the range of state and other agencies involved in resourcing education initiatives focusing on community action and social change
- Issues of co-operation and integrated approaches within and across government departments, state agencies and communities
- Learner understandings, expectations and motivations in pursuing courses

From pilot testing the topic guide on two colleagues I realised I needed to give time at the outset to explaining my background, the focus of the research, and my interest in the topic in order to create a rapport and put interviewees at ease. This was important since I had opted to become involved in dialoguing with the interviewees sharing my thoughts, experiences and knowledge. During the first three interviews recurring issues were identified. This assisted in tightening the focus of subsequent interviews. The topic guide, my own theoretical framework and sensitivity and my knowledge of the field were all useful in managing the multiplicity of experience and ideas that presented during the interviews. These also assisted in the formulation of multiple possibilities from the data as opposed to seeking consensus on all issues.

Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data looks for meanings and understandings. To make sense of the raw data I engaged in an initial process known as open coding. This involved naming and organising the various chunks of information and ideas as they emerged in

order to identify, name and categorise phenomena (Denscombe, 1998, Bauer and Caskell, 2000; Merriam, 1998). In tandem I noted relationships between the presenting ideas, other research and established theory, a process that Robson (1993) and Denscombe (1998) call 'memoing'. Summary notes on completion of each interview proved helpful in establishing the main ideas emerging and identifying issues that merited cross checking with other interviewees or with relevant documents.

As the interviews progressed broad themes became evident. At this point I found it useful to discuss the data with two colleagues who had offered to act as soundboards, a process that deepened my understanding of the themes and the interrelationship between them. Finally, I refined the data into five key themes. The identification of initial categories and final themes was influenced by my own theoretical orientation and reflections and the perceived (subjective) understandings of the research participants. However, I was careful to avoid premature theory construction and resisted temptation to jump to quick conclusions by challenging my own ideas and explanations throughout. I achieved this in two ways. Firstly, I focussed on differences and contradictions as well as regularities and patterns in the data across the interviews and compared the ideas emerging with existing theories. Secondly, I had follow up conversations with some interviewees to guard against inadvertently contaminating their perspectives with my own beliefs. I kept in mind that, inevitably, our sense of social phenomena can never be entirely objective and that analysis of qualitative data "calls for a reflexive account by the researcher concerning the researcher's self and its impact on the research" (Denscombe 1998, p. 212).

> Specifically, analysis is strongly 'data-driven'- developed from phenomena, which are in various ways evidenced in the data of interaction. Correspondingly, there is a strong bias against priori speculation about the orientation and motives of speakers and in favour of detailed examination of conversationalists' actual actions. Thus the empirical conduct of speakers in treated as the central resource out of which analysis may develop. (Silverman, 2000, p. 150)

Conclusion

This research is underpinned by a case study approach involving qualitative interviewing. One-to-one interviews were conducted with 16 people involved in senior management and co-ordination roles within a further education context. Interviewees included a mix of personnel working at national and local level across two Government Departments, five VECs and two National Voluntary Organisations. A group interview was conducted with four people employed in a VEC. Relevant documents were also reviewed. In an effort to strengthen validity, reliability and objectivity I used triangulation, theoretical sampling and worked towards establishing intersubjective agreement. While analysis was influenced by my own theoretical sensitivity I was careful to challenge my own ideas throughout so as to avoid misinterpreting the data. The next chapter presents the research findings under five broad but interconnected themes.

CHAPTER FIVE

PERSPECTIVES OF POLICY MAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Introduction

My experience of further education provision and understanding of transformative learning theory have led me to consider that while education has the potential to support collective community and social action, this is overshadowed by the Government's priority attention to labour market needs. In this research I wanted to investigate the opportunities, barriers and tensions experienced by personnel involved with and within VECs in inserting a community action and social change agenda into further education programmes. I wanted to explore their experiences, thoughts and feelings in some detail and extract meanings from these. I had many ideas from the preceding chapters floating around in my head when I conducted the one-to-one interviews and group interview. I knew for example that I would examine whether the meaning of language and concepts used in policy and literature were shared or well understood. I had some idea that in the course of data collection and analysis I would look for views on community education and staff development. I also thought issues related to structures and systems would emerge as significant. In this chapter key research findings are presented. These comprise perspectives from interviewees (one-to-one and group participants), enhanced by references to relevant documents and reports in an attempt to strengthen representativeness and credibility. This enabled strong and robust conclusions to be made. Findings are set out below under five headings:

Shared Understandings and Meanings (language, concepts)

Community Education

Structures and Systems

Labour Market Focus of Programmes

The Role of the Individual Educator

Some ideas arise under a number of headings demonstrating the interrelationship and interconnectness between them, indicating their reliability and significance.

Shared Understandings and Meanings

According to all respondents the concept of transformative learning for individual or social change is not widely understood. The term was considered to be largely confined to a small circle of academics, those who embrace 'a particular approach' to community education and a limited number of adult education practitioners.

> Only that I'm involved in this course, (that is the Masters in Adult and Community Education in Maynooth College), I mightn't know what transformative learning means, certainly in my experience most of my peers don't know what it means, and I haven't seen any reference to transformative learning in the material on the Back To Education Initiative or Community Education Facilitators, the newest initiatives in further education.
>
> (Programme Co-ordinator, VEC)

> In my experience the term transformative learning belongs to the academic world and is not really filtering widely into the world of education.
>
> (National Co-ordinator)

In the context of education playing a role in individual, community or social change respondents confirmed that terms such as personal effectiveness, consciousness raising, citizenship, social responsibility and community development are more widely used by adult educators than transformative learning. While these ideas arise liberally in policy documents, there was unanimity that they mean different things to different people. Meanings attached to them were perceived to be influenced by a mixture of professional and personal issues for example, position and role in the workplace, personal experiences and organisational ethos. Staff within VECs noted inconsistent understandings within the DES and thereby an absence of clarity on how terms and concepts should be interpreted and acted on by further education providers.

Accordingly, some indicated that they give little thought to the macro policy context in which they work, concentrating primarily on delivering each programme within its guidelines. National Co-ordinators confirmed there are no formal mechanisms for personnel attached to the Further Education Section of the DES to explore, as a team, the full range of priorities and principles set out in national or european policy and ensuing implications for further education provision. This was interpreted by some as a lack of commitment on the part of Government officials to act on all the ideas reflected in policy.

European and national policies place a primary focus on the relationships between education and training, labour market needs and economic development. Interestingly, all interviewees claimed that these relationships are easily identified and understood and widely embraced by further education providers. Learners are enabled to gain skills and qualifications thereby bolstering their employment prospects. In turn, this contributes to economic competitiveness at individual, community and national levels. Some saw this as discouraging service providers and educators from explicitly embracing other priorities such as community development, citizenship and consciousness raising except through a labour market focus. Others strongly contended that further education programmes that address individual employability and national competitiveness encompass wider positive outcomes for individuals, local communities and wider society. These include increased involvement in community activity, greater willingness to vote in public elections, improved living standards and general social progress.

> It depends on what idea of individual empowerment and social change we are pursuing. Let's be frank, employment gives individuals and families an opportunity for a better lifestyle. It may also enable people to become more involved in community activity or indeed social issues through work; it's really up to the individual. (Principal Officer, DES)

Senior management in VECs and national co-ordinators remarked that the strong lobby by a small number of academics and the C&V Sector during the consultation process for the White Paper in Adult Education was significant in deepening the focus on individual and community empowerment and social change. Openness by some officials within the DES to listen to a wide range of perspectives and embrace these ideas was attributed to a commitment to social inclusion as opposed to a radical social action agenda. This was reflected in interviews with senior officials in the DES and most VEC staff where the term social inclusion and social change were often used interchangeably. Social change was seen in terms of building social awareness and social responsibility and enabling individuals participate in society as opposed to promoting change in the systems and structures that support the society in which we live.

In this regard it was recognised that the from a Government perspective education is a socialising agent, used to support and encourage participation in society within the boundaries of the status quo. Several noted that most people involved in the design and delivery of education programmes support this approach restricting the scope for introducing a more radical perspective. Others questioned whose definition and idea of promoting radical social change gets to the forefront and why? A number of interviewees from the statutory sector contended that some individuals and organisations aligned to the C&V Sector pursue a particular approach without reference to others. This creates a polarised effect and reduces opportunities for complementary actions and fails to recognise "that the social action and change agenda is extremely ambiguous, difficult and even contested, which adds to the complexities of the issue under discussion" (National Co-ordinator). Interviewees attached to the C&V Sector suggested that in general those attached to the statutory sector show little understanding of, or interest in, promoting collective community action and social change,

concentrating their efforts solely on individual development. This focus on individuals was confirmed by senior managers in VECs and DES, most of whom see education in terms of personal empowerment that may or may not lead to involvement in community or political activity.

A difficulty cited with the consultation for the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) was that the while some common ground was identified among the players shared understandings on key concepts did not emerge, nor have they emerged since.

> I don't believe senior officials in the Department and Government understood the possible implications of the language used in White Paper at all. I asked one person involved in the process if he thought it was a subversive document ...Labour market issues were well understood but things like community education, democracy, participation and other stuff like that were not really understood. (CEO, VEC)

The absence of "shared understanding for anything other than the competitiveness agenda"(CEO, VEC), was viewed by respondents within VECs as a key inhibitor to progressing the wider community and social action agenda implied by other priorities set out in the White Paper. "If we have no mutual understanding or direction we cannot make real progress at local level" (CEO, VEC). Difficulties arise at the very basic stage of planning. This is evidenced by the experience of one co-ordinator who has begun a process of bringing staff together across programmes to agree a framework for activity.

> We agreed that activity we were doing was about personal change, and vocational development. But we couldn't agree on the word 'political' change. Now, the word civic was agreeable as this was seen to be around individual citizenship and democracy and learning ability. But, certainly, some within the group felt that it was a bit weak in the context of the kind of change they might have been talking about. We agreed in the end that we were talking about the capacity for education to be a vehicle for social change.... But in terms of the language to be used, I mean it was quite a moment, we actually went to a vote on it. (Programme Co-ordinator, VEC)

Some urged further debate in order to bring clarity to ideas and concepts espoused by current policy and possible implications for education provision because "without a

shared understanding people will act out of the understanding they assume"(CEO, VEC). One respondent encapsulated the general sense:

> ...concepts beyond the competitiveness agenda are named if not well understood. At least this gives us a licence for some action, however limited, and continued lobbying for education to be about more than employability and economic prosperity. (Programme Co-ordinator, VEC)

Community Education

Community Education -Its Nature and Potential

A report by AONTAS (2004) based on a series of roundtable discussions on community education highlighted that community education is subject to mixed interpretations and approaches. This was verified in the one-to-one interviews and group interview. There was agreement that, to most people, community education simply means courses are delivered in a community setting. Generally the focus of courses is leisure, literacy, personal development or a labour market skill with little, if any, inclusion of 'a political dimension' promoting collective community or social action. Tellingly, one interviewee commented:

> The majority of courses, even within the C &V Sector, do not even address basic community issues, not to mention issues with a wider social or political dimension. Only a limited number of groups and organisation embrace this in its truest sense. (Director, National Voluntary Organisation)

The degree to which this happens, it was strongly felt, is largely determined by criteria set by funding agencies, organisational or group ethos and the approach of individual organisers and tutors. Most interviewees attached to the statutory sector considered it problematic that certain individuals and organisations within the C&V Sector advance community education primarily as an approach "located in motivating learners toward collective community and social action" (National Co-ordinator). They claimed this fails to acknowledge the full range of community education activity that can be used to broker social change. In addition, it was argued that there is little evidence that tutors

within community organisations have any greater commitment to this than those within formal institutions. In this regard some commented that the White Paper on Adult Education over emphasised community- based women's groups and their approach, perhaps unintentionally, diminishing the value and significance of other community based initiatives. Significantly, divergent emphases and approaches were cited as inhibiting healthy debate on how community education could be constructed to meet a variety of objectives within communities.

Particular strengths of community education include the fact that certification is not an expected outcome. DES guidelines are broad allowing considerably flexibility in how initiatives are designed. However interviewees highlighted that it is seen as a marginal activity within many VECs, and "as yet there is no clear strategy for its development within the IVEA" (CEO, VEC). A weakness noted by some, especially CEFs and staff in National Voluntary Organisations is that most VECs allocate funding 'in terms of hours for courses' with little scope for general planning and development work. It was understood by one-to-one and group interviewees that community education as advocated in the White Paper on Adult Education is directed at individuals and communities that experience socio-economic and/or educational disadvantage. It is seen as a tool to engage individuals who may not return to formal institutions in less formal learning activity. Agreement that it is fair to use "limited and scarce resources" (CEF, VEC) in this manner was obvious.

There was a keen sense that "education enables individuals to engage with social and community issues and act as responsible citizens" (CEO, VEC). In this context many noted a strong relationship between community education initiatives, social inclusion

and the kind of social change that enables individuals participate and function more effectively in society, as it is currently constructed.

> The system (that is government and statutory agencies) is happy to support efforts to bring individuals up to certain level of education, to help them gain information and skills for participation in society, as they see it, of course, or bring communities up to a certain point of development, but beyond that and certainly in terms of supporting activity that seeks to challenge the status quo, they don't see this as their responsibility. (National Co-ordinator)

Indeed a number of respondents highlighted that the case for a social change agenda receives little attention when further education courses are meeting the needs of middle class populations reflecting a judgement that

> ...only those from less well off communities need to be motivated, through community education, towards collective community action and social change" Community education is not seen as a necessary vehicle for social change in middle class communities. Why? Because we don't see that they really need to change. (CEO,VEC).

While many respondents mentioned the sensitive relationship between community development and community education a clear sense of what this means was absent, even within the group discussion where there was time to share opinions. A Principal Officer in the DES claimed "...the focus of community education under the Department of Education and Science is closely aligned to individual needs". Therefore, supporting community and social action was seen as more in keeping with the responsibilities of the DCR&GA that has responsibility for local and community development. The Principal Officer in the DCR&GA who noted that "community education or community development is not the sole responsibility of any one Department or agency nor should it be" shared this view. Funding from an array of Government Departments and statutory agencies was generally acknowledged as appropriate for community education activity given the breadth of activity falling under this umbrella. Nonetheless some felt this brings with it the issue of short-term funding from a variety of sources with different agendas making it difficult to build capacity or plan effectively for long-term

activity. Others considered it led to duplication of provision "letting everyone off the hook for addressing contentious areas" (Service Manager, VEC). Some considered that if a larger proportion of the available resources was filtered through VECs a more strategic area based focus to a process driven and community development agenda could be pursued. Others felt a move in this direction would simply mean more VEC courses in more locations. According to many what is required is greater collaboration between Government Departments, education providers and the C&V Sector to establish a framework for provision.

> Without this there will be no real strategy for introducing a community action and social change focus into the broad sweep of courses under community education negating the fact that the White Paper recognised a key role for community education. (CEF, VEC)

In this regard the appointment of CEFs was seen as indicating Government commitment to the further development of community education and described as, "pivotal in shaping community education in the future" (Programme Co-ordinator, VEC).

Community Education Facilitators

The DES was commended for devising a role description[1] and specification for CEFs that embraces experience in community work and adult and community education as well as mainstream teaching. Nonetheless, some argued the DES should be more proactive in ensuring that VECs interpret the post as set out in the guidelines in order to coperfasten strategic development of community education nationally. This was seen as especially important as community education was singled out in the White Paper on Adult Education as supporting the promotion of collective development at community level. In contrast others, especially senior and programme managers within VECs claimed VECs must have flexibility in how to activate the role within its overall

[1] Circular on Pay and Conditions for Community Education Facilitators, 45/2002. (Department of Education and Science, 2002).

resources and priorities, to ensure strategic development locally. Notably, those attached to the C&V Sector cautioned there are signs that the role might become over institutionalised and restricted within VECs.

> The role as flagged up in the White Paper had significant potential to effect change. Unfortunately, it is now being seen by the Department and most VECs in a very narrow way, it could turn out just to be more of the same. Then there is the constant reminders that the post is within the VEC. What does that mean? Are they afraid, that CEFs might actually come up with new ideas?
>
> (Director, National Voluntary Organisation)

Some contended that if staff changes within the DES had come about before 2003, the role may not have emerged in its current form and the training and support programme, located with AONTAS would not have been agreed. This they believed, highlighted an over-reliance on the interpretations of individuals in certain positions and an absence of genuine commitment by the DES to the development of community education as espoused in the White Paper on Adult Education.

It was clear that practice emerging within VECs is mixed. Some CEFs are heavily involved in the co-ordination of activity such as the BTEI (Part-time Programmes), reducing time available for development work within the community. However, a positive effect of this is that it facilitates linkage with other programmes, which is central for the strategic development of the role and of community education within the Adult Education Service. While other CEFs are being encouraged to focus primarily on development activities within the community, this is not always considered a central feature of the Adult Education Service. In other cases "the role and related functions are being integrated within the adult education team, giving them the status they deserve" (National Co-ordinator). CEFs cited a number of barriers to their practice promoting collective community and social action. Significantly these include the absence of clarity on what this actually means and who shares responsibility for it; a

lack of consensus on what constitutes community education; the perceived low status of community education and a history of little engagement between other further education programmes and community education activity except to recruit learners for full-time courses. These sentiments were reflected by comments within the group interview where views were exchanged between personnel linked to different aspects of the adult education service. New consultative planning processes underpinning the preparation of Education Plans within VECs and requiring interaction and exchange of ideas across programmes were identified as offering potential to address these barriers. Training in strategic planning under the National Training and Support Programme for CEFs was cited as helpful in strengthening the participation of CEFs in the planning process thereby assisting them to "embed the role" within their VEC. Reports on the training sessions and minutes of the Steering Committee for the Training and Support Programme verified this[2].

Commenting further on the National Training and Support Programme, CEFs considered it useful for networking and exploring different perspectives on community education. They noted it assisted them in clarifying their role and in devising strategies to positively challenge other VEC staff, thereby deepening their understanding of and willingness to engage with community education. But most emphasised that progress will be heavily dependent on leadership from senior management.

> Without leadership and direction from the Department and senior managers in VECs our efforts will be a struggle and community education will remain marginalised with limited status and impact in relation to other programmes.
> (CEF, VEC)

[2] Reports and Minutes of the Steering Committee for the Training and Support for CEFs (Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science, March 2004; June 2004;.October,2004; April, 2005; June 2005; October 2005)

It was widely acknowledged that it is too soon to examine the benefit of the post of CEFs to the development of community education. CEFs felt that the newly formed Association of the Community Education Facilitators will be helpful in raising the profile of and widening discussion on community education within the further education sector over time. However, they were realistic that change and development will be slow as they are located within a traditional system where community education is underdeveloped, under resourced and not well understood even by many of those involved.

Structures and Systems

National and Local Structures

Structures and systems were noted as significantly influencing what gets implemented and how, when and by whom it is implemented. The absence of effective co-ordinating and implementation structures, an issue for further and adult education for years, was attributed primarily to a lack of will within the DES. Failure to establish the National Adult Learning Council (NALC) and the Local Adult Education Boards (LAEBs) was described as regrettable by respondents at local and national level, given their intended planning and co-ordinating function across services. Those attached to the C&V Sector were highly critical of the decision by the DES to review the establishment of NALC without consultation "As with other things, the over reliance on the understanding of certain individuals and the power they can exercise within a system became obvious" (National Co-ordinator). The outcome, a proposal that NALC will be an advisory board as opposed to a statutory agency was considered a retrograde step, diminishing its authority and running the risk that it, and consequently LAEBs, will not be taken seriously. It was generally felt that because the structures promised in the White Paper

on Adult Education, did not emerge policy, priorities and actions are being progressed in a singular and disjointed manner.

> We very soon realised that some things were going to happen and others were not, so we went after things in our own area because we knew they would not happen otherwise. (Director, National Voluntary Organisation)
>
> Co-ordinated development did not emerge so areas progressed separately for example the National Adult Literacy Strategy, the BTEI (referring here to Part-time Programmes), e- learning at third level. (Principal Officer, DES)

A Principal Officer in the DES was confident that the decision to review NALC was merited. In her view there are

> ...enough structures at national and county level already such as the National Qualifications Authority, Awarding Councils, County Development Boards, all of which have co-ordinating functions, are representative and consultative, with heavy involvement of further education interests.

Social inclusion units within Governments Departments and inter-departmental committees are also in place. What is really required is "more joined-up thinking within Government" coupled with intra-agency and inter-agency work to "make what is in place already work more effectively". Some claimed that limiting planning for and effective co-ordination of adult education in this will restrict the involvement of the C&V Sector. It will also deny local service providers, practitioners and communities opportunities to explore a more holistic vision for the expansion of further education services "that address issues other than human capital development and labour market needs" (National Co-ordinator). There was a strong feeling that the comprehensive consultation process that underpinned the White Paper on Adult Education has been negated, "increasing the risk that meeting labour market needs will remain the priority, sidelining new opportunities to insert a wider focus on a community and social change agenda" (Programme Co-ordinator, VEC).

Aside from overarching structures such as NALC and LAEBs some respondents commented on the absence of formal linkages between the further education providers attached to the DES. For example there is no structured relationship between the various managerial bodies[3] that negotiate on behalf of further education providers. Even within the IVEA developments in this regard "have been very recent". Consequently capacity to develop a cohesive approach to policy and influence national developments is diminished.

> ...for example in relation to the current consultative process under FETAC we are not organised. Bodies such as FÁS and Teagasc have a history of internal structures that support planning across all their centres. Of course provision in such agencies is much tighter than within VECs, with a key focus on specific labour market competencies, so they are less concerned with how general education develops. (CEO, VEC)

Internal Systems

Sub-groups related to specific areas including further and adult education have recently been developed within the IVEA. Supporting more effective linkages within the VEC arena, this approach will facilitate deeper exploration of issues emanating from relevant fora and will inform future discussions with the DES. This was viewed by CEOs and other VEC staff as offering new opportunities to debate the role of further education in supporting community and social action as well as meeting individual learner and labour market needs.

> We need to have the difficult philosophical discussions at the highest level, at all levels, and our systems have to be developed to accommodate this, otherwise debate on some issues will remain located in the academic world, within lobby groups, or limited to certain programmes and individual educators. (CEO, VEC)

Systems to support planning at local level were uppermost in the minds of those planning and managing service delivery within VECs and was energetically discussed

[3] Managerial Bodies include the JMB-AMCSS (Joint Managerial Body-Association of Management of Catholic Secondary School) the IVEA (Irish Vocational Education Association). The JMB supports the development and implementation of policy and acts and speaks on behalf of voluntary secondary schools. The IVEA which supports the development and implementation of policy and acts and speaks on behalf of VECs.

in the group interview as well as by individual interviewees. VECs were described as being in transition given the range of new legislation coming to bear on how they plan and deliver services.

In particular, the consultation process underpinning the preparation of five year Education Plans was recognised as important. A significant outcome is cross fertilisation of ideas at intra-agency and inter-agency level and within the community when agreeing the ethos, mission and priorities across services. Respondents commented on the value of local education networks, now established in most VECs, involving VEC staff, other agencies and community based groups. Staff from different services are networking with each other and community interests, some for the first time.

> This might help us really explore what we mean by community action and social change and how our services contribute to this. But I don't see community and social change as completely separate and skills and qualifications for personal and employment needs can also meet the other agenda.
>
> (Programme Co-ordinator, VEC)

Within these contexts some saw potential for embedding the concept of empowerment in further education and exploring how all programmes share responsibility for supporting the empowerment of individual and communities. Endorsement of the outcome of such processes by top management and VEC Committees was seen as crucial.

Bureaucracy

The bureaucratic nature of the statutory sector and EU funding was highlighted, in particular by those attached to C&V Sector and VECs. By this, people were referring to guidelines, reporting requirements and monitoring systems underpinning further education programmes. The programmatic nature of provision was considered

especially problematic. Each programme is funded separately, framed within specific guidelines and objectives and accounted for separately to the Department of Education and Science or agency acting on behalf of the Government or EU. "It's crazy, the number of separate proposals and reports that have to be made to deliver core services not to mind anything additional" (CEO, VEC). This, it was argued, discourages planning across programmes prohibiting a cohesive approach to service delivery and reducing flexibility. Focusing on issues beyond the individual learner or specific course has therefore become associated with certain initiatives, in particular, those falling under community education.

All programme guidelines now promote equality of access and flexible approaches to delivery. But learner outcomes in terms of achieving basic skills, national certification, subject expertise and vocational skills were seen as the primary reference points against which success is measured, giving a clear message to further education providers. Attention to wider outcomes remains at the behest of individual providers and tutors. In tandem, details required in monitoring reports were described as cumbersome, concentrating primarily on quantitative data such as numbers achieving certification or progressing to employment or other courses. This, many believed, absorbs so much time and energy there is little left to invest in "...the critical reflection and planning so crucial to visionary development of services. Quantitative data takes precedence as it's tied to funding." (Service Manager, VEC). An examination of reporting templates for further education programmes and monitoring reports for the European Structural Fund Evaluation Unit within the DES confirms this[4].

[4] Progress reports for the European Social Fund Monitoring Committee are prepared annually across all programmes. (www.education.ie; ESF Unit, Department of Education and Science).

DES officials and National Co-ordinators conceded that funding and reporting mechanisms are complex and advised of plans underway to implement more integrated funding and reporting systems. Internal DES reports[5] verify this but highlight the difficulty of initiating such changes. For example the promised Further Education Information Management System has to be developed in tandem with other sections within the DES - primary, post primary and third level. Some welcomed new processes attached to quality assurance measures required under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (Ireland, 1999) and the preparation of Education Plans required under the Vocational Education Amendment Act (Ireland, 2001). But there were reservations that any potential positive impact will be diminished if additional resources are not made available to extend or broaden supports and services. Without additional resources bureaucratic demands on individual managers, co-ordinators and tutors will simply escalate further limiting time available for planning, reflection or engagement in philosophical issues.

> Occasionally we are asked for individual stories but qualitative, personal and social outcomes are often not analysed, or even recorded, in any significant way. Now, the new planning and quality processes and equality legislation might push us more in that direction, time will tell, and we don't know that we will be getting any extra resources to do this. (Service Manager, VEC).

Labour Market Focus of Programmes

A key message from Principal Officers in the DES was that feeding into the knowledge and market economy is an important and essential function of further education within VECs. A core responsibility of VECs is to build individual capacity and employment potential by providing certification opportunities that have direct relevance to the labour market for school leavers and adults with low skills. Stressing the importance of national economic development they viewed skills for employment, individual

[5] A series of internal papers and proposals within the Further Education Section address this issue. For example

development, community action and social change as compatible with and complementary to each other.

> I don't see major contradictions between these agendas for providers or tutors. They have leeway in how to insert concepts such as conscious raising and citizenship into all programmes through general modules such as communications, personal development, locally-designed modules and even the specific skills modules. (Principal Officer, DES)

To varying degrees National Co-ordinators and VEC staff accepted this. But they felt that in practice programme objectives and assessment processes do little to encourage this as the primary focus is on personal competencies and specific labour market skills. Providers or individual tutors are not required to give attention to issues such as community development or social issues except where these relate to core content in a course such as social care or youth studies. Teaching qualifications required to be become a whole-time teacher are designed for teaching at primary and second level. Attention to adult education is not compulsory although some colleges offer course electives for self-selection by learners. In-service staff development tends to focus on technical subject expertise and operation issues. Therefore many of our further education tutors had had no exposure to adult education philosophies or methodologies. The force of the labour market case, argued several respondents, is clearly visible in that expansion of programmes and funding increases generally go hand in hand with public debate on skills gaps and employment trends.

> Resources for initiatives other than those leading to skills and qualifications relevant in some way to the labour market are limited. Other things clearly have a lesser priority, prohibiting more comprehensive development of general education within further education. (National Co-ordinator)

This is reflected in recent initiatives providing new resources to VECs. Excluding the appointment of Community Education Facilitators additional resources (when inflation is taken into account) have not been made available to widen community education

activity. The CEFs and several others believed that community education is 'a poor relation' to other further education programmes, getting the least amount of resources and therefore the least amount of attention from the DES and within VECs. Against this the BTEI (Part-time Programmes) commands an annual budget of fifteen and a half million euro[6]. The Initiative is heavily oriented to providing certified outcomes for learners which improve access to the labour market (Department of Education and Science, 2004; see Appendix Three).

One CEO commented on research as far back as the early nineties that highlighted the crucial relationship between qualifications, job prospects and individual earning power. "Not to recognise and accept this would be remiss of providers, if we don't I tell you we will soon be out of business" (Programme Co-ordinator, VEC). The Director of NALA and others noted dramatic, but long overdue increases in funding for the provision of adult literacy in the past 10 years, prompted significantly by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS):

> IALS, a survey that while recognising the social implications of illiteracy, located the literacy debate firmly within the economic domain. without doubt, this forced the Government to invest more in this area.
>
> (Director, National Voluntary Organisation)

A respondent working with Travellers said the market agenda is especially visible in training centres for Travellers where most courses have a clear skills base or vocational focus. The irony, in his view, is that after 15 years of provision there is still a lot of discrimination against Travellers in the world of work within the settled community. Many never engage in any work outside the Travelling Community. Evidence of commitment by VECs to promoting social change for Travellers beyond "being able to fit into settled society" is limited, he said. For example in one VEC, a condition

[6] Annual budget profiles for further education programmes (Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science, 2005).

attached to the lease of premises for a Traveller Training Centre is that Travellers cannot use it to meet about social or community issues. In accepting this condition without question the VEC was disassociating from actively encouraging Travellers to progress wider community and social issues. In another VEC, some VEC committee members while supporting training for Travellers voted against halting sites in certain localities, "perhaps understandably in one way but again showing contradictions in terms of support for real social change".

Some felt that most further education providers and educators are more comfortable responding to labour market demands than general education needs. Although this carries the pressure of being responsive to changing employment trends, it provides a clear focus, commanding status with employers, third level colleges and learners.

> Everyone easily understands the labour market issue. Skills gaps or demand is identified. Providers seek additional resources or reallocate current ones due to decreased demand in other areas. You recruit and deliver to certification standards. It's what industry wants, it's what the Department, Government and even EU want, it's what most learners want. It's an approach that most of us - learners, teachers, and managers- can easily identify with. So we get on with it, in many ways it's safe. (CEO, VEC)

In general it was thought that adult educators are ambivalent about a wider social and political change agenda at least 'in the radical sense' and in the absence of clearer direction from DES will remain so.

> Education contributes to social change in many ways; don't forget economic change is also about social change, higher employment levels generally improves communities. We definitely have responsibility for ensuring learners develop skills that enable them to participate in society but this can be achieved through most programmes even vocational ones. If learners choose to engage in community activity or social and political action, whatever, that's up to them. Participation in our services may enable them acquire relevant skills and develop an interest but we can't be associated directly with it.
>
> (Principal Officer, DES)

Commenting on the centrality of a skills and labour market focus in current national discussions in relation to new processes and awards which are to apply under the Further Education Awards Council some claimed that other statutory providers of further education such as FÁS and Fáilte Ireland are comfortable with such trends. Within an education and training context this is their primary focus.

> Their priority is that learners acquire skills for work so they don't especially see the need to make the case for a wider focus. But the DES, VECs and the IVEA should. Otherwise we are losing an opportunity for further education to be a dynamic social change agent. But I have to say I am not sure how many of my colleagues agree with this. (CEO, VEC)

Since the DES, the IVEA and VECs have no agreed policy position on a wider agenda for further education it is difficult to influence current trends in this regard.

The Role of the Individual Educator

General Factors Affecting the Role of Educators

Respondents understood the role of the individual educator to be contingent on wide ranging factors including organisational leadership and ethos, government priorities, programme guidelines, assessment systems, personal convictions and not least learner expectations. While limited by external factors, there was some consensus that, depending on personal convictions, individual educators can significantly influence what happens in the learning environment.

Discussion in the group interview and one-to one interviews emphasised that guidelines underpinning further education programmes within VECs, excluding community education, prioritise basic and vocational skills that have a labour market focus. A review of DES guidelines underpinning programmes [7] also indicated this. Respondents considered this to be the driving force behind the selection of course content and

[7] Guidelines for courses under the PLC programme, VTOS, STTCs, Youthreach and the BTEI (Part-time Programme) and the Adult Guidance Initiative (www.education.ie)

methodology, irrespective of the personal convictions of individual tutors. Some noted that the majority of people involved in delivering adult education are happy with the system (wider societal developments as well as the education system) and do not see it as their function to seek that learners become critical of the system, in a political sense.

> I don't know that I want to change the system in the radical change sense, most benefit from it. In my own managerial role, I think in terms of social inclusion, of working to ensure wider access to education programmes that lead to qualifications and core skills. (CEO, VEC)

Over three quarters of respondents attached to the statutory sector considered it naive to expect statutory services to explicitly promote radical political and social change. Citing recent cuts in funding to the Community Workers Co-operative[8] the Principal Officer in the DCR&GA claimed:

> The state is hardly going to liberally fund services and individuals that continually challenge it. If they want to do that, they need to think about getting all their resources elsewhere.

A Programme Co-ordinator within one VEC remembered an Adult Education Officer being moved to another location because she allocated VEC hours to community groups involved in political issues with which the VEC did not wish to be associated. Another was ostracised within the VEC team because he openly engaged in political issues within the community in which he worked.

However, many considered a realistic expectation of further education and therefore educators is the development of critical thinking skills crucial to individual empowerment and effective participation is society. Teaching methodologies and approaches that develop investigative and analytical skills associated with individual capacity to evaluate wide ranging life situations were rated as very important. But the extent to which individuals get involved in communities, politics or social issues was

[8] The Community Workers Co-operative is a Community Development Organisation that works toward social and political change and is in receipt of Government grants.

considered to be a matter of personal choice and not a concern for the individual tutor. There was agreement that all programmes can contribute to critical thinking, individual empowerment and subsequent involvement in community or social action depending on how one views what contributes to this. For example some referred to evidence from learners that returning to basic education enabled them develop the skills and confidence necessary to become involved in community and political activity. Studies carried out by NALA, under VTOS and by The Basic Skills Agency[9] that document learner experiences support this. A Principal Officer in the DES believed that:

> A particular good example of education contributing to social change is that many Travellers who have become spokespersons for the Travelling Community admit they gained the skills and personal confidence required through programmes in Senior Traveller Training Centres. (Principal Officer, DES)

Among others she also drew attention the fact that "provision in further education is more flexible and not as confined by set curriculum as provision at either second or even third level" Some proposed that the new framework for qualifications and awarding systems provide even greater flexibility as national standards will be more broadly defined. Offering new opportunities for accreditation and certification, providers will have more responsibilities for and freedom in the design and delivery of content and assessment methods. Despite this increased flexibility, many felt that the trend is towards certification that establishes knowledge, skills and competencies expressed in specific learning outcomes. Therefore, in practice the framework may in fact be restrictive.

> The dominant paradigm is exams and assessment and since most courses are linked to a specific subject area or vocational skill content is driven by the specific assessment outcomes and qualifications.
>
> (Programme Co-ordinator, VEC)

[9] The Basic Skills Agency provides research and development support to providers of basic education in the United Kingdom. Basic skills here refers to literacy and numeracy.

In the group interview a VEC Programme Co-ordinator said

> .....the more certification becomes the focus, which is helpful I agree in one way, the more tutors feel they have to work within the boundaries of assessment outcomes and these are so competency and skill based that less and less time is being given to what I call the extras or innovatively addressing wider issues. That's my experience and I have been involved as a tutor and co-ordinator over a number of years. When I first became involved we (he meant tutors and organisers) were more relaxed about taking chances, giving time to more general education.

Learners it was felt have strong views on what education is about, based on their past experience of education and/or their current needs. Most believed that learners by and large undertake courses for a particular personal, vocational, or leisure purpose. The explicit introduction of issues related to social responsibility, community activity and political or social change is often not what they expect or want and as one National Co-ordinator said, "who are we to say they should have to learn about these. I doubt if most tutors could do this well without a great deal more support".

Qualifications and Staff Development

It follows from the above that the issue of appropriate qualifications and training for adult educators was raised. Several respondents suggested that current pre-service teaching qualifications are limited in equipping people to working in further and adult education and are:

> .....restrictive in engendering commitment to introducing any kind of social analysis into the act of teaching. Educators themselves need to be supported to develop their own critical thinking skills in order to be able to teach others to become critical thinkers. (CEO, VEC)

Many teachers in further education, it was highlighted, entered the system as post-primary teachers. While they may have acquired valuable practical experience they have had little, if any, opportunities to explore adult education theories against which to critique their own thinking or practice. In addition, many are disinterested or unfamiliar

with critiquing wider societal issues. They are inexperienced in employing strategies within their specific subject area that enable and encourage learners to do so. Those from the C&V Sector were inclined to advocate the establishment of specific qualifications for further, adult and community education citing the success of some programmes already in place. Others advocated a review of current teaching qualifications to incorporate modules in adult education.

The complexity of moving towards separate qualifications for further education was raised by senior managers in VECs and DES officials and was evident in minutes of a meeting of the Steering Committee of the Training and Support Programme for CEFs[10]. In particular employment restrictions would arise in respect of future appointments, placing staff already in place without qualifications at a disadvantage and limiting the pool of expertise available. Further discussion on this issue was advocated building on the positive outcomes of current undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in adult and community education. Such discussion should ensure linkage with teaching qualifications for other levels of education to maximise resources and expand rather than limit the pool of expertise available.

The importance of on-going staff development was evident. Current practice was considered to be contrived, primarily addressing technical and operational issues such as safety and health, new legislation, management strategies or reporting systems dependent on whether the audience is tutors, co-ordinators or managers. Even where the focus is on curriculum and assessment the emphasis is mainly on specific subject expertise and associated learning outcomes. This trend was confirmed by an internal

[10] Minutes of the Steering Committee for the Training and Support for CEFs (Further Education Section Department of Education and Science, June 2005).

DES profile[11] of the type of training and support provided for staff in further education programmes through National Co-ordinators and National Support Services.

> Professional development courses deal mostly with specific programmes, subject expertise and operational issues. They should provide more space for exploring philosophies, for self-reflection, for examining group work processes and developing a basic understanding of community development issues and social analysis. (National Co-ordinator)

Those who have responsibility for organising local or national staff development initiatives indicated that adult education theory, including transformative learning, is sometimes the focus, or at least part of, staff development programmes. However, the extent to which this happens was deemed to be dependent on individual co-ordinators or managers and in the absence of a national strategy "a hit and miss approach will prevail" (Service Manger, VEC). Consequently the impact on adult education practice is short lived and over reliant on the conviction of individuals sometimes placing them, especially those in part-time positions, in vulnerable positions.

A recent decision by the DES[12] to provide VECs with a staff development budget to manage across programmes instead of funding initiatives via individual programmes was welcomed. National Co-ordinators and VEC staff saw this as an opportunity to develop a more co-ordinated, cohesive and dynamic strategy for staff development. However some cautioned it might not mean a better balance between technical, operational issues and adult education theory without direction from the DES, National Co-ordinators, VEC management and expressed interest by tutors. Some suspected this might not be forthcoming.

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[11] The Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science prepared an internal profile of its Support Services for further education programmes and initiatives in 2005 (unpublished).

[12] Department of Education and Science-Business Plan (Department of Education and Science, 2005).

Conclusion

Findings fall under five interconnected areas: *Shared Understandings and Meanings; Community Education; Structures and Systems; the Role of the Individual Educator; and the Labour Market Focus of Programmes.*

The concept of transformative learning is not widely understood within the field of adult education. Consensus on the meaning of terms and language such as consciousness raising, citizenship, cultural development and community development commonly used in national and EU policy does not prevail. Interestingly, the concepts of economic competitiveness and labour market issues are underpinned by common understanding. Social inclusion and social change are sometimes taken to mean the one thing suggesting that the most common understanding of social change is to enable individual to participate effectively in society as it is currently constructed as opposed to working to effect change in the structures and systems that support the status quo.

Community education in general refers to courses delivered in community settings and most courses do not embrace an approach that promotes community action or social change. Community education as advocated in the White Paper on Adult Education is directed at individuals and communities experiencing socio-economic or educational disadvantage in order to support and enable more effective participation in society. In the context of limited resources this approach is widely endorsed. Divergent views and approaches are seen as inhibiting debate on a community action and social change agenda within further education provision.

Consequently there is a lack of clarity about how to interpret and act on certain aspects of policy when delivering services. The role of CEFs was described as pivotal in

shaping the development of community education in the future but considered at risk of becoming over institutionalized within VECs. Significantly barriers to CEFs promoting collective community and social action include the perceived low status of community education and a history of little engagement between community education activity and other further education programmes. Training and support has enabled CEFs challenge current perceptions and practice but long-term change will be dependent on leadership from senior management.

Failure to establish NALC and LAEBs to plan and co-ordinate future developments was seen as regrettable. Confining the issue of effective planning and co-ordination to joined-up government and inter-agency and intra-agency work, as advocated by a senior DES official, was seen by some as potentially limiting the involvement of the community and voluntary. Additionally, service providers, practitioners and local communities will be denied opportunities to explore a holistic vision for further education increasing the risk that labour market needs will continues to overshadow attention to a community action and social change agenda. Local consultation processes underpinning VEC Education Plans, local networks and sub-groups within the IVEA are all described as positive. These may support an informed, cohesive approach to policy development and promote an exploration of how all programmes can contribute to the empowerment of individuals and communities.

In contrast the bureaucratic nature of statutory services is cited as problematic. The programmatic nature of further education and reporting and monitoring systems limit a focus on empowerment issues beyond the individual to areas like community education. Furthermore they reduce time available for "the critical reflection and planning so crucial to visionary development of services" (CEO, VEC).

A key message from senior DES officials is that meeting the needs of the knowledge economy and labour market is an essential function of VECs. Many believe that education for employment, individual empowerment, community action and social change are not mutually exclusive. Rather they are compatible and complementary. In general there is ambivalence about introducing an explicit community action and social change agenda into programmes except where this is a core element of specific courses such as social care, youth studies. Many further education providers and educators are perceived to be more comfortable with a labour market focus. A realistic expectation of further education programmes is the development of the critical thinking skills crucial for effective participation in society. In this regard selection of teaching methodologies that promote investigative and analytical skills is seen as important and can be incorporated into all further education programmes. The new qualifications framework provides even greater flexibility as providers have more responsibility and freedom in how programmes are designed and delivered. Nonetheless some believe that qualifications and skills directed at the labour market are restrictive.

The role and influence of the individual educator in the promotion of a community action and social agenda in contingent on factors such as organisational ethos, Government priorities, programme guidelines and assessment systems, personal convictions and learner expectations. A review of undergraduate and postgraduate studies as well as in-service staff development programmes to include more attention to adult education theory was advocated. This is seen as important in enabling teachers to critique their own practice against adult education theory; develop their own critical thinking skills; introduce social analysis into programmes and thereby encourage learners to become critical thinkers.

CHAPTER SIX

KEY MESSAGES FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

Introduction

The study has explored the tensions and challenges experienced by personnel working with and within VECs in inserting a community action and social change focus into further education programmes with reference to the type of transformative learning espoused by Freire, Mezirow and Habermas. This was considered in the context that the White Paper on Adult Education (Ireland, 2000) identified six overlapping priorities: consciousness raising, citizenship, cohesion, competitiveness, cultural development and community building. Together these see education as linking personal experiences with wider structural factors; enabling an active role for all in shaping the overall direction of society; supporting individual empowerment, developing a collective sense of purpose and promoting employment, economic growth and prosperity (pp. 28-29). However, most further education programmes focus primarily on promoting economic competitiveness, manisfested in an over-emphasis on the acquisition of skills and qualifications that improve employability and increase adaptability to labour market needs.

The main research consisted of one-to-one interviews (sixteen) and a group interview (involving four people) with personnel working in management and co-ordination roles in national and local contexts to identify their understandings, perspectives, and experiences. Relevant reports were used to cross check and verify some to the ideas that emerged in the interviews. Key research findings emerged under five interrelated themes; shared understandings and meanings (language, concepts); community education; structures and systems; labour market focus of

programmes and the role of the individual educator. Here I draw out conclusions, which contribute, to the debate on adult and further education in Ireland. Broadly these are framed within three interconnected areas:

- Vision and Philosophical Stance
- Messages for Community Education
- Institution and Individual Power.

Vision and Philosophical Stance

Transformative and emancipatory learning as espoused by Freire, Mezirow and Habermas is achieved by the learner becoming aware through self-reflection of their situation and perspectives and engaging in a critique of that awareness as espoused by Freire, Mezirow and Habermas achieves transformative and emancipatory learning. It involves a critique of the origins of one's attitudes and ways of interpreting the world. In this scenario educators should be interested in developing learners' awareness, helping them to see the world in multiple ways. This prepares learners for reflective action to bring about changes in their lives, communities and wider society, which is a complex, political activity. I appreciate the difficulties in pursuing this through formalised programmes of study. Educators have to give careful attention to preparing relevant material and selecting dialogical methodologies and often have to interrogate the colonization of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1984; Fleming and Murphy, 2005, forthcoming) in subtle as opposed to explicit ways. Efforts have to be balanced against the constraints of the system and the complex needs of learners, which include certification in specific skills and expertise. Limited understanding and contested meanings of what education is about are particular issues.

Findings in this research emphasise that transformative learning is not well understood with debate and interest confined to a small circle of academics, lobbyist and individual educators. Ideas such as consciousness raising, citizenship, personal development, community development, social responsibility are viewed by most adult education policy makers and practitioners associated with VECs as contributing to individual empowerment, community action and social change and therefore transformative learning. However, there is little consensus on what all this means, and how it might best be supported through further education programmes

This lack of understandings and therefore consensus was acutely evident in the fact that many of the interviewees tended to offer programmes aimed at social inclusion as indicating Government commitment to the kind of social transformation. advocated in this study. Some fail to see that social inclusion is an attempt re-integrate and to 'normalise' the unemployed and disaffected therefore legitimating the systems that might otherwise be regarded as contributing to exclusion (Preece, 2000; Barry, 1998). Social inclusion strategies focus primarily on improving employability and increasing basic skills so that people can participate more effectively in and benefit more from society as it is currently constructed. Therefore, in reality education initiatives linked to the social inclusion strategy collude with the dominant discourse of the knowledge economy; seducing the majority of educators (including those who support transformative learning theories as considered in this paper) into thinking they are making a contribution to radical social change. As an educator who claims some understanding of transformative learning theories and a personal interest in incorporating a political dimension into education programmes I can identify with associated tensions for tutors and co-ordinators. Like others (Bynner and Parsons, 1987; Keogh and Downes, 1998;

Finglas Cabra Partnership, 1994) I have come across learners who claim that participating in a basic education course transformed their life because their confidence grew, job prospects improved, other learning opportunities became available or it encouraged greater involvement in community activity. This requires educators and administrators to find time to reflect on their educational and philosophical values in order that they do not get swept along with the tide.

This is difficult because cushioned by these positive outcomes and change for individuals we see ourselves as advocates of social transformation although neglecting a wider collective action and social transformation agenda. Clearly the absence of shared understandings, together with confusion and false beliefs that as educators we are contributing to the empowerment of communities and radical social change through our current suite of programmes is highly problematic. It has the effect of letting the Government off the hook for not effecting the systemic change and mechanisms to ensure a more equal balance between the personal, social and economic objectives. Reports by Murphy (1973) and Kenny (1984) and White Paper on Education (1995) all drew attention to the need for more effective, co-ordinated development of adult and further education.

Building on this the White Paper on Adult Education proposed the establishment of NALC and LAEB. Although initial work on setting up NALC commenced in 2003 this was suspended in 2004 to review its terms of reference and proposed responsibilities. While the final outcome has not yet been made public, it seems that NALC is in abeyance with the effect that the proposed establishment of LEABs is also suspended. This is despite a supposed European Union and Government

commitment to the more effective co-ordination of adult education and lifelong learning across stakeholders (statutory sector interests, C&V Sector, employers etc).

Undoubtedly these structures (if they come about) could provide opportunities for debate on important philosophical and practical concerns underpinning the development of adult and further education. Such debate should seek to arrive at common understandings on the language and concepts presented in policy and how they can best be translated into action. Interestingly findings in this study indicate that the C&V Sector are more concerned about the delay in preceding with the implementation of structures than those within the state sector although some in the state sector are clearly disappointed. This could be related to the fact that community and voluntary interests have much to gain from the creation of more formalised structures. They would have improved access to where policies are formulated and future developments agreed. On the other hand VECs and the IVEA would not just have to co-operate with others as they do now, but allow others to increasingly impact on how they shape their polices and practice. So in not avidly arguing for the implementation of the structures proposed in the White Paper on Adult Education they seem to be in Foucault's terms simultaneously exercising power and resisting change in an attempt to protect their current power base (Brookfield, 2004).

However, it is obvious that VECs and the IVEA are committed to improving their own internal mechanisms in order to develop and strengthen their capacity to influence national policy development. This may, as suggested in this study, offer potential to negotiate an increased community action and social change focus into further education. But firstly VECs must explore mutual understandings of terms

such as citizenship, consciousness raising, community development and learning for transformation. Secondly, they must examine new strategies for how existing further education programmes can be reconstituted to go beyond the current emphasis on interpersonal skills, personal development and social skills that focus primarily on participation in the status quo. This should include an examination of content and pedagogical processes that promote critical thinking and reflection and engage learners in a critique of social systems and structures. Action of this nature may well depend on individual managers, co-ordinators and individual tutors that understand and embrace transformative learning taking the first step and building allies within the VEC arena. In turn the IVEA, VECs and individual educators should through forging alliances with stakeholders especially learners, local communities, professional and voluntary associations and even the media should seek to influence change in the wider education and training system. Mayo as working with the logic of the system refers to such collective effort by those working within in order to be effective (Mayo, 1999, p. 6). Habermas argues such action has the potential "to inoculate lifeworld values of caring, ethical concerns and democratic principle into the system and so resist and reverse colonization" (Fleming and Murphy, forthcoming 2005).

The relevance of education levels to employability and its strong connection to improved standards of living for individuals and communities and national competitiveness is not disputed. Literature and statistics that verify this are extensive (ESRI, 2001; CSO, 1992; 2005). The important contribution of further education programmes with particular reference to early school leavers and adults with low or no qualifications is acknowledged. Clearly the findings show there is no ambiguity among policy makers and providers in this regard. In sharp contrast

the findings highlight varying views as to whether a social transformation focus in the radical, political sense is appropriate or even possible within VEC further education programmes. Some questioned if this is a realistic expectation given that VECs are state agencies. To borrow a phrase from Fleming they are "part of the apparatus of the state" (Fleming, 1998, p. 5) and therefore reflect its dominant value system, which is transmitted through all levels of education and other institutions of the state.

Policy emphases may identify the promotion of citizenship, consciousness raising, social cohesion and community building as priorities, which many view as providing opportunities for social transformation. But in practice funding is skewed in favour of certified programmes and learning outcomes that have a high occupational and employment focus, driving providers and tutors down a behaviourist, prescriptive route. The findings suggest that this has become a comfortable, safe option for most providers, which secures a reasonable share of available Government funding and the respect of learners and employers alike. According to Freire (1972a), Mezirow (1978), Shor (1992) and Habermas (1984), problems arise when the behaviourist approach is used alone as a way of facilitating learning. Objectives-based learning, outcomes based education, competency based instruction take over and education becomes preoccupied with narrow job related skills. This displaces general critical education that they argue teaches people to learn how to learn, to question, to research, to participate in groups and to act for reflection (Shor, 1996; Mayo, 1999, Brookfield, 2004; Collins, 1998). This is a challenge for the radical educators as while they can exercise authority in the classroom, their efforts are outweighed by the wider system.

Findings indicate that some policy makers and practitioners concur with the thinking of Freire and Shor and others (Shor & Freire, 1987). Any subject at any level provides opportunities to develop critical thought and reflection that are crucial for what Mezirow calls perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978). Likewise the 'ideal speech situation' advocated by Habermas (Hart, 1990; Habermas, 1996) which promotes the development of communicative competencies necessary for engagement in rational discourse and critical reflection can be created. Such opportunities may arise within modules that address highly specialised content as well as general education modules such as personal development and communications. In this regard courses with a particular labour market orientation are seen as compatible with individual empowerment and social transformation agenda.

I can identify with this, as in my own time as a tutor; I used topics such as family law, nutrition, and fashion trends to raise questions about the society in which we live. But I remember the kind of student resistance that Freire and Shor (1987) and Brookfield (2004) talk about. Some learners resisted my efforts preferring to get on with the more practical skills or didn't want their ideas to be challenged. Certainly I was aware of my limited skills to engage in social analysis and had to carefully plan my approach and selection of content in order that the discussions and group work did not become ineffectual and meaningless (Mayo, 1999; Shor and Freire, 1978). While these findings show some support for the notion that all learning situations lend opportunity to promote critical thinking and reflection it also contests that most adult educators are not themselves equipped to engage in social critique. Often the support of educators of like mind, through networking activities, is crucial to build

the skills and confidence necessary to introduce a political dimension on an on-going basis.

Adult educators are themselves products of the system and in their pre-service education have not participated to any great degree in adult education philosophies, dialogic processes or other pedagogical practices associated with transformative learning, this being so because the current qualifications required to become a whole-time teacher are not required to incorporate them. Any efforts to address this deficit should aim to include adult education philosophies and transformative theories into all teacher qualifications as opposed to creating a separate qualification for adult educators. This would cultivate a deeper interest in transformative education among a wider set of educators and across all levels of education building the potential for a more systemic approach. The findings show that in-service staff development programmes also give limited attention to this. Current effort in this regard is confined to a small number of individuals and lacks a co-ordinated strategy resulting in a hit and miss approach and limited impact.

The fact that there is no agreement on how to best support the promotion of critical thinking and critical reflection among adult educators and learners and within further education programmes poses challenges. For the most part further education providers consider they are doing what they are expected to do well. As educators we are more preoccupied with getting things done, that is courses delivered a certified, than exploring the philosophical issues underpinning education services. Therefore the case for change and new resources gets diminished in a bid for more resources to deliver more of the same as opposed to doing it differently. The result is little organised resistance to the almost complete labour market focus of further

education programmes. And what adult educators within VECs need is just that - an organised, co-ordinated effort to work out a philosophy for further education that goes beyond the economic agenda. Further education provision within VECs needs to be rescued from an almost complete pre-occupation with specific skills and addressing labour market needs.

Education is but one force in society (albeit a significant one) and as Mayo (1999) Freire (Freire and Shor, 1987) concede we should not expect education to do what it cannot do, namely transform society by itself (Mayo, p. 159). Nonetheless, a strong case needs to be made for a better balance between functional, instrumental objectives and other objectives. All further education programmes should aim to develop learners' critical thinking skills and communicative competencies. In this way they can support individual empowerment and transformation that Mezirow (1978; 1989) claims may or may not lead to social action. They will also promote and enable more effective participation in free and open public discourse in civil society that Habermas (Habermas, 1984; 1987; Fleming 2002;) claims has been eroded by the system world. In so doing further education programmes can make a contribution to inserting what Murphy and Fleming (forthcoming, 2005) call democratic accountability into the system. Current discussion around the development of a new awards structure for further education provides some opportunities for this type of change. Disappointingly the findings in this study show that the VECs are not well organised in this regard. My own involvement in this process in my current role within the DES confirm this. However recent moves within the IVEA to develop mechanisms to strengthen its capacity to influence national policy are having some effect.

Messages for Community Education

Community education is presented in literature as having stronger potential for promoting transformative learning than other components of adult or further education such as VTOS, PLC or the BTEI (Part-time Programmes). Certainly the process driven approach that initiates the kind of social analysis that leads to individual awareness and collective social action aimed at changing societal structures offers opportunities for transformative learning. (CORI,1999; Connolly,2003; AONTAS, 2004b,). The research findings in this study do not concur that this is a widespread approach to the delivery of community education. To the contrary they strongly indicate that the degree to which this happens is dependent on funding criteria, most of which has a narrow focus and requires outcomes linked to certification and improved employment prospects. In most instances community education is understood simply as courses delivered outside formal institutions, to meet the perceived needs of learners and communities, a view as persistent within community groups and organisation as the statutory sector. After that, as established in literature, understandings of what it is about and how it is delivered diverge, with little attention given to the process driven approach or a social transformation agenda.

Community groups and organisations have become increasingly involved in course delivery through resources available from VECs and a myriad of Government Departments and European Union initiatives. This study suggests broad agreement that, given the nature and breadth of community education activity, funding from an array of Government Departments and other sources is appropriate. A benefit of increased resources, whatever their source is that they enable wider course provision and greater area coverage. This suits the Government agenda as it is seen to be

addressing education disadvantage and reaching out to communities not well served already.

The findings suggest that community education activity funded by VECs is closely aligned to individual needs and interests. A strong social inclusion focus is evident with people agreeing that scarce resources should be directed at enabling individuals and communities of greatest disadvantage increase their level of education. Like the formal institutions, community groups and organisation that engage in course delivery through seeking resources or hosting courses on behalf of VECs have been seduced by the social inclusion agenda.

Lovett (1988) points out that this may mean that courses reach individuals not already catered for and those not interested or willing to attend courses within formal institutions. However it ignores the fact that community problems are national structural problems and neglects collective solutions. In addition, diverse unrelated activity contributes to unnecessary competition, duplication and fragmented effort. A disconnectness of VEC community education activity from other VEC activity, as indicated in the findings is also problematic. Such trends diminish opportunities for shared responsibility within and between agencies. The role of CEFs holds potential to bring together perspectives and effect more strategic development but only if supported by the DES and senior VEC management.

I argue that the increase in the number of community-based organisations and groups involved in direct delivery of courses serves only to exacerbate a lack of vision and strategy for community education activity of the type that promotes transformative learning. In engaging in course provision linked to specific labour

market outcomes and certification community groups and organisations increasingly find themselves bound up in all the related administrative tasks. A significant pitfall is that they become so entwined in this that they lose sight of a wider community development and social change focus. They become another arm of the Government and the official agenda of and organisations improving educational levels and therefore employability. I suggest community organisations and groups take a step back if they want to pursue a truly transformative learning agenda in their communities. Instead of becoming an agent of the state by delivering state funded courses they might be better to influence the kind of courses Government agencies make available and the associated pedagogical processes.

Of course they could allow their physical space to be used for the delivery of programmes funded by a Government agency. This would be valid, provided the Government agency took responsibility for the administration but allowed the host groups negotiate the delivery processes to be used. Such an approach might even generate funds from rent charges or a fee for development activities as a proportion of official tuition hours. This could then be combined with other resources to pursue a different type of community education activity. Such activity should be more in keeping with creating Habermas's 'public spaces' for the free and open debate in civil society on issues that affect participants' lives and communities (Habermas, 1996; Fleming, 2002). These courses should not be constrained by specific learning outcomes and the acquisition of labour market skills by individual learners. Examples could include group activity, networks or thematic seminars with guest speakers that promote discussion and debate. I am also thinking along the lines of the folk school and study circle models, which have been successful in Denmark and Sweden in attracting adult learners. This approach would require a

review of what community groups and organisations see as their core mission, philosophy and practice. It would also demand marketing support from the state that would nurture a learning culture where employers, society and learners place greater value on non-certified learning and recognise that it also builds personal competencies that have broad application in work and life.

Institution and Individual Power

VECs are state funded institutions. In line with the Government perspective of education as a socialising agent they are designed to support the dominant power and value system. They provide a wide range of adult and further education programmes most of which have predetermined objectives and separate reporting requirements. Emphasising the bureaucratic nature of VECs these findings suggest that this acts against co-operation and a flexible approach to the planning and delivery across most programmes. Local networks together with the consultative processes recently put in place to support the preparation of five year Education Plans (now required under the law) offer new opportunities for more effective planning. These processes could contribute to shared responsibility across VEC further education programmes for an increased focus on a community action and social change agenda. But while these processes promote greater intra-agency and interagency relationships and community involvement they may "become a blunt planning instrument" (Interview Participant, CEO, VEC) if not well understood and supported. If VECs are not provided with more flexible and increased resources little may change.

Within the VEC arena the programmatic nature of funding has led to various, associations forming that are aligned to adult education services and individual

programmes and initiatives. Each of these is separately organised, and pursues most of their activities independently of each other. As a combined force these associations should articulate a strong stance on key philosophical issues such as transformative learning. Mechanisms to support greater co-operation and collaboration need to be developed. Mechanisms for effective communication with the new internal structure in the IVEA also need to be agreed in order to reduce this fragmented, disjointed approach to policy development and practice. Such co-operation and collaboration across staff groupings and associations will enhance the efforts of individual educators who, while impacting positively on individual learners are unlikely to be able challenge the status quo in any significant way.

Integrated budgets from the DES may emerge in the near future but some programme specific guidelines are likely to continue. In addition plans are underway to develop an Integrated Further Education Support Service at national level to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to supporting local providers and to developing policy. I am encouraged by all of this and current efforts to bring the team of National Co-ordinators together to work in a more co-operative fashion. It promises opportunities to place a stronger focus on transformative learning within policy development, in-service courses and therefore within the management of local services. But this can only happen if the staff involved in the Support Service, the DES, the IVEA and managers of local services enable it to happen. My experience tells me that this will demand considerable attention to facilitating a cultural shift in work practices where sharing responsibility as equals becomes the norm as opposed to the current practice of working independently of each other to a large degree.

National Voluntary Agencies such as AONTAS and NALA need to pause and step back. They need to ask if they have become over-involved in the delivery of services for the state. They must interrogate their practice and ask if in becoming another delivery arm of the state they have diminished their capacity to lobby for change from outside the system. In this regard I am reminded of the historical backdrop to AONTAS as a "co-ordinating body, a clearing house for ideas, a creative and innovative centre and a think tank for Adult Education" (AONTAS, 2005, p. 2).

In conclusion, this study confirms a lack of consensus on and understanding of transformative learning and the role of further education within VECs in engaging learners in the process of perspective transformation. While there are many consultative fora at local and national level and therefore, to borrow a Habermas concept, public spaces where rational discourse and debate on the issue can take place, this is not happening to any great degree. Efforts are down to a few individual educators and some community and voluntary organisations that put the issue on the table and keep it there. The stronger focus on networks and new consultative planning processes within VECs is welcome and positive. However it is clearly time that more formalised structures to support more effective co-ordination of policy development for adult education policy were put into operation as promised in the White Paper on Adult Education (2000). Without such structures confusion and contention about much of the terminology and concepts used in current european and national level will prevail. A philosophical debate will elude us and a truly transformative agenda for adult and further education will continue to be overshadowed by a narrow labour market focus that has swept us along in the belief that economic growth will leads to a better life for all and better society.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE	**DEFINITIONS OF FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING**
APPENDIX TWO	**EXTRACTS FROM VEC ACTS**
APPENDIX THREE	**FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION**
APPENDIX FOUR	**GOVERNMENT ACTS RELEVANT TO EDUCATION PROVISION**
APPENDIX FIVE	**QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND FURTHER EDUCATION AWARDS**

APPENDIX ONE

DEFINITIONS OF FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Formal learning can be achieved when a learner decides to follow a programme of instruction in an educational institution adult training centre or in the workplace. Formal learning is generally recognised in a qualification or a certificate.

Non-formal learning arises when an individual follows a learning programme but it is not usually evaluated and does not lead to certification. However it can be structured by the learning institution and is intentional from the learner's point of view.

Informal learning results from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It does not usually lead to certification.

Source: Tissot, 2004; OECD,2005.

APPENDIX TWO

EXTRACTS FROM VEC ACTS

The Vocational Education Act, 1930

This Act empowers VECs to provide continuation and technical education and to make provision for their progressive development.

> .... "continuation education" means education to continue and supplement education provided in elementary schools and includes general and practical training in preparation for employment in trades ...and other industrial pursuits and also ...for improvement of young persons in the early stages of such employment. ..."technical education" means education pertaining to trades, manufacture, commerce and other industrial pursuits ....
>
> (Vocational Education Act, 1930, Part 1, p. 6)

Source: Vocational Education Act, 1930

The Vocational (Amendment) Act, 2001

The Act reforms and updates the Vocational Education Act, 1930 and its various amendments. The Act provides structures and procedures in order that each VEC can meet, in as effective and efficient a manner as possible, the needs of vocational education in the area which it serves.

Section 9. – (1) Functions of vocational education committees

Without prejudice to the operation of any other enactment by or under which functions are conferred on a vocational education committee, a vocational education committee shall–

> (a) plan, co-ordinate and review the provision of education and services ancillary thereto in recognised schools and centres for education established or maintained by that committee,

(b) asses whether the manner in which it performs its functions is economical, efficient and effective,

(c) adopt and submit, in accordance with section 30, an education plan,

(d) adopt and submit a service plan to the Minister in accordance with section 25,

(e) where it considers appropriate, make all reasonable efforts to consult, in relation to the performance by it of its functions, with–

(i) boards of management of schools established or maintained by that vocational education committee,

(ii) persons performing, in relation to centres of education established or maintained by that vocational education committee, functions the same as, or substantially the same as, those exercised by boards of management in relation to schools referred to in sub-paragraph (i),

(iii) students registered at such schools or centres for education,

(iv) parents of students who are so registered and who have not reached the age of 18 years,

(v) members of the staff of that that vocational education committee, and

(vi) such other persons as it considers are likely to be affected as a resulted of the performance by it of its functions, or as it considers have a particular interest or experience in relation to the education or training provided in recognised schools or centres for education established or maintained by it;

Source: Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, 2001

APPENDIX THREE

FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION

Government Departments involved in supporting Further Education

Ten out of a total of fifteen Government Departments are involved in Further Education and Training provision in Ireland. Table 1 sets out the main Government Departments involved and their main education and training agent or partner.

Table 1 Government Departments involved in Further Education Provision

Government Department	Main Education and Training Agent(s) or Partner(s)
Department of Education and Science	VECs; Second Level Schools; Third Level Colleges
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	FÁS
Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism	Fáilte Ireland[1] (formally CERT)
Department of Agriculture and Food	Teagasc
Department of Health and Children	Health Boards
Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources	An Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)[2]
Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform	Area Development Management (ADM) Ltd.[3], VECs; Community and Voluntary Organisations and Groups
Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	ADM Ltd.; Community Development Projects; Community and Voluntary Organisations and Groups
Department of Social and Family Affairs	VECs; Community and Voluntary Organisations and Groups
Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Development	Local Authorities; Community and Voluntary Organisations and Groups

[1] Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority is the state agency established to support strategic development of the Irish tourist industry. It develops and provides a range of training and continuing professional development courses. (http://www.failteireland.ie/education_training).

[2] An Bord Iascaigh Mharaigh (BIM), the Irish Sea Fisheries Board is the state agency established with to developing the Irish sea fishing and aquaculture industries providing a range of services including training supports (http://www.bim.ie/templates/about_bim.asp? node_id=179).

[3] Area Development Management Ltd. (ADM), is an intermediary company established in 1992 by the Irish government in agreement with the European Union to support local social and economic development. It manages a number of programmes on behalf of the government many of which have a training and education dimension (ADM Ltd., Annual Report, 2004).

Department of Education and Science: This Department funds VECs, Non-VEC Schools, and some Community Organisations and Groups to support the development and delivery of further and education. (See below for more detail on further education programmes under VECs).

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment: This Department funds FÁS, the Industrial Training Authority which provides a wide range of training programmes, work experience programmes and employment supports to ensure the supply of a highly skilled workforce and to facilitate the re-integration of those who are socially excluded into the labour market. It is also the lead department for the European Social Fund Programmes and funds. FORBAIRT, the agency that provides support services to Irish industry across a wide range of commercial activities.

Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism: This Department funds Fáilte Ireland (formally CERT), which identifies training needs in the tourism sector, develops and delivers training programmes and provides national assessment and certification in partnership with education and industry.

Department of Agriculture and Food: This Department funds TEAGASC, which provides courses for new entrants and adults in agriculture and rural development. The adult training courses are aimed at improving skills in farming, development of alternative land-based enterprises and rural community initiatives e.g. tourism.

Department of Health and Children: The Health Boards are funded to provide a range of health and parenting programmes at local level.

Department of the Communications, Marine and Natural Resources: This Department funds An Board Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) – the Irish Sea Fisheries Board – the authority responsible for the industrial training and education of those entering and already working in the fishing industry.

The Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform: The Department in partnership with VECs, third level colleges and other interests are responsible for the development and monitoring of the Prison Education Service. It is also involved the development of childcare services that facilitate access to further and adult education, the education equality initiative and a number of juvenile projects

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs: This Department is currently the lead Department for the Operational Programme for Local and Rural Development, which support a range of education developments under the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, RAPID, the Dormant Accounts Fund. It also provides direct funding and grants to Community Development Projects and community based organisation some of which is used to provide education and training courses.

Department of Social and Family Affairs: This Department manages the Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEA), which supports and enables unemployed adults to pursue full-time and part-time courses while retaining social welfare benefits.

Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government: A number of small grants are available to support local activities for example, environmental issues.

Source: www.irlgov.ie

Further Education Programmes under VECs

The National Adult Literacy Programme

The National Adult Literacy Programme
Target Group: All adult who have literacy difficulties.
Overall Objective: To improve functional literacy within the adult population.
Age Band: 16+

The International Adult Literacy Survey (1997) found that 25 per cent of the Irish population between 16 and 64 (approximately 500,000) experienced functional literacy difficulties. The survey prompted investment in a National Adult Literacy Programme that focuses on reading, writing, communication, numeracy, information technology skills and personal development. Prior to this 85 per cent of literacy provision was provided by volunteers. VECs now use a range of promotional activities to market literacy services. A continuum of provision from one-to-one voluntary tuition, group tuition and to progression to certified courses carrying FETAC certification is now available. A *READ WRITE NOW* Series is broadcast by Radio Teilifis Éireann and is successful in reaching people who may not want to join the local literacy scheme. This supplemented by a national helpe line in the NALA. National Family Literacy involving parents and children and workplace literacy initiatives are in place and literacy support is integrated into a range of other further education programme such as VTOS, Youthreach, STTCs and social employment initiatives.

FETAC and Junior Certificate and Leaving Applied Certificate options are also available. The programme is also delivered by FÁS in Community Training Workshops. Participants receive a training allowance, which is dependent on age and distance from the centre where the programme is provided. committed

Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs)

Responsibility for the Network of STTCs transferred to VECs from FÁS in 1998. The programme operates on the same basis of Youthreach except there is no upper age limit. Travellers who left school early or did not attend school at all take part in course of two or three-year duration depending on participant needs and the courses they are following. The programme has a clear vocational focus offering courses in a range of practical skills, work experience and incorporating a strong focus on literacy, numeracy, personal development. National certification is provided through FETAC and Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied options are also available. Some participants are eligible for training allowances which is dependent on age and distance from the centre where the programme is provided. Others in receipt of social welfare payments retain these payments while on the programme.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

This measure in place since 1989 provides courses of up to two years duration for unemployed people over 21 years and who are at least six months unemployed. Lone parents, people with disability or signing for credits and dependent spouses are also eligible for participation. Courses are vocationally oriented concentrating on the development of employment related skills and qualifications. Courses are broad ranging including skills and qualifications in technological and business skills, general education as well as personal and social skills. National certification is provided through

FETAC and Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate options are also available. Participants in receipt of social welfare payments retain these payments while on the programme.

Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Programme

Post Leaving Certificate Courses were formally introduced in 1985 to provide appropriate education and training for young people who have completed senior cycle at second level to bridge the gap between school and work. Courses have been developed in a wide range of disciplines. The objective is to provide skills that meet the needs of the economy, to equip participants with the vocational and technological skills necessary for employment and support progression to further education and training. Based on a strong foundation of general education courses are of one or two years duration focusing on technical knowledge, personal development and work experience. While it is principally aimed at school leavers over one third of the participants are adult learners. National Certification is provided through FETAC at Levels 4, 5, and 6 of the new framework for qualifications. Some participants are entitled to a state grant through the local authority to support participation while other may be entitled to retain social welfare payments.

Back To Education Initiative (BTEI): (Part-time Programmes)

Back To Education Initiative (Part-time Programmes)
Overall Objective: To increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper second level education in a range of flexible learning opportunities, leading to certification and enabling progression to other further education and training and employment.
Target Group: Young people and adults who left school with less than upper second level education. A high priority is to target individuals that experience acute barriers to participation for example those with low or no formal qualifications, those long term unemployed or at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, Travellers, Homeless people, Drug users, Ex-offenders, people with disabilities.
Age Band: 16+

The BTEI (Part-time Programmes) was designed to build on existing full-time and part-time further education provision. The overall aim is to increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper second level education in a range of flexible learning opportunities. A high priority is to target individuals and target groups that experience acute barriers and are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process for example those with low or no formal qualifications, the long term unemployed and at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, Travellers, Homeless people, Drug users, Ex-offenders, people with disabilities. Courses in a broad range of disciplines are offered for example basic education, communications, personal development, general education including Junior and Leaving Certificate subjects and specific skills areas such as catering and tourism, social and health care, childcare, business, information and communications technology and crafts. Providers must offer certification options to learners for example FETAC Certification Levels 1-5 and the Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate but learners may decide not to pursue this. Many especially those who are social welfare dependent or a medical card holder are exempt from fees, some are entitled to reduced fees while other have to pay full fees in line with a fee structure agreed by each VEC. Participants in receipt of social welfare payments retain these while taking part on the course while some others may be entitled to a training allowance.

Community Education

Community Education
Overall Objective: To address a wide range general and specific education needs within local communities and provide exploratory learning opportunities from which learners progress to other courses.
Target Group: Local communities with a special focus on socio economic disadvantage.

Community education is one of the most fluid elements of further education within VECs. The budget can be used to meet a wide range general and specific education need identified within local communities including basic education, leisure interests, personal development and practical skills such as art, crafts gardening or catering. Activity need not always be shaped in the typical course format of number of tuition hours per week and informal settings and methodologies are the norm. There is no requirement that certification options are provided but if participants wish it may be. Its self-directed and learner-centred character and its capacity to reach the most marginalized were described as noteworthy in the White Paper (2000). In this regard courses under community education are sometimes used to provide exploratory learning opportunities from which learners progress to other learning. Since community education activity is supported by a wide range of other government departments and other sources in reality VEC provision constitutes only a small part of overall provision. The appointment of Community Education Facilitators within VECs to support to new and existing community education groups is intended to strengthen community education activity in the future.

Self-Financing Adult Education

Self Financing Adult Education
Overall Objective: To address a range of general and specific education interests within the general catchment area including professional and leisure interests.
Target Group: Non specific

This is another very fluid element of further education provision. As implied learners generally meet the costs through an appropriate fees structure agreed by the VEC, although it or another body can sponsor some participants on low income or social welfare payments. Most VECs provide a wide range of courses under the self-financing measure but it is not obligatory for them to do so. Courses are generally dictated by

learner demand as well as interest. Some lead to general and professional qualifications while others provide for personal and social development or meet leisure and hobby interests of learners.

Source: www.education.ie

APPENDIX FOUR

GOVERNMENT ACTS RELEVENT TO EDUCATION PROVISION

Date	Title
1926	School Attendance Act
1930	Vocational Education Act (Amendment Acts were enacted in 1936, 1943, 1944, 1947, 1950, 1962 and 1970)
1967	School Attendance (Amendment) Act
1989	Dublin City University Act
1989	University of Limerick Act
1991	University of Limerick (Dissolution of Thomond College) Act
1992	Regional Technical Colleges Act
1992	Dublin Institute of Technology Act
1994	Dublin Institute of Technology (Amendment) Act
1994	Regional Technical Colleges (Amendment) Act
1997	Universities Act
1997	Scientific and Technological Education (Investment) Fund Act
1997	Youth Work Act
1998	Education Act
1998	George Mitchell Scholarship Fund Act
1997	Scientific and Technological Education (Investment) Fund (Amendment) Act
1999	Regional Technical Colleges (Amendment) Act
1999	Qualifications (Education and Training) Act
2000	Education (Welfare) Act
2001	Teaching Council Act
2001	Vocational Education (Amendment) Act

2001 Youth Work Act

2002 Residential Institutions Redress Act

Source: www.education.ie

APPENDIX FIVE

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND FURTHER EDUCATION AWARDS

National Qualifications Framework: Synopsis of Level Outcomes

This synopsis, while not being part of the formal determination of the Authority, is useful in understanding the nature of the learning outcomes at each level.

Level 1

The learning outcomes relate to the performance of basic tasks in a controlled environment under supervision and the display of an ability to learn information and basic repetitive skills, as well as to sequence learning tasks. Literacy and numeracy achievements would correspond to those measured at the initial levels of international assessment systems.

Level 2

Key outcomes at this level are basic literacy and numeracy and the introduction to systematic learning. Learning outcomes relate to the ability to learn new skills and knowledge in a supervised environment and to carry out routine work under direction. Learning outcomes at this level are typically developmental rather than geared towards a specific occupation.

Level 3

Learning outcomes at this level relate to a low volume of practical capability and of knowledge of theory. The outcomes relate to the performance of relatively simple work and may be fairly quickly acquired. Outcomes at this level may also confer a minimum employability for low skilled occupations and include functional literacy and numeracy.

Level 4

Independence is the hallmark of this level. Learning outcomes at this level correspond to a growing sense of responsibility for participating in public life and shaping one's

own life. The outcomes at this level would be associated with first-time entry to many occupational sectors.

Level 5

Learning outcomes at this level include a broad range of skills that require some theoretical understanding. The outcomes may relate to engaging in a specific activity, with the capacity to use the instruments and techniques relating to an occupation. They are associated with work being undertaken independently, subject to general direction.

Level 6

Learning outcomes at this level include a comprehensive range of skills which may be vocationally-specific and/or of a general supervisory nature, and require detailed theoretical understanding. The outcomes also provide for a particular focus on learning skills. The outcomes relate to working in a generally autonomous way to assume design and/or management and/or administrative responsibilities. Occupations at this level would include higher craft, junior technician and supervisor.

Level 7

Learning outcomes at this level relate to knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles in a field of study and the application of those principles in different contexts. This level includes knowledge of methods of enquiry and the ability to critically evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems. The outcomes include an understanding of the limits of the knowledge acquired and how this influences analyses and interpretations in a work context. Outcomes at this level would be appropriate to the upper end of many technical occupations and would include higher technicians, some restricted professionals and junior management.

Level 8

Innovation is a key feature of learning outcomes at this level. Learning outcomes at this level relate to being at the forefront of a field of learning in terms of knowledge and

understanding. The outcomes include an awareness of the boundaries of the learning in the field and the preparation required to push back those boundaries through further learning. The outcomes relate to adaptability, flexibility, ability to cope with change and ability to exercise initiative and solve problems within their field of study. In a number of applied fields the outcomes are those linked with the independent, knowledge-based professional. In other fields the outcomes are linked with those of a generalist and would normally be appropriate to management positions.

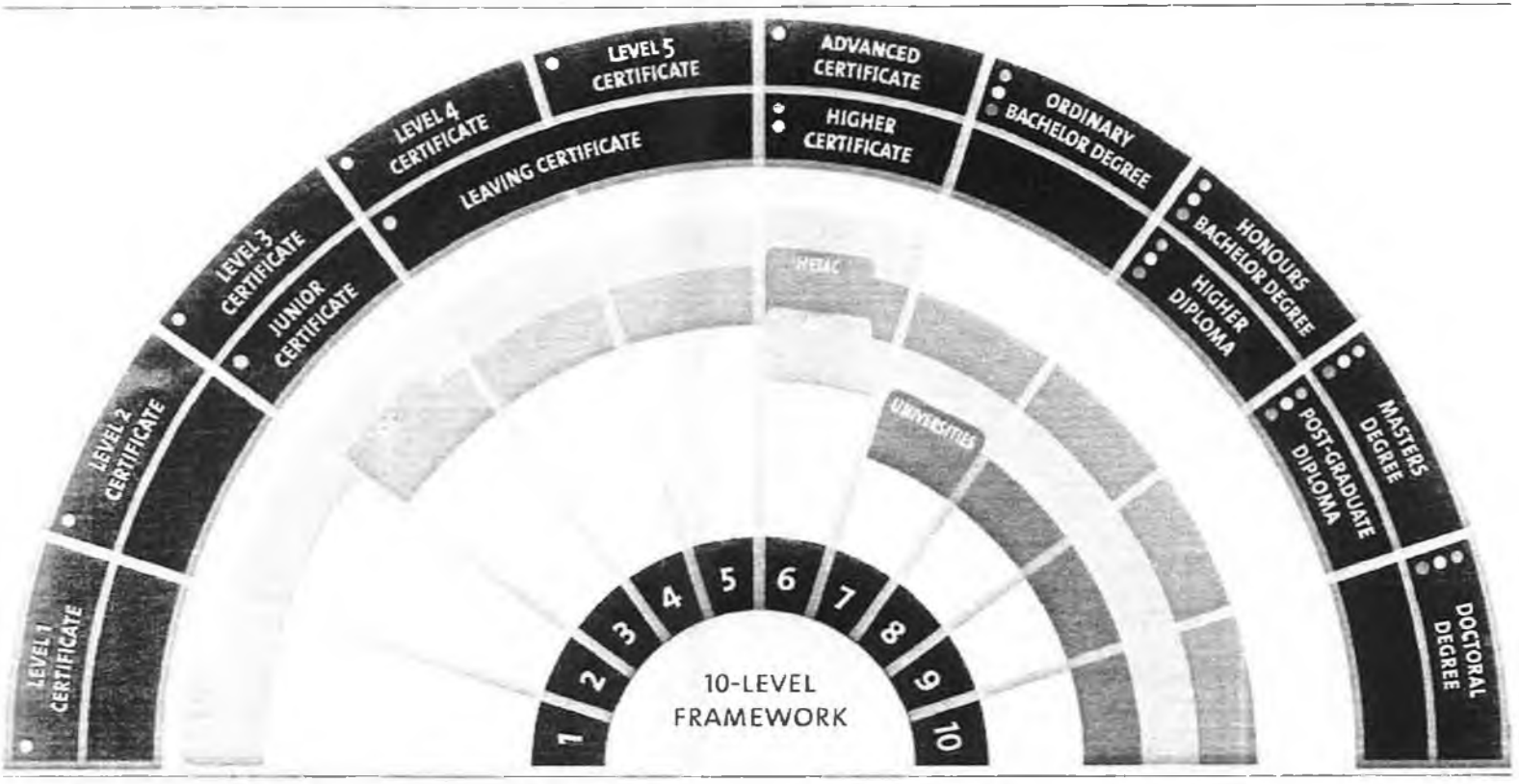
Level 9

Learning outcomes at this level relate to the demonstration of knowledge and understanding which is the forefront of a field of learning. The outcomes relate to the application of knowledge, understanding and problem-solving abilities in new or unfamiliar contexts related to a field of study. The outcomes are associated with an ability to integrate knowledge, handle complexity and formulate judgements. Outcomes associated with this level would link with employment as a senior professional or manager with responsibility for the work outputs of teams.

Level 10

Learning outcomes at this level relate to the discovery and development of new knowledge and skills and delivering findings at the frontiers of knowledge and application. Further outcomes at this level relate to specialist skills and transferable skills required for managing such as the abilities to critique and develop organisational structures and initiate change.

Source: www.nqai.ie



National Framework *of* Qualifications
INITIAL MAJOR AWARDS AND AWARDING BODIES

- FETAC – Further Education and Training Awards Council
- SEC – State Examinations Commission
- HETAC – Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- DIT – Dublin Institute of Technology
- Universities

This diagram illustrates the ten-level National Framework of Qualifications

Further Education and Training Awards

National Foundation Certificate (Level 3 under the new qualifications'framework)

Courses leading to this certificate are provided by **Further Education Centres**. This certificate is awarded to a learner who meets the required standard in a total of eight modules, comprising of three core modules and any five elective modules chosen from the list of modules below.

Modules	Health Related Fitness
Art/Design	Horticulture
Career Information	Introduction to Aquaculture
Caring for Children	Introduction to Kayaking
Child Development and Play	Irish
Communications	Italian
Computer Literacy	Living in a Diverse Society
Consumer Awareness	Living Things in their Environment
Craft – Ceramics	Machine Knitting
Craft – Glass	Mathematics
Craft – Leatherwork	Music Appreciation
Craft – Metalwork	Office Procedures
Craft – Printmaking	Outdoor Pursuits
Craft – Puppetry	Personal and Interpersonal Skills
Craft – Pyrography	Personal Care and Presentation
Craft – Textiles	Personal Effectiveness
Craft – Upholstery	Preparation for Work
Craft – Wood	Russian
Drama	Spanish
English as a Second Language	Swimming
Engineering Workshop Processes	Transnational Experience
Food and Cookery	Video Expression
Food and Nutrition	Visual Arts Practice
French	Water Safety
German	Work Orientation

National Vocational Certificate Level 1 (Levels 4 under the new qualifications framework)

Courses leading to this certificate are provided by **Further Education Centres**. This certificate is awarded to learners who achieve the required standards in eight modules comprising of four core modules and four elective modules which may be drawn from the list of modules below.

Modules	
Accommodation Services	Hurling
Aquaculture	Information Technology Skills
Athletics	Irish
Badminton	Italian
Basketball	Kayak Skills
Caring for Children	Mathematics
Catering	Metalcraft
Catering for Diversity	Orienteering
Child Development and Play	Painting
Communications	Personal and Interpersonal Skills
Computer Applications	Personal Effectiveness
Cultural Studies	Plant Care and Maintenance
Data Entry	Powerboat Skills
Dinghy Sailing	Rockclimbing
Drama	Russian
Drawing	Security Industry Awareness
Electronics	Soccer
Engineering Workshop Processes	Spanish
English as a Second Language	Sport Horse Riding
Everyday Science	Stable and Yard Routine
Fast Food Catering	Swimming and Water Safety
French	Technical Drawing
Gaelic Football	Textiles
German	Understanding Interculturalism
Graphic Design	Volleyball
Health Related Fitness	Windsurfing
Historical Studies	Woodcraft
Human Biology	Work Experience

National Vocational Certificate Level 2 (Level 5 under the new qualifications framework)

Courses leading to this certificate are provided by **Further Education Centres**. This certificate is awarded on successful completion of courses in:

Applied Science – Animal Care	Horsemanship
Applied Science – Food	Horticulture
Applied Science – Laboratory Techniques	Hotel and Catering
Aquaculture*	Information Processing
Art	Information Technology
Art/Craft/Design	Interior Design
Business Studies	International Trade
Business Studies – Administration	Language and European Studies
Business Studies – Bilingual Secretarial	Marketing
Business Studies – Secretarial	Media Engineering
Call Centre Operations	Media Production
Childcare	Motor Technology
Commercial Fishing*	Multimedia Production
Community and Health Services	Nursing Studies
Community Arts	Outdoor Recreation
Community Care	Performing Arts
Computer Aided Design	Performing Arts – Dance
Construction Technology	Performing Arts – Music
Control Technology	Print Journalism
Craft	Radio Production
Cultural and Heritage Studies	Retail Studies
Design	Seafood Processing*
eBusiness	Security Studies
Electronic Technology	Security Systems Technology
Engineering Technology	Sport and Recreation
Fashion Design	Theatre Performance
Floristry	Theatre Production
Furniture Design	Tourism
Graphic Design	TV and Film Production
Hairdressing	Youth Work

National Vocational Certificate Level 3 (Level 6 under the new qualifications framework)

Courses leading to this certificate are provided by **Further Education Centres**. This certificate is awarded on successful completion of courses in:

Applied Languages and Business
Applied Languages and Information Technology – International Teleservices
Childcare
Commercial Surface Supplied Diving*
Community Arts
Community Development
Electronic Technology
Greenkeeping
Networks and Software Systems
Security Operations and Administration
Strategic Customer Relationship Management

Source: http://www.fetac.ie/directory/