

**FINDING THE HORSESHOE NAIL:
COLONIZATION, DE-COLONIZATION AND COUNTER-COLONIZATION
IN ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, Kevin Devlin, who so nearly saw this project come to completion. Throughout my life, he taught me by word and by example, and helped shape the person I have become, with the values I hold today. In the end, he taught me so much about courage, grace and dignity.

Thank you, Daddy. All shall be well.

ABSTRACT

As the ‘Occupy’ camps have sprung up around the world, there has been a growing understanding of neo-liberalism as a hegemonic global political discourse in which the values of the market have come to dominate all aspects of human endeavour. At the same time, concerns have been expressed about the colonization of community education by neo-liberalism. As a traditionally process-oriented, non-formal learning experience, influenced by the ideas of Paolo Freire, and concerned with concepts such as social justice and combating marginalization, community education has increasingly been influenced by the values of the market place. These neo-liberal values have been apparent in a greatly increased emphasis on accreditation, outputs, and regulation, as well as greater emphasis on training for the workplace, rather than helping the learner to ‘read their world’ and challenge oppressive structures.

This thesis argues that when considering the colonization of the sector, it is equally important to consider the tutor, as the person working most closely with the learners. This thesis therefore sets out to ask the question: ‘What is the impact of neo-liberalism on tutors whose value systems are shaped by the traditional ethos of community education?’

Using Habermas’ concepts of the public sphere, the colonization of the lifeworld by the system and the pathologies that arise when it is colonized, as well as Freirean concepts of resistance and oppositional practice, this thesis uses Critical Theory to identify that tutors are experiencing an attempted colonization of their own professional lifeworld, with symptoms akin to Habermas’ pathologies as well as reports of isolation, marginalization, and the experience of the effects of hegemonic power. It is those tutors who manage to identify sites of oppositional practice within the accreditation system who seem to be able to resist the

colonization of their professional lifeworld. By using the neo-liberal accreditation system to express their own values, I suggest they are, in fact, counter-colonizing the system. The remaining tutors are attempting to de-colonize their learners' lifeworlds, but at a high price, as their own professional lifeworld is colonized.

I conclude by arguing that any consideration of the colonization of the sector as a whole must taken into account the colonization of the tutors' professional lifeworld, and join Inglis (1997) in calling for a pedagogy of power, but one that incorporates an understanding of the systemically marginalized status of the tutor.

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GLOSSARY

- DES:** Department of Education and Skills
- FÁS:** Foras Áiseanna Saothair. The Irish National Training and Employment Authority. This agency is being disbanded, and its roles divided between the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Education and Skills. Its training role will come under the remit of the newly-created SOLAS
- FETAC:** Further Education and Training Awards Council. Responsible for certifying awards at levels 1-6 of the National Framework of Qualifications
- SOLAS:** Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanunaigh Scileanna. The new further education and training authority which will henceforth incorporate the VECs and the training division of FÁS under its remit
- VEC:** Vocational Educational Committee. Traditionally responsible for vocational education in Ireland, the 33 VECs are to be disbanded, reduced to 16 Local Education and Training Boards, and to come under the remit of the newly-created SOLAS

*For want of a nail the shoe was lost.
For want of a shoe the horse was lost.
For want of a horse the rider was lost.
For want of a rider the battle was lost.
For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.*

(Traditional children's nursery rhyme)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

'[T]he political needs of society become individual needs and aspirations, their satisfaction promotes business and the commonweal, and the whole appears to be the very embodiment of Reason'

(Marcuse, 1966, p. ix)

Since the 1980s, a new political ideology has been sweeping the globe. Known as neo-liberalism, it emerged in reaction to the Keynesian economic model, which became discredited with the 'stagflation' 70s and early 80s and other political crises (Finnegan, 2008). Neo-liberalism has become the dominant political ideology of capitalist globalism. It involves the systematic deregulation of trade and finance, the adoption of new forms of fiscal and monetary policy, and the large-scale implementation of a programme of marketization and privatization across the world. Indeed, the market has become the dominant hegemonic paradigm of our age, as it seeks to bring 'all human action into the domain of the market (Harvey, 2005 p.3), and has come to be viewed as 'common sense', even by those who are most marginalized and oppressed by it. While neo-liberalism has brought untold wealth to a few, wage depression and outsourcing to ensure the maximization of profit has pushed ever more people into poverty, and the income differential between the wealthiest and the poorest on the planet has increased exponentially. In 1996, the net worth of the 358 richest people was equal to the combined income of the poorest 45% of the world's population—2.3 billion people (Harvey, 2005, pp. 34-35).

This research is set against the backdrop of a year which has seen individualised sites of resistance to global capitalism and neo-liberalism become a concerted battle in the shape of the 'Occupy' camps that have sprung up in over 80 countries (The Guardian Online). I will look at a microcosm of that larger battle which is taking place. I will look at people who are

working within a neo-liberal system which is exacerbating the inequalities they experience; I will explore the effect that this system is having upon them and I will identify acts of resistance, no less significant than all the ‘occupy’ camps, even if they occur outside of the glare of the media. Every act of resistance is significant. Any act of resistance could be that horseshoe nail which shifts the tide in the final battle.

Community Education

It has been argued one of the areas of ‘human life’ which neo-liberalism has attempted to commodify is education. This research will be looking particularly at its impact on community education, as there has been much concern about the colonization of community education by neo-liberalism, and the impact that would have on its unique traditions (Collins, 1991; Connolly, 2007; Finnegan, 2008; Fleming, 2001; Mayo, 1999; Thompson, 2007).

Community education in Ireland grew out of the women’s movement of the 1980s (Connolly, 2003; DES, 2000). Influenced by the work of Paolo Freire, it involved helping learners to identify their needs and those of their community, and to learn to ‘read their world’ (Freire, 1970), to recognize systems which oppressed them, and then to take action. Community education did much to cater for the needs of those who had already been failed by the education system (Lynch, 1999), and its traditional ethos has been based on the principles of social justice and equality. Having existed on the fringes of the educational sector for years, it was brought into the mainstream of adult and community education with the publication of the White Paper, *Learning for Life* (DES, 2000). But with recognition and funding came demands for accountability, and the requirement for documenting that accountability, such as ‘bums-on-seats’ and accreditation achieved by learners. Having been brought into the mainstream, community education now came within the ambit of the neo-liberal ideology that was becoming dominant in Ireland (Finnegan, 2008); it became colonized by it. It is the

purpose of this research to explore that colonization in the context of the tutors who work within the community education service and try and understand the impact it is having upon them.

Finding a research question

Stephen Brookfield has written that '[O]ur theoretical quests are usually initiated by our desires to explain and resolve the practical contradictions and tangles that consume our energies' (Brookfield, 2005, p. 10). That is particularly true in this instance. In my role as teaching and learning coordinator for the Adult and Community Based Education Services in a Dublin VEC, I have been working with tutors for the past four years, supporting them in their teaching practice, and increasingly supporting them around the delivery of FETAC accreditation. In that time, the number of portfolios submitted by learners for FETAC certification has increased dramatically, from 100-200 per year, to nearly 900 in May 2011.

I have tried very hard to build up relationships of trust with the tutors, so that they will feel safe coming to me if they have a concern or problem in their practice. As I have worked with them, I have heard concerns voiced that we are becoming subject-led rather than learner-led, that there isn't time to address the learners' needs, that there is an increase in bureaucracy which is taking time away from teaching, and that we are losing much of what made our sector unique. Coming to Maynooth to do the Postgraduate Diploma in Adult and Community Education, I began to consider what I was hearing from the tutors in work in the light of what I was learning in college, and to identify some of these problems as being related to a growing neo-liberal ideology. This was at odds with the traditional ideology of community education, and the discursive traditions within which these tutors had worked. I wanted to use this thesis to get a better sense of how these clashing ideologies and discourses were affecting the tutors, so the research question I identified was:

What is the impact of neo-liberalism on tutors whose value systems are shaped by the traditional ethos of community education?

My purpose in choosing this question was two-fold: I wanted to explore the impact of neo-liberalism on tutors to gain a deeper understanding of what was happening, and possibly to gain some insights into how I might better support them, but I also wanted to give voice to some of the anxieties and tensions that they had expressed to me.

Identifying a theoretical framework

Given the political nature of this research, it is appropriate to use a theoretical framework that reflects that political perspective and my own ontological stance. I am therefore embedding this research within a critical theory, which views power as being wielded by an elite in order to exploit the many in ways that may not be always immediately apparent, and which sees, as I do, a role for education helping people to recognize and challenges those forces of oppression. The theorists I will be specifically drawing on are Jürgen Habermas and Paulo Freire.

There is a problem with using Habermas as a theorist: he is such a prolific and complex writer, and has had a lifetime of developing his theories, that it is well beyond the scope of this research to adequately comprehend and evaluate the corpus of his work. This thesis is *not* about the theories of Habermas, or Freire, for that matter. It is about listening to what the tutors are saying about their lived experience, and trying to make a meaning of it using some of the ideas Habermas and Freire have to offer us.

Caveat

Brookfield points out that you will never find a theory that will neatly capture a standardized model that can be applied across all adult educational contexts—life gets too messy. ‘Perhaps

the most we can reasonably hope for is that those who understand their work through the lens of critical theory might document publically the ways this understanding shapes, or at least influences, that work' (Brookfield, 2005, p. 9). This paper is that documentation of my growing understanding. It simply reflects the meanings I have made out of what I have heard when talking to the tutors, based on my understanding of these theorists at this point in my learning journey. I am making no claims to truth beyond the meanings I have made, the implications I have identified for my own practice, and possibilities for future study. This paper is simply one contribution to the body of scholarship concerned with the colonization of community education by neo-liberalism.

In this thesis, I look at the impact neo-liberalism is having on tutors who are working within the tradition of adult and community education. Using Habermas' concepts of the diminution of the public sphere and the colonization of the lifeworld, I found that while all tutors involved were attempting to decolonize their learners' lifeworld, there were indications that some of them were experiencing a colonization of their own professional lifeworld by the system, as well as isolation, marginalization and the effects of hegemonic power. Some tutors seemed to have been able to identify sites of resistance within the potentially reductive and neo-liberal system of accreditation, and in doing so adapted it to the traditions of critical pedagogy. I hypothesize that they are managing to 'counter-colonize' the system with their own values, and therefore experiencing less colonization of their own professional lifeworld. As long as tutors are themselves marginalized and experiencing colonization, I feel it is difficult for them to help their learners to decolonize their lifeworld. I therefore conclude by reflecting on the implications of my findings on my own practice, with regards to encouraging a public sphere where tutors could symbolically produce and reproduce their lifeworld, and join Inglis (1997) in calling for a pedagogy of power, but one which includes an understanding of the systemic marginalization of tutors.

Structure of this thesis

This thesis documents the journey of my learning through this past year, from trying to identify the exact question that I was going to research, right up to the conclusions that I drew from what I had learned, the implications for my own practice that I identified, and the possibilities for future study.

In Chapter 2 I will outline my methodology, the road map of that journey. I will describe the ontological stance that I have adopted, the core beliefs and assumptions through which my perceptions and the meanings I have made have been filtered, which, based in critical theory, tries to recognize oppressive structures and change them through social action. I also identify my epistemological stance which, in line with critical theory, accepts socially constructed meaning as valid knowledge (Ewart, 1991). Finally, I describe the route my journey has taken: the paths chosen, the people met, the choices made.

In Chapter 3 I will explore the existing literature in this field. Since my research question—how tutors are being impacted by neo-liberalism—is premised on the assumption that community education *has* been colonized by neo-liberalism, the first step is to identify whether or not that is in fact the case. I look at the traditions and discourses of community education, as well as those of neo-liberalism, and conclude that community education *has* indeed been colonized by an ideology of neo-liberalism and the discourses it employs.

The second half of the literature review considers the work of Paolo Freire and some of the theories of Jürgen Habermas, and identifies some commonalities and complementarities to their work which makes it useful to consider them together when trying to make meaning of the experiences reported by the interviewees. In particular, Habermas' idea of the colonization of the lifeworld by the system (1987), the pathologies that emerge as a result and the role of the public sphere in defending that lifeworld as well as Freire's concept of

conscientization (1970) and of occupying the subsystem in order to effect resistance (Horton & Freire, 1990), appear to be useful concepts when trying to understand the impact of neo-liberalism in having on the tutors.

In Chapter 4, I let the interviewed tutors speak for themselves—not interpreting what they said, but simply sorting it thematically. As I wrote up that chapter, I could hear their voices in my head, and could hear their passion, their fears, anxieties and hopes for their learners, as well as their own experience of isolation, marginalization and hegemonic power. My main concern in writing this thesis is those voices will get lost amid the theory, and that I do not have sufficient writing skill to convey the depths of the feelings they shared with me.

Chapter 5 is where I try to make meaning of what I have heard, in the light the theoretical framework I have adopted. I review the extent to which these tutors have internalized the traditional values of community education, the impact of new neo-liberal ideologies on their practice, and conclude that the tutors I spoke to are experiencing the attempted colonization of their professional lifeworld, which is exacerbated by their lack of a public sphere due to a range of systemic reasons. Those who are unable to resist this attempted colonization would seem to be experiencing tensions and anxieties similar in nature, if not intensity, to those pathologies identified by Habermas. However, those tutors who identified education as being explicitly political chose to use the potentially reductive system of accreditation, with its neo-liberal discourses of outputs and measuring, as a site where learners could learn to ‘read their world (Freire, 1970), and start to question the forces which oppress them—the very forces, I would argue, that the system of accreditation was designed to copper-fasten.

Using a Habermasian perspective of the colonization of the lifeworld by the system, Fleming calls for adult education to have a role in de-colonizing the lifeworld in response to that colonization. All the tutors I interviewed here were attempting to do that for their learners.

But those, whose own professional lifeworld was being colonized, were doing so at a very high personal cost. I argue, on the other hand, that those tutors who were using the subsystem of accreditation as a site of resistance, were in fact *counter-colonizing* the sub-system with their own values, and were thus not experiencing the attempted colonization of their professional lifeworld, or experiencing the attendant ‘pathologies’ to the same extent.

In Chapter Six I conclude by arguing that any consideration of the marginal status of the learner must include an awareness of the systemically marginal status of tutors. As the people at the coalface of community education, they will be severely compromised in their ability to help their learners de-colonize their lifeworld, if their own professional lifeworld is under attack. I further consider ways in which I can use what I have learned throughout this research in my own practice, to help create a public sphere which will support the symbolic production and reproduction of the lifeworld of community education, of its values and traditions. Finally, given the tutors’ awareness of hegemonic power, which I do not feel is adequately dealt with by these theories of Habermas, I back Inglis’ (1997) call for a pedagogy of power, but one that, in addition to relational power, includes an understanding of the impact of the hegemonic power of the system, and the effect that has, through the tutor, on the learner.

Glimmers of hope

This is a story of neo-liberalism and the impact that it is having on the lives of the tutors I spoke to. While it is set in the context of the adult and community based education service of a VEC, I believe that the struggle it documents mirrors thousands of similar struggles, in thousands of different sites around the world. The impact experienced here, of the colonization of the lifeworld by a systemic ideology of neo-liberalism, is the same as that

experienced by the many thousands of people around the world who are experiencing the marginalization effected by global capitalism and its dominant neo-liberal ideology.

But this is also a story of two halves; it is also a story of resistance. There will be those who accept the hegemonic dominance of an ideology which oppresses them, and suffer the consequent colonization of their lifeworld, but there will also always be those who find sites of resistance to challenge those oppressive forces. It is the role of all involved in community education to fight the colonization of its lifeworld so that the potential for resistance identified here may be replicated across the sector, and stand alongside all the other acts of resistance across the globe.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

'It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters in the end'.

(Ursula K. LeGuin, 1969)

Introduction

In my practice working as a teaching and learning coordinator in a VEC, I am increasingly aware of the growing dominance of a neo-liberal ideology within the adult and community education sector which has had a tradition of critical pedagogy. In a sector which had judged the 'usefulness' of knowledge in terms of its contribution to social and political change, and was concerned with recognising and combating oppression, inequality or exploitation (Thompson, 2007), there was a new push towards training for the workplace, accreditation, and a new emphasis on the outcomes, rather than the processes of learning.

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact that this neo-liberal colonization is having on the practice of tutors who, I believe, experience this clash of discourses, and attempt to negotiate it within their practice. I am adopting a reflective approach to methodology in this study. This chapter is the story of my learning journey as I spoke to the tutors, and made meanings of what they had experienced. Hammersley says of a reflective approach to methodology that it is by necessity infused by a distinct personal perspective, and that radical versions of reflexivity arise from an 'increasing emphasis on [...] the insistence that the personal is political' (Hammersley, 2011, p. 29). This chapter therefore attempts to outline the personal nature of this research, and the political lens through which I filtered that which I heard.

Why is this research relevant to me?

In my professional capacity, I work with tutors to support them in their professional practice. A crucial part of my role is helping the tutors to keep the needs of the learner central to the learning process, something which is becoming harder as the push towards accreditation and outcomes-based learning gets stronger. Working with the tutors over the past four years, I tried very hard to build up open relationships of trust in which they feel safe to discuss some of their concerns, many of which are about accreditation. I had started to hear themes emerging, themes of anxiety as to whether the learners were ready for accreditation, concern as to whether we were losing our traditional learner-centred focus, and questions as to whose needs were being met in the increasing push towards accreditation. I decided to explore those anxieties I had been hearing, to give voice to the tutors who had no other forum for their voice to be heard, and to make a meaning of what they were telling me.

In search of a paradigm: Identifying my ontological stance

Any research which is conducted is infused by the personal perspective of the researcher (Hammersley, 2011; Mason, 2002). It is therefore important that I be quite clear about my own personal perspective. I came to work in the field of adult and community education because I am passionate about the role of education in fighting for social justice and combating exclusion and marginalization. I believe that it is the role of education to help learners to recognize those forces of oppression, and learn to 'read their world' (Freire, 1970, p. 47). Since education is all too often used to replicate social inequalities, and to maintain the privileged position of the elite, I wanted to be involved in a form of education which helped to challenge that. In looking for a paradigm within which to site my research, I felt that a Critical Theory paradigm most closely resembled my own ontological stance. Critical Theory explores the ways in which inequities, and the systemic exploitation of the many by

the few, are accepted without question (Brookfield, 2005). In this instance, I wished to explore the neo-liberal system within which adult education tutors were working, the impact it was having on them, and I felt that Critical Theory was the most appropriate framework through which to do so, as it offered tools to explore the systemic challenges the tutors faced.

Identifying my epistemology

As I interviewed the tutors as part of this research, I was interested in exploring their experience of the impact of neo-liberalism, and the meanings that they made of that experience, in dialogue with me. They are the experts of their own, lived experience, and so, I would argue, the knowledge gained in these interviews is valid knowledge. This is not to make any claims beyond the experience of these tutors; it is just one further contribution to the body of scholarship.

The epistemological stance associated with Critical Theory accepts socially constructed meanings as valid knowledge, but it goes beyond the potential relativity of social constructivism by actively naming what it considers to be oppressive interests, and seeking to redress them (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). This is particularly relevant to this research, as I do believe that neo-liberalism serves the interests of a power elite. Critics of Critical Theory might argue that it is not the role of the researcher to be an ideologue or to have an agenda. I would suggest, along with other critical theorists, that a call to ideological neutrality is itself laden with laissez-faire values which allow the status quo to be reproduced (p. 32). Since this research is looking at precisely those neo-liberal, laissez-faire values in community education, it is particularly important, I believe, that I address this and position myself as not being ideologically neutral.

In conducting this research, and in particular when interviewing the tutors, I was concerned about the impact my own ideological stance might have on those I spoke to, and the meanings

I made of what I learned. Throughout my reflective study I repeatedly tried to turn my own critical gaze upon myself and my assumptions, as is within the traditions of Critical Theory (Brookfield, 2005), but even greater measures were required when talking to the tutors. I therefore avoided mentioning neo-liberalism, as I felt it was a value-laden concept, but focused instead on their experience of teaching accredited programmes, because I felt that for tutors used to working in the non-formal community education ethos, increased accreditation with its emphasis on outputs and accountability would be an aspect of neo-liberalism that they would be most likely to come into contact with, without necessarily recognizing it as such. Only later in the interviews or the follow-up did I mention neo-liberalism, once the tutors had identified their own stance.

Using a qualitative approach

In this study I adopted a qualitative approach because I felt it would allow me to understand the complexities of the issues involved, to interpret what I was hearing within the social context in which the tutors practiced, and thus allow me to attempt a more holistic, and deeper, analysis (Mason, 2002). Qualitative research tries to understand the issue from the point of view of the people being studied, and to explore meanings. As such it is congruent with the Critical Theory framework within which this study is set, as Critical Theory is underpinned by ‘the concept that existing social structures and beliefs are socially constructed’, (Ewart, 1991) and accepts them as valid knowledge. One of the problems that has been identified with qualitative analysis is the question of reliability, whether its findings be reproduced in another context (Merriam & Simpson, 1984). But I am not trying to do anything other than document what these tutors told me, and to make meaning of what I heard them say to me. A further problem around qualitative research concerns ensuring the validity of the findings, and the trustworthiness of what I was told. While this will always be something to be aware of, the tutors I spoke to were all ones I had worked with in the past,

and with whom I had built up relationships of trust. What they told me resonated with what they and other tutors had told me in the past, and with my own experiences as a tutor.

Identifying research participants

I was interested in interviewing tutors who were familiar with, and identified with, the traditional ethos of community education such as creating opportunities for the learner to develop a capacity for critical thinking in a context which valued non-formal learning. I chose this group because I felt that if community education is indeed being colonized by neo-liberalism, this group would most probably be affected by that colonization, and I wished to find out how they were being impacted.

In finding tutors who identified with the traditional ethos of community education, I had, first, to make a value judgment as to whether they fit the criteria, based on past conversations with them, as well as my knowledge of their teaching practice. In the event, I found that they all interpreted their understanding of the traditions of community education slightly differently, and there was a spectrum of opinions as to the extent of the political nature of education, as is to be expected in any group of individuals. They were all, however, committed to the ideal of non-formal learning which would allow the learner to address issues that were relevant to their needs. It has to be noted that despite the large number of tutors with whom I work, it was difficult enough to find many who really had an understanding of the traditional values of community education. That may well itself be an indicator of the extent to which the sector has already been colonized.

A further factor in my choice of tutors to interview arose from the fact that I worked with them in a professional capacity, and I was personally concerned about issues of power. It was therefore very important to me that anybody I approached should feel comfortable about saying 'no' to being interviewed, and safe in voicing opinions that I, or the 'organization'

might not agree with. The final criterion for inclusion thus became finding tutors who would be comfortable in taking an oppositional stance if they wished.

I interviewed five tutors, all of whom differed in the length of time they had been teaching, the routes they had taken to get into teaching, and the subjects they taught. I initially made informal contact with them, to enquire as to whether they would be interested in talking to me, and this was done using a non-work email address, and I stressed in that initial contact that I was doing this in a private capacity. When they agreed, this was followed up by a formal letter of consent, outlining the nature of the research, and assuring confidentiality. Everyone I approached agreed to be interviewed.

Ethical implications

Mason comments that research should be conducted as moral practice with due regard to political context (Mason, 2002). It was very important to me that I did nothing to place the tutors in a vulnerable position (Merriam & Simpson, 1984), and I made a firm commitment to all of them, both in writing and verbally that no one in the VEC would know of their involvement in the research.

I was very concerned about the power implications of interviewing these tutors about accreditation, as I worked with them professionally, supporting them in delivering accredited programmes. While I had had many informal conversations with a number of these tutors about accreditation over the years, I was concerned that discussing it in a formal context with a recorder running would introduce a new dynamic. In the end, I felt the best thing I could do was to name my concerns openly with them. I did so at the beginning of each interview, explaining my concerns, and trying to make a space where we could discuss the issues. On listening to the transcripts I realized that I was projecting a lot of my own concerns; the tutors all started out quite relaxed, but as I belaboured the issue, you could hear them becoming

more concerned, as they wondered what they were going to be asked! In the event, they spoke to me so openly, and with such passion about their hopes and fears for the sector, and the impact that the pressure for accreditation was having on their practice, that I feel it was a real testimony to their courage and, I hope, a relationship of trust that we have built up between us.

It is important that interviewees be told about the purpose of the research, but one of the problems about doing that is that it can skew the results (Merriam & Simpson, 1984). I was loath to mention neo-liberalism directly, as that could be considered a value-laden concept, and inadvertently encourage the interviewees to answer in a particular way. I therefore initially asked them about accreditation as, with its emphasis on outcomes rather than process, and its increased bureaucracy, it is an aspect of neo-liberalism they are most likely to encounter regularly in their practice, one which would be at odds with the traditional community education ethos. At some point in each interview or follow-up, when I thought the interviewee was sufficiently confident in their own opinions not to be skewed, I mentioned neo-liberalism, so that every interviewee knew exactly what the research was about.

Choosing a method

I chose to interview the tutors, because I felt that method was suited to the qualitative approach I was taking, and indeed to my own methodological position. I wanted to create a space where they could critically reflect on their experiences and to make meaning of them—meanings and lived experiences that I believe to be valid knowledge.

I had initially planned to conduct one-to-one interviews in order capture the interviewees' personal opinions, and then to have a follow-up session in a group, in the hope that through the dialogue of a group setting, new meanings could be made. In the event, it was not possible for organizational reasons to have a group follow-up session. In retrospect, given the

strength of emotions and opinions that emerged from some of the interviews, a group session might have been difficult, and possibly inadvisable, as the tutors for the most part did not know each other well or at all. Instead, after I had completed the coding and done a thematic analysis, I met all but one of them (one person was unable to meet me for personal reasons), and discussed what I had found with them. The purpose of this was both to ensure that they were happy with how I interpreted what they had said, and that they would have an opportunity to learn from the research (Merriam & Simpson, 1984).

The interview process

In advance of the interviews, I felt intuitively that I wanted to use a semi-structured interview format, because I thought that would allow me the flexibility and openness to address new issues that might arise that had not occurred to me. I was nervous about doing this, however, and was concerned that I lacked the skill required to adapt the questions, and still get the information I was looking for (Kane, 1995). I wrote up a list of questions, but found in the first interview that following the questions closely did not work for me. I felt it broke the flow of the interview, and in a curious way it changed the dynamic. It became a matter of the interviewee being questioned, rather than reflecting out loud with occasional prompts or queries, to allow new areas to be explored, or clarifications to be sought. After the first interview I went back to my original idea of a semi-structured interview. The questions asked were in response to the issues that arose, as I tried to tease out what impact neo-liberalism was having on them. This allowed me to go down unexpected routes. For example, I knew from previous discussions that the tutors had concerns about accreditation, and I knew that they all tried to make the accredited material as relevant to their learners' needs as possible. What I had not expected was the extent to which some of them considered that act to be explicitly political in nature. I would not have got that insight if I had stuck rigidly to the questions I had prepared, but that finding added a whole new dimension to my analysis.

Finding a theoretical framework for analysis

The theoretical framework to this thesis evolved in a dialectical process between the theorists and the findings that emerged in my conversations with the interviewees. In working with the tutors over the previous four years, I had worked very hard to build up open relationships of trust, in which they felt safe to discuss some of their concerns about the accredited classes they were being asked to teach. I started to hear themes emerging, themes of anxiety as to whether the learners were ready for accreditation, concern as to whether we were losing our traditional learner-led focus and questions as to whose needs were being met in the increasing push towards accreditation. In a sense (as I realized half-way through this study) those four years were years of ‘lived field work’, as I started to become aware of questions for which I had no answers. Coming to Maynooth to do the Postgraduate Diploma in Adult and Community Education and coming face to face with new ideas and theories, I started to recognize, and make sense of what I had been hearing from the tutors over the past four years; it became a year-long inductive analysis, making sense of what I heard and experienced in my own practice. Moving into the MEd programme, I decided to explore those anxieties I had been hearing, to give voice to the tutors who had no other forum for their voice to be heard, and to make a meaning of what I had heard.

Throughout the previous year, as I had started to analyse what I had experienced in the light of what I was learning, I started to identify some themes, and the theorists I thought might have some insight into those themes: initially Foucault and Gramsci. Inevitably these themes and theorists that I had identified earlier were going to affect the questions that I asked, and the way that I interpreted the answers in this present project. I came to realize that previously inductively-reached conclusions could quickly become deductive in this new project. While a deductive approach has its own validity, I feel it limits the possibility of being open to new insights that were beyond my initial imagining. Thus while my first interviews were framed

within the contexts of my initial assumptions, it was very important to me to take a semi-structured approach and see where they led to, and to be open to unexpected outcomes.

Analysing the findings of the interviews helped me to discover themes that I had not expected to find, and led me to explore new theoretical frameworks to explain what I had found, and that reading in turn shaped the follow-up conversations that I had with the interviewees. It thus became both a dialectical and dialogical process.

Mapping my learning journey

Reflexivity is a central feature of a critical methodology (Hammersley, 2011), and is one that I have tried to apply to myself throughout. While this was a study about the impact of neo-liberalism on tutors, it became a journey of learning which extended beyond the narrow confines of the research question. In the course of it, I was forced to question my fundamental beliefs, address issues of power about which I was initially deeply uncomfortable, question my own involvement in a system which I felt to be problematic at best, and consider ways in which I could work within that system and remain true to the values that I held.

As I went on this learning journey, I became aware of extent to which I myself am caught in the nexus between community education and neo-liberalism, in which I am struggling to find sites of resistance in my own practice. Maybe what I had really been asking throughout this study is how I could maintain my own critical voice.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the relevance of this research for me, as well as the ontological and epistemological stance I have adopted which is within the traditions of Critical Theory, seeking to identify and question systems of inequality, and accepting as valid knowledge the

meanings that those involved make of their lived experience. I have outlined my reasons for adopting a qualitative approach, and attempted to document the paths I took and the reasons for taking those paths throughout this journey. Finally, since reflexivity is such a key part of critical enquiry, I briefly outlined my own reflective journey of learning throughout this study. In the next chapter I will review the concepts which provide the theoretical framework for this study.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

When things are investigated, then true knowledge is achieved; when true knowledge is achieved, then the will becomes sincere; when the will is sincere, then the heart is set right; when the heart is set right, then the personal life is cultivated; when the personal life is cultivated, then the family life is regulated; when the family life is regulated, then the national life is orderly; and when the national life is orderly, then there is peace in this world.

Confucius

Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore the impact of neo-liberalism on tutors working in adult and community education who identify with the traditional community education ethos. Therefore in this literature review, I want to look at the genesis of critical pedagogy in the community education sector in Ireland, and the impact of policy on subsequent developments in that sector. I shall explore neo-liberalism as promoted through national and international policy, its colonization of adult and community education, and the new discourses which have emerged as a result. Finally, I shall be looking at the theories of Jürgen Habermas and Paulo Freire, to see what insights they have to offer which might help us to understand the dynamics which occur when community education tutors, more used to working within the traditional value systems of community education, work within a neo-liberal system. I will conclude by arguing that while individually their work offers interesting insights into different aspects of this study, taken together, they offer a deeper theoretical understanding of what happens when tutors' lifeworld is colonized by neo-liberalism, as well as the practical tools to identify sites of resistance to that colonization.

Critical Pedagogy and Community Education

Arising out of the work of Paulo Freire, the tradition of critical pedagogy in adult education is about creating opportunities for the learner to develop a capacity for critical thinking, the

ability to question commonly held assumptions, and the confidence to challenge those assumptions which are having a negative effect upon their lives.

Community education Ireland, was heavily influenced by the literacy and women's movement of the 1980s (DES, 2000; Connolly, 2003), but advocated a model of critical pedagogy which could be used by other groups, such as marginalised men, travellers, etc. many of which had already been failed by the education system (Lynch, 2006). It was a model which valued non-formal learning which was not bound to previously established criteria with regard to content or assessment (Connolly, 2003).

Moving into the mainstream

With the recommendation in the White Paper, Learning for Life (DES, 2000), of the appointment of community education facilitators, the sector started to come into the mainstream of adult education. Spending many years as the 'Cinderella' of the education sector (Fleming, 2001) may have been challenging, but it allowed the critical ethos of community education to flourish (Slowey, 2004). However, with the benefits of coming into the mainstream, such as official recognition and funding, came the resultant challenges, such as accountability for the funding received, and being exposed to the dominant educational and societal ideology. It has been argued that that dominant ideology in Ireland is currently a neo-liberal one (Allen, 2007, cited in Fitzsimons, 2010; Finnegan, 2008). It is worth then, exploring the concept of neo-liberalism, in order to understand the impact that it has had on community education.

Neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism has become the dominant political ideology of global capitalism, involving the systemic deregulation of trade and finance, and a large-scale programme of marketization and privatization around the world. The market has become the dominant, hegemonic paradigm of

the age (Finnegan, 2008, Harvey, 2005), and the relationship between the market and the state has been reconfigured. This means that the state has abandoned or downgraded social and redistributive functions, while social life has been commodified and civil society has been colonized. As a result, it has deepened social inequality. Since education plays a key role in the reproduction of the status quo (Lynch, 1999), it becomes all the more important for the system to co-opt a sector such as adult and community education, which works with some of the most marginalised in the community, so that the privileges of the elite are maintained and not questioned.

Neo-liberalism and educational policy

Much current policy regarding adult education stemmed from the EU's commitment to the concept of lifelong learning which in turn grew out of a concern about the threat of globalism, and the need to improve economic competitiveness (Finnegan, 2008; Nordin, 2011). From a policy perspective, further interest in adult education, and literacy in particular, came from the publication of the OECD report (1997) which identified that 25% of Irish adults scored at the lowest literacy level, and noted the correspondence between low literacy, low participation in training, and low incomes. Where community education and literacy classes had long been allowed to exist on the fringes of the education system, there was suddenly an economic imperative to put funding and resources into the sector. This imperative is reflected in the White Paper (DES, 2000), and other policy documents (Department of the Taoiseach, 2011; EGFSN , 2007).

The impact of neo-liberalism on education

In the discourse of lifelong learning, the concept of knowledge has been replaced by those of skills and information. With its emphasis on training for a flexible, versatile workforce this discourse allows for a high degree of mobility, both within and between businesses and countries (Olssen, 2008). This allows businesses and governments to avoid long term

responsibility towards their workers. In this neo-liberal market discourse the learners become entrepreneurs of themselves and take responsibility of their own education while the state provides the tools that facilitate and audit that process. While community education has traditionally valued non-accredited learning, there has been an increasing push towards assessing learning, specifically assessing it through FETAC accreditation. I would suggest that FETAC accreditation is the tool that the state is providing to audit and facilitate the process of the learner becoming the entrepreneur of their learning.

The language of the marketplace is precisely the type of language being used by SOLAS, the new body overseeing the soon-to-be merged VECs and FÁS in its consultation document, in which learners are referred to as ‘customers’, and the learning process is referred to as the ‘customer experience’ (DES, 2011). Equally, the bureaucratic requirements around the delivery of FETAC accredited classes, has increased dramatically under the new quality assurance agreements. Tutors are required to complete assessment plans, attend and give induction sessions, document information given to learners, document feedback given, attend meetings, complete evaluations, as well as teach. There seems to be an assumption that a tick box is a suitable method for assessing the quality of the learning experience received by the learner. This increase in professional regulation mirrors the increase in legal regulation in social life noted by Fleming (2000, p. 4) as a feature of neo-liberalism.

The concept of lifelong **and** lifewide learning is one that has been promoted at an EU level as the site of learning has come to include learning in all imaginable situations (Olssen, 2008). This concept has also been promoted, somewhat problematically I feel, at a national level. I would suggest that by linking itself to the model of critical community education that had developed in Ireland out of the women’s movement in the 1980s, the lifewide learning discourse allowed for an initially unrecognized colonization of the neoliberal agenda in community education, facilitated by weak discursive and institutional traditions, which

offered a permeable site for colonization (Finnegan, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2005, O'Sullivan 2008).

Furthermore, Thompson (2007) points to a pre-occupation with 'getting things done' in community education, rather than wasting time on theories, and I would agree with Finnegan and O'Sullivan that this lack of theorizing, at least at the level of every day practice, has allowed the concepts of neo-liberalism to slip in (relatively) uncontested. As a result there has been an increasing concern with both the language and practice of the market, and the growing importance of throughputs, outputs, progression routes, accreditation, calculations of competence, quality assurance, marketing strategies etc., which Collins calls the 'trappings of a cult of efficiency' (Collins, 1991, p. 2) In the process, 'education is being transformed into training' (p.29). And that, I would argue, is exactly what has happened in Ireland through the increasing emphasis on accreditation in adult and community education.

Neo-liberalism: The tutor perspective

Thompson argues that 'teachers are regarded as potential revolutionaries and/or incompetents, who need to be motivated by the threat of losing their jobs, and monitored by excessive amounts of bureaucracy as a way of using up their energy and distracting them from using too much critical intelligence' (Thompson, 2007, p. 29). Of course, if tutors are not in a position to think critically themselves, then they will be less able to facilitate their learners to think critically. As argued above, the strategy of lifelong learning allows employment contracts to become more flexible, with responsibility for employment tenure resting with the individuals, allowing companies to offset the responsibility for social and fiscal payments (Olssen, 2008). Ironically, I would suggest, the very tutors who engage with the learners on this lifelong learning quest are, for the most part victims of this neoliberal employment culture themselves, working by the hour, and being laid off for every holiday. Not necessarily recognising it as a dominant discourse themselves, it becomes difficult for them to facilitate their learners to

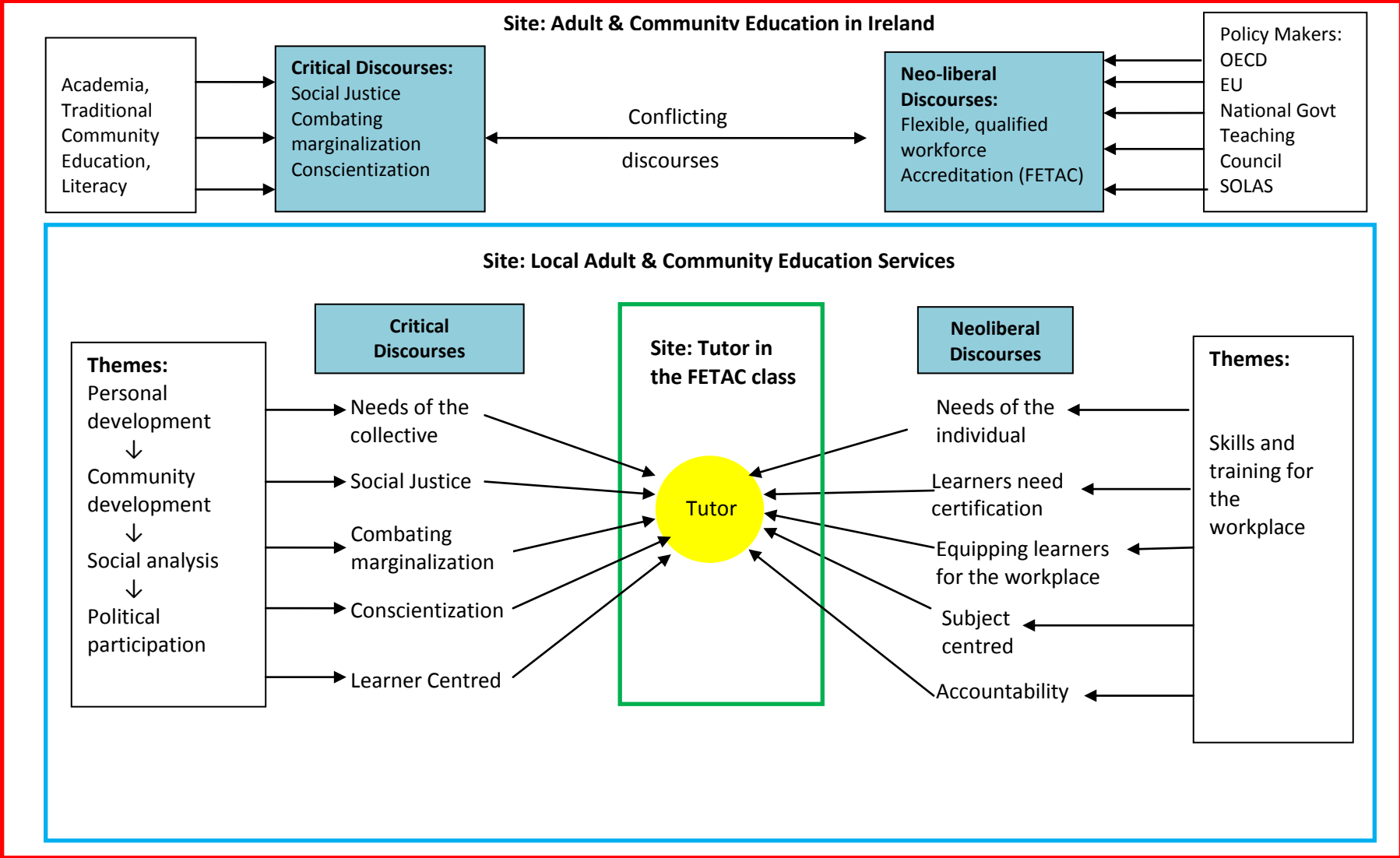
critically evaluate the dominant power discourses within which they find themselves. As Collins points out, the problems associated with a marginal status for adult education teachers as well as administrators have persisted, notwithstanding the public rhetoric proclaiming the virtue and necessity of lifelong learning. Indeed, the marginal status of the tutors corresponds closely to that of the learners they teach (Collins, 1991).

Conflicting discourses

As shown above, with the colonization of adult and community education by a neo-liberal ideology, a new set of discourses has entered into the sphere. Discourses are ‘meaning repertoires’ through which we filter events and experiences (Ryan, 2011). The discourses in which we engage help define us and others, and as such are central to the way we make meaning.

The themes of personal development, community development, social analysis and political participation (CEFA, 2011), which were practiced by the community education and literacy sector, were characterized by discourses of social justice, combating marginalization, conscientization and addressing the needs of the collective. The new, colonizing themes are increasingly about skills and training for the workplace; the discourses around certification, such as equipping learners for the workforce, accountability, and the focus on the needs of the individual conflict directly with the traditional discourses of the sector. These conflicting discourses converge upon the tutor who is working within the traditional community education ethos, whose beliefs and practices are informed by and imbued with those discourses, and now has to work within the parameters and discourses of a neo-liberal system. The diagram on page 27 illustrates the convergence of these conflicting discourses upon the tutor.

Conflicting discourses and the tutor



Finding an analytical framework

As discussed above, there have been considerable changes within the adult and community education sector—changes, I would argue, which have had a particularly profound effect on the tutors working at the coalface with the learners. In a relatively short time, they have moved from working in an environment which valued non-formal, process-oriented learning, to one in which there is an increasing emphasis on accreditation, outcomes and bureaucracy in both the learning and their working environment, while still ostensibly maintaining a ‘learner-centred’ approach. The aim of this thesis is to explore the impact of neo-liberal changes on tutors who identify with the critical ethos of community education. I wish to explore the impact of those conflicting discourses upon them, and to see if adopting a sociological perspective will provide greater insights into what these tutors are experiencing. To do this, I will be looking at the theories of Jürgen Habermas and Paulo Freire, whose work is embedded within Critical Theory. I will be exploring what they have to offer individually to help explain the impact of these conflicting discourses on the tutors in this study, I will examine the limitations of their theories with this context, and how, taken in conjunction, they can provide new insights into the tutors’ experience and practice.

Critical theory

Critical Theory is a theoretical framework which uses a Marxist perspective to explore social inequities, and the systematic exploitation of the many by the few. It is based on the premise that the commodity exchange economy will generate tensions, ‘created by the desire of some people for emancipation and the wish of others to prevent this desire being realized’ (Brookfield, 2005, p.23). This thesis will look at one aspect of those tensions, using concepts developed by Jürgen Habermas.

In adult education, Habermas is probably best known for his theory of communicative action. He developed a theory of democracy grounded in a theory of communication—in a break from traditional Marxist analysis, he says that a theory which is concerned with human liberation needs to look at how people organise their communication rather than at how they organise their patterns of production. In outlining his theory of communicative action, Habermas explores

three intertwined topic complexes: first a concept of communicative rationality...; second, a two-level concept of society that connects the ‘lifeworld’ and the ‘system’ paradigms...; and finally, a theory of modernity that explains the type of social pathologies that are today becoming increasingly visible, by way of the assumption that communicatively structured domains of life are being subordinated to the imperatives of autonomous, formally organized systems of action.

(Habermas, 1984 p. xi)

In this study, I am particularly interested in exploring how these three intertwined themes can help us to understand the impact that neo-liberalism is having on adult and community education tutors. Habermas (1984) says that in everyday communication, individuals cannot avoid using speech in a way that strives to reach understanding. An important place where these common understandings are achieved is in the public sphere.

Public Sphere

Located within civil society, Habermas defines the public sphere as ‘a network for communicating information and points of view’ (1984, p. 360), and

‘an intermediary between the political system on the one hand, and the private sectors of the lifeworld and functional systems on the other’ (p. 373).

This points to the vital role that the public sphere plays as a ‘bulwark against the systematizing effects of the state and the economy’ (Fleming, 2000, p. 2). The public sphere is fluid and it can be sited in brief conversations, or sustained discussions.

But this public sphere is increasingly coming under threat, argues Habermas. With the growth of capitalism and the move from an industrial to an information society, people are less

prepared for participation in public discourse (Habermas, 1996, p. 325). To prevent this diminution of the public sphere, its communicative structures must be kept intact by an energetic civil society (1996, p. 369), including adult education classes where concepts can be discussed, views shared, consensus reached, and democracy learned. It is through this discourse that the public sphere becomes the ‘primary locus of the struggle to protect the lifeworld’ (Fleming, p. 3).

I would argue that this concept of a public sphere is particularly useful in understanding what is happening to the tutors in this study. As adult educators, they showed a clear commitment to helping their learners be a part of an active civil society, and to engage in that public sphere. Yet as I argue, theories which apply to the learners are as applicable to the tutors. One of the findings to emerge in this research was that the tutors had little opportunity for either brief conversations or sustained discussions in which they could share ideas with each other, explore common meanings, or even develop a sense of common purpose. In short, they had no real sense of a public sphere for their professional life. The problem that Habermas identifies with the diminution of the public sphere is that it leaves the lifeworld vulnerable to colonization by the lifeworld. So what is the lifeworld, and why does it need to be protected from the system?

Life World & System

The *lifeworld* is ‘the reservoir of implicitly known traditions, the background assumptions that are embedded in language and culture and drawn upon by individuals in everyday life’ (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. 427). In this, it is akin to Illich’s concept of *commons* (Illich, 1983). It is the values, assumptions and language that we share with others, the

intuitively present, in this sense familiar and transparent, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions, that have to be satisfied if an actual utterance is said to be meaningful.

(Habermas 1987, p. 131)

It is always being renewed and recreated in communicative action, and the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld fulfils three important functions: ‘the propagation of cultural traditions, the integration of groups by norms and values, and the socialization of succeeding generations’ (Habermas, 1987).

If community education has a clearly defined set of traditions, as outlined above, and those working in it share values, assumptions and even language, then I would argue that Habermas’ concept of a lifeworld is a very useful tool for analysing that common experience of working in community education; I would suggest that the tutors have a professional lifeworld which should be the place where those meanings and values are reproduced.

The *system* refers to structures of instrumental action, such as industry or even governments (Habermas, 1987), and it can be divided into two different sub-systems, money and power, which form the ‘steering media’ of both the capitalist economy, and state institutions and their administration. Again, this is a useful construct, as it can help us to understand the forces behind recent government policy with regard to community education, and to see accreditation and its accompanying bureaucracy as an instrument of that policy both in terms of the marketization of education, and accountability for money invested by the state.

Colonization of the lifeworld by the system

Habermas develops the concept of colonization to explore the relationship between the system and the lifeworld (Fleming, 1996, p.3). He is concerned that the lifeworld is being colonized by the system, which has been created to serve the technical imperatives of the state and the economy. He refers to:

the infiltration of capital into areas of life which until now were shielded from it by tradition and within which the values of capitalist society...were not hitherto dominant.

(Habermas, 1992, p. 66).

If, as I argue above, there is a lifeworld of community education, then this concept of colonization is particularly useful, as it allows us to understand the impact of accreditation as an instrument of the system in serving the needs of the state for a flexible labour force; accreditation effectively becomes a sub-system of the larger system, which is colonizing the tutors' lifeworld.

Habermas argues that the steering media have their own discourses, which are 'indifferent to the dynamics of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization necessary for the development and reproduction of lifeworlds' (Kemmis, 1998, p. 280). When this happens, the internal communicative action that underpins the lifeworld is replaced by the ideas, values and language of the system; 'reshaping individual and collective self-understandings, relationships, and practices' (Kemmis, 1998, p. 280).

The impact of colonization of the lifeworld

Collins points out that an ideology of technique and efficiency leaves us with little appreciation of our past. It is, essentially, ahistorical (Collins, 1991, p. 41). In other words, it breaks the link with your lifeworld, and makes you vulnerable to colonization. Habermas (1987) identifies a number of pathologies resulting from the colonization of the lifeworld, including a decrease in shared meanings and mutual understanding (anomie), the erosion of social bonds (disintegration), an increase in people's feelings of helplessness and lack of belonging (alienation), consequent unwillingness to take responsibility for their actions and for social phenomena, (demoralization), and destabilization and breakdown in social order. Illich too, suggests that crucial practical and ethical values of everyday life are eroded by rationalism and technical perspectives (Illich, 1979, cited in Collins, 1991), and highlights the psychic damage wrought in our everyday living by the onslaught of extreme technicist orientation (Illich, 1983). In order to prevent this happening, the lifeworld must be

symbolically produced and reproduced through the medium of communicative action (Habermas, 1984).

Habermas, Democracy and Power

Central to the concepts of communication and democracy, argues Habermas (1996), is also the concept of communicative power. Within complex modern democracies, communicative power is dependent on administrative bodies but ‘the nature of administrative power conflicts with the logic of communicative power, which is ultimately based [...] on relations of mutual recognition and respect’ (Scheuerman, 1999). Modern democracy thus contains a paradox, in that it requires forms of administrative power that are structurally incompatible with the communicative power, which, according to Habermas, is what makes democratic deliberation possible in the first place.

I would suggest that this paradox becomes relevant to us when we consider that the adult education classroom, where the learner is experiencing democratic practices through communication action, also becomes the site where they experience neo-liberal administrative power, through the requirements of FETAC accreditation. Thus the curriculum-led vs. learner-led dilemma which tutors experience in their attempts to create a democratic classroom, mirrors the administrative vs. communicative power paradox mentioned above.

Habermas and adult learning

Fleming (2000) suggests that it would be useful to define the role of an adult educator as working with the public space, helping adults both to decolonize the lifeworld through democratic, critical discourses, and to transform systems such as organizations, bureaucracies and workplaces (p. 7). However, he further asks if adult education will serve the system or the life-world. Looking at the current and future trends, the answer would seem to be that it is increasingly serving the system.

Habermas supplies us with the tools to recognize what potentially happens when the system is served. If, as argued above, adult and community education has a critical tradition in Ireland, with its own shared values and discourses around social justice, marginalization etc., then, I would suggest, it has its own lifeworld. But in a profession dominated by part-time tutors, on temporary contracts, where is their public sphere? Where can they explore the issues they face within a dialogic context, leading to political will formation, and the possibility to fight that colonization of their lifeworld? When tutors working within the traditional community education ethos, whose practice is informed by the values, are asked to work within the technical rational system of FETAC accreditation, a system imbued with the spirit and discourses of neo-liberalism, then, I would suggest, their lifeworld is being colonized and Habermas gives us the concept of pathologies to explore the impact of this colonization.

Critiquing Habermas

It has been said that Habermas' later work is idealistic and inadequately critical of the existing political order in liberal democracies (Payrow Shabani, 2003). This is a theme picked up by Welton (2003) in the context of the Gulf War and the lies that were told in order to justify that war. He points out that deliberative democracy is not working when governments lie and use the media to prevent the development of a public sphere.

Inglis (1997) speaks of adult educators swinging between Foucauldian pessimism and Habermasian optimism. But the problem with adopting that Habermasian optimism and seeing adult education as an ideal place in civic society where citizens can learn about deliberative democracy, is that it can blind us to systemic inequalities within the system, and leave us vulnerable to colonization. Payrow Shabani points out that 'an inadequate critical treatment of the actual institution of liberal democracies [...] robs us of our critical ability to protest the remaining injustices of the system' (2003 p. 6). While I accept the validity of these criticisms, I do not feel that the answer is to throw out Habermas' ideas—this study

points to an even greater need for a public sphere, but one which continues to question and critique systems of inequality.

There are further problems around Habermas' analysis of power, particularly in his theory of communicative power. It has been argued that this model makes 'many concessions to capitalism, as it takes existing institutions of liberal democracy as the starting point for normative theorization' (Payrow Shabani, 2003, p.10), and by aligning communicative power with state power, he legitimizes it. Payrow Shabani suggests that we can overcome the weaknesses in Habermas' theorization of power, by appropriating Foucault's concepts of the relational and discursive nature of power. I agree with this suggestion, as my own findings in this study point to the need to explore more fully the relational and discursive nature of power that the tutors were experiencing in their practice. Thus, I suggest, while concepts such as the public sphere, and the colonization of the lifeworld by the system are particularly useful analytical tools in the context of this study, they would benefit from a more rigorous problematization of systemic power.

This call for a Foucauldian understanding of power is one that is shared by Inglis (1997). He distinguishes between empowerment, which he argues is about personal development within existing systems, and emancipation, which has an overtly political aim (Inglis, 1997). Inglis suggests that this process of empowerment, focussing on people becoming self-regulated, disciplined and controlled, corresponds to Foucault's theory that more subtle and pervasive forms of control are becoming more common in Western society, and he argues that adult and community education needs to develop a theory of power, as it will only be able to contribute to a more equitable society, with a clear understanding of how power works at a structural and agency level.

Habermas has been critiqued for distinguishing too rigidly between the lifeworld and the system. Kellner suggests that we are caught up in a contradictory process: while the lifeworld

is experiencing threats from the system, at the same time there are conflicts and openings in system which allow for ‘democratic intervention and transformation’ (Kellner, n.d). These opportunities for transformation became apparent in this study, where some tutors found sites of resistance within the system, and were able to imbue it with the values of their lifeworld. Furthermore, Welton (1995) points out that Habermas says resistance must be sited in social movements and grassroots activism across a wide range of issues; this suggests that Habermas does recognize that potential for resistance within the system, but doesn’t develop the concept sufficiently. I would suggest we need to look at the work of Freire to better understand how resistance may occur within the system.

Paulo Freire

Challenging mainstream education

Freire’s particular relevance to tutors working within the adult and community education sector is that he is writing primarily as an educator rather as a political analyst or philosopher. He focuses on the ideological means whereby those in power and privilege (the oppressors) exert control over those they exploit (the oppressed). One of the ways this happens is through mainstream education which, he says, is characterised by a process of ‘banking education’ (Freire, 1970, p. 58). This banking approach facilitates ‘cultural invasion’, as the learner becomes vulnerable to ideas imposed from above (ideas related to the dominant culture) and from outside (ideas disseminated as a part of the process of cultural imperialism) (Mayo, 1999, p. 59). This is analogous to Habermas’ ‘colonization of the lifeworld’ by the ‘system’ and the way in which the values of the system become taken as common sense by the lifeworld.

Freire, democracy and dialogue: Learning to read the world

Resisting this cultural invasion becomes a key task in adult learning, and adult educators play an important role in this context as democratic educators, promoting learning through

dialogue (Mayo, 1999, p. 63). Through a 'pedagogy of the question' the educator helps the learner to reflect on their reality in a process of praxis, which is at the core of conscientization (Freire, 1970, p. 85). This helps the learner to 'read their world', to become critically literate and crucially, to take action against the oppressive elements in their lives

Freire and Neo-liberalism

Freire was well aware of the challenges that neo-liberalism would bring to adult education. Writing forty years before the establishment of SOLAS, and the current suggestions of making attendance at adult education classes a requirement for receiving social welfare payments, Freire presaged much of what was to come when he pointed out that the oppressors are not interested in changing the systems which oppress,

for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of 'welfare recipients'. They are treated as individual cases, as marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a 'good, organised and just society.

(Freire, 1970, p. 55)

In other words, it is the oppressed who come to be considered the problem, rather than the system which oppresses them. As this neo-liberal discourse becomes hegemonic, accepted as 'common-sense' by the oppressed, they are not in a position to 'read' the oppressive nature of the situation within which they find themselves, and are thus not able to challenge it. Clearly this makes the role of the adult educator all the more important within the current neo-liberal climate. But if that tutor is working within a context which has itself experienced a 'cultural invasion' by a neo-liberal ethos, if, as mentioned above, adult education is increasingly serving the system rather than the lifeworld, then this puts tutors in a situation where they have to 'read' and challenge oppressive forces in their own professional context, in order to help their learners 'read' and challenge the forces that oppress them.

Freire and resistance

Ever practical, Freire helps us to find sites of resistance to oppressive structures. He favours working both within and outside the system, saying that ‘every time we can occupy some position inside of the subsystem, we should do so’ (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 203). I would suggest that a process of political conscientization, and the praxis which it implies, is relevant for those adult educators who find themselves working within a neo-liberal system that is engaged in a process of cultural invasion with regards to their values and practice as adult educators within a critical tradition. This happened in the United Kingdom, where, even when the neo-liberalism of Thatcherism took over so completely, many adult educators across the country still found spaces to colonize with oppositional practice (Payne, 1995).

Critiquing Freire

Although Freire has been a highly influential figure within the adult and community education sector, he is not without his critics. One of the criticisms levelled against him is that he tends to argue in a binary way; we are either for the oppressed or against them (Smith, 1997, 2002). While this may be a useful starting point for someone first engaging in the field, this either/or approach could lead to simplistic political analysis. It also makes it easy to dismiss his work. Indeed, one of the tutors in this study specifically mentioned that she believed his work was of most relevance in Brazil, and not for a modern Western society, even though in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992), Freire discusses his work with Spanish guestworkers in Germany, and in the inner city slums in the United States. This critique of Freire as being relevant only in a specific geographical, political and historical location is one that is raised by Giroux, who argues on behalf of Freire that his work has:

been appropriated in ways that denude it of some of its most important political insights. Similarly, it testifies to how a politics of location works in the interest of privilege and power to cross cultural, political, and textual borders so as to deny the specificity of the other and to reimpose the discourse and practice of colonial hegemony.

(Giroux 1992)

More problematically, I believe, Taylor (1993) argues that what is claimed to be liberatory teaching practice may be closer to banking education than we might like, and says that the practice of Freirean education can, under the guise of problem-posing, introduce all sorts of ideas and values:

The rhetoric which announced the importance of dialogue, engagement, and equality, and denounced silence, massification and oppression, did not match in practice the subliminal messages and modes of a Banking System of education. Albeit benign, Freire's approach differs only in degree, but not in kind, from the system which he so eloquently criticizes' (Taylor, 1993, p. 148).

Interestingly, this critique was echoed by one of the tutors, who felt that she did not have the right to adopt a Freirean approach in her practice, as it would be introducing her values into the classroom, which would then be 'learned' by the students.

Torres (1993) has also noted that Freire has a tendency to turn everyday situations into pedagogical ones, that while his initial point of reference may be non-formal, his approach is still curriculum-based, in that a curriculum implies a predefined set of concerns and activities. While educators need to look for 'teachable moments', Torres argues, concentrating on this can lead us to overlook the simple power of being in conversation with others. Interestingly, I believe this tendency has been adopted whole-heartedly in adult and community education in Ireland, and has allowed the distinction between learner-led, and curriculum-led learning to become blurred. It allows lip service to be paid to being learner-centred (fundamentally compromised in a curriculum-led classroom, I would argue), while in fact being merely 'learner-flavoured'; the materials dictated by the curriculum are delivered in a context which is of interest to the learner. This confusion between being 'learner-centred' and 'learner-flavoured' has allowed the 'FETACization' of community education to proceed with less contestation than might otherwise be the case, and thus further facilitated the colonization of the sector.

While there are problems relating to the ideas of Habermas and Freire, we have seen that they both offer theoretical perspectives through which we can usefully analyse some of the issues which adult and community education currently faces. The next section will tease out what both have in common, how reading them together addresses individual problems with their work, and why taken together, their theories provide us with the tools to explore more fully that which happens when tutors from a critical tradition work in a neo-liberal system.

Habermas and Freire

Finding Commonalities

While even a superficial reading of both Habermas and Freire can identify commonalities such as their commitment to democratic principles, Morrow and Torres (2002) have produced an exhaustive comparative study of the works of both authors, and have identified a number of common themes and approaches. They identify four common themes which underpin their work, saying that both men share a common understanding of a critical social science which is focussed on emancipatory possibilities; have common theories of society as a system of social and cultural reproduction that identify contradictions which in turn create possibilities for transformation; both share a critical social and psychological understanding of the individual who, through various forms of domination is thwarted in their developmental possibilities, but who yet has the potential to challenge that domination through critique and practice; and finally, a common understanding of individual and collective learning that suggests a relationship between education and transformative change (Morrow & Torres, 2002, pp. 14-15). These common themes are of particular relevance in this study, as it is looking at tutors who are caught within oppressive structures themselves, who need the space to produce and reproduce their cultural values and to identify and transform those oppressive structures.

Morrow and Torres further identify common approaches in the work of both Habermas and Freire, sharing, as they do, a similar dialogical and developmental strategy. They both locate identity formation within a process of dialogical communication, and their strategies are developmental because they both argue that the potential for growth can only be fully realised under optimal conditions of socialization (Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. ix). Indeed, Collins (1991, p.29) argues that the concept of communicative action provides the rational grounds for an emancipatory practice of adult education of a kind envisaged by Freire. I would suggest that this concept of identity formation within a process of dialogue is particularly relevant for tutors who for systemic reasons are experiencing a diminution of their public sphere and few opportunities of dialogue with other tutors. Morrow and Torres argue that for both Habermas and Freire, a central thesis is that various forms of '*critical literacy*' [original emphasis] are necessary for the development of individual autonomy and collective practice:

for both, transformative action can be carried out only by participants who construct their own collective learning process as a part of changing their relationship to the social world

(Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. 16).

Finding Complementarities

While Habermas and Freire share the commonalities outlined above, they do, of course, have very significant differences, both stylistic and epistemological. However, I would be inclined to agree with Morrow and Torres (2002) and Collins (1991), that taken together their work is complementary, and addresses certain lacunae that had been identified with each theorist. Thus Habermas has been criticised for being a grand theorist, whose work is of no practical consequence, while Freire has been accused of a lack of theoretical and methodological rigour (Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. 13). Of course, Habermas does point to some practical strategies, such as the use of dialogue, but it is true that his style makes him inaccessible to many of those who are trying to identify ways to resist the pressures they find themselves under. So,

Freire helps us to understand the abstract concept of communicative action through an approach which places dialogue within the context of a *practical* pedagogy. Equally, while Freire does engage with theory, it can be argued that it is ‘incompletely elaborated, a limitation deriving from his [...] preoccupation with practice’ (p. 13). But the purpose of Morrow and Torres’ comparative strategy is to:

locate Freire’s work in the larger context of contemporary critical social theory and to identify the pedagogical implications of Habermas through Freire [which] *allows us to see more concretely the theoretical depth of Freire, as well as the practical implications of Habermas* [original emphasis] (p. 14).

It is precisely this added depth that we get from exploring the work of these two writers together, that we need in this study. Habermas gives us the tools to understand the wider societal issues such as the loss of a public sphere, the impact it is having on the tutors and the tensions that arise from that impact, while Freire gives us the practical tools to identify oppressive structures and to explore sites of resistance within a neo-liberal system. This is particularly relevant for those tutors who are already familiar with the work of Freire, and are looking for practical tools with which to tackle the problems they face.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the genesis of critical pedagogy in community education, and its colonization by neo-liberal ideology. It has explored the work of Habermas and Freire, and identified that taken together, they provide us with both the theoretical and practical tools with which to analyse the impact that working within a neo-liberal system is having on tutors who come from a critical tradition.

The next chapter looks at what the tutors reported about their experience of teaching within a system of accreditation, dominated by a neo-liberal discourse. If community education is about giving voice to the voiceless, then this next chapter is an attempt to give voice to the tutors, and to allow their experiences of working within a neo-liberal system to be heard.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

'The history of social movements is a history of people operating in the cracks of superstructures'

Jane Thompson, 2007

Introduction

This chapter will look at the findings of this study of five tutors working in Dun Laoghaire VEC. My purpose was to get a sense of how they were being impacted by working in a system which, as I have argued in the last chapter, has been increasingly colonized by a spirit of neo-liberalism, and which would appear to be at odds with the ethos to which they ascribe. The chapter will outline the tensions and anxieties that they experience, but also the sites of resistance that some of them were able to find in their practice.

Choosing tutors

All tutors chosen were either working in the literacy service, the community education service, or both, and had in their practice shown a commitment to the traditional ethos of the adult and community education sector. While all tutors were very obviously wedded to the *practices* of adult and community education, I was interested in seeing the extent they identified with its *ideology*. I believed it was important to understand this, as I felt the extent to which they were committed to the traditional ideology of community education could have a bearing on the extent to which they felt the impact of working within system dominated by a neo-liberal ideology.

While all those with whom I spoke to recognized the political potential of education as a concept, they differed in the extent to which they thought it had a role in adult and community education now. Three of them identified an explicitly political, collective role, one felt it had political potential but not in her practice, and one tutor felt that it was inappropriate to

introduce a political element into the classroom, but explained her reasoning in distinctly Foucauldian terms, referring to the power relationships between tutor and learner, and the extent to which the learner could be swayed by the political views of the tutor. She saw it as her role to help the learner find the voice to express their own views. The latter two were the two tutors who when asked, saw the least relevance for the ideas of Paulo Freire at least in their own practice.

Choosing questions

Although I was looking at the impact of neo-liberalism on tutors, I explicitly asked about the impact that accreditation (mostly FETAC) had on their practice, as with its emphasis on outcomes and measurements, it is the neo-liberal tool that they are most likely to meet, and it stands in contrast to the traditional community education ethos which traditionally eschewed accreditation. Thereafter, I explored more generally to see in what other ways the tutors felt impacted by the neo-liberal system, as outlined in the last chapter, and whether or not they identified it as such. What was immediately apparent in all but one of the interviews was extent to which they expressed tensions and concerns. The tutor who expressed fewer tensions and anxieties than the rest had just been involved in a highly successful community project, and was very keen to discuss that. All the tutors were very happy to talk about the purpose of community education, and themes such as ‘social justice’, ‘combating marginalization’ and ‘learner-centred’ emerged repeatedly.

Concerns around accreditation

There was recognition of the positive aspects of accreditation, in terms of the sense of achievement that it could give learners, and an acknowledgment of the cultural capital it brought. However, all tutors identified there being a considerable push towards accreditation, with one tutor explaining ‘the pressure [to accredit learning] is getting heavier, especially as

the years go on'. Their use of language was interesting too, with several references to seeing themselves and the coordinators as 'bulwarks' against learners being encouraged to work towards accreditation when they possibly weren't ready or interested in doing so, and one tutor saying that when she first mentions FETAC, 'I sometimes feel like I'm dropping a bomb in the middle of the room.' This push towards accreditation had considerable impact on the tutors, with them repeatedly reporting feeling a sense of pressure. 'I can feel the pressure coming down, I can see it, and I can see it in the conversations'.

There was an awareness that in many instances the push came from the learners as well, particularly out of a concern to get employment. However, one tutor identified that the push might be coming from within community education as well, commenting that:

[t]here is an internal contradiction going on between a desire to maintain our ethos and the desire for the kudos that comes with accreditation.

Another tutor commented that:

sometimes I do think we fed into the rat race, thinking that it was the only way to go, but there *are* other ways of going, and there are other ways of being.

Finally, there was broad agreement that the increase in accredited programmes was linked to funding requirements.

Accreditation and the community education ethos

There was a sense that this increased accreditation was problematic, that 'the accreditation has become the goal, as opposed to the learning'. It was felt that this was not in tune with the community education ethos, and impacted on the way they taught.

There isn't enough time to process the new stuff, because we have to meet specific learning outcomes. But... it does away with some of... the original ethos of community education, the process-oriented stuff.

The concern around addressing specific outcomes rather than exploring areas that were of interest to the learners, was raised by most tutors with one tutor saying 'It's hard, really, really hard—what could I have done with those learners if I hadn't been trying to work towards a

FETAC Level 3?’ There was also considerable concern over there being insufficient time to process the learning or the traditional concerns of community education. As one tutor commented:

[w]e don’t have the time for that development to take place. Time for thinking about what it means to be a woman in Ireland who can’t help her children with their homework... time for thinking about being part of a democratic society.

There was a sense from some tutors that there are some processes which cannot be assessed and which community education traditionally focussed on, and a concern about the impact that this would have on the learner:

the effect of accreditation is that you only really assess the items that are on the list, and all the other items that are vital and come from what that person wants, they are put... they’re not put to one side, but they’re quite often... [long pause, sigh] ... they *are* put to one side.

This highlights the dilemma identified by a number of the tutors of trying to balance the conflicting demands of being subject-led, with the traditional learner-led ethos, and it became clear that tutors were spending a considerable amount of personal time, and energy ‘running around, *not* metaphorical running around, trying to make sure all the boxes are ticked, without losing the student’. All the tutors reported going to considerable effort to make the module descriptor fit the needs of their learners.

Accreditation and bureaucracy

The concept of ticking boxes was one that emerged frequently, especially with regard to the bureaucracy that is perceived to accompany FETAC and its quality assurance system. There was a sense that they spent a great amount of time caught up with the bureaucracy and that:

there is so much paperwork and so much form ticking, that actually the people accrediting the courses are losing sight of where we want to go.... It is important as an organization that we don’t bogged down in the box-ticking.

There was also concern that the learners would lose out, as it left less time for lesson planning and creativity, but it was equally clear that the tutors interviewed tried their best to minimize

the impact on the learners, even though it meant increasing their own workload, in their own time.

Accreditation and the workforce

A number of the tutors expressed concerns that education was being used to address the needs of the workforce rather than the community, and that that was the source of much of the push towards accreditation. ‘Accreditation is valued in our society in terms of getting a job—if you don’t have it, you are considered of lesser value,’ one tutor commented, while another felt that:

You’re almost put on a track, Level 3, Level 4, Level 5. And you might get off, and you might get back on again, or you might not. But to think that adult and community education is only about either training for the job market or getting awards is just to sell it so short, compared to what it can deliver!

However, while acknowledging the role of education, there was also a concern about that emphasis on accreditation for the workplace in the current economic crisis. As one tutor exclaimed: ‘We’re creating dreams...setting people up for jobs they won’t be getting’! Instead, it was felt, community education needed to be working with learners to address their current needs, which may well involve long-term unemployment. Several tutors also mentioned the creation of SOLAS, and the impact that that may have upon the culture of community education, with there being even greater emphasis on training for the workplace in the future.

Accreditation and power

Several of the tutors identified accreditation as having a problematic effect on the relations of power within the classroom, in particular upon the teacher-as-learner / learner-as-teacher ethos of community education.

[T]hat shifts the power differential in way it doesn’t need to be shifted. I think I’m there as a facilitator, mentor, helper. We’re all together, we’re all learning and helping them to achieve it. But if I have to mark it, how can I go back next year, maybe to the same students, and be all fuzzy, fuzzy and say we are all adults together.

There were also concerns that learners, particularly those engaging for the first time, were not sufficiently prepared for making the decision to embark on accredited learning, given that it may not be within their experience, or habitus. They were not in a position to make an informed choice:

I think the problem is that learners don't really know what they want. Does it matter if you get a FETAC award or not? But if you don't really know what a FETAC award is, and you have no experience of it, then it is quite difficult to work out how important it is. And sometimes it is almost like we don't prepare the learners enough for those kinds of decisions. They aren't given a choice... I think they are disempowered.

Clearly disempowering the learners was never the intention of the adult and community education sector, so was it changing as a result of this push towards accreditation?

Challenges facing community education

It became clear as I explored the concerns around accreditation that there was a general concern that the sector was buying into existing systems that would change it, rather than being changed by it, and that in the process, community education was becoming more structured and institutional. There was also a sense that that much of what makes community education unique could be lost.

We have a history, a sense of empowerment. But that sense is being eroded because the other side of being outside of the formal structure is that we always feel like we're second cousins, Cinderella at the ball. So, because of that, there's a bit of a push to get taken into the fold. But by being taken into the fold, I think we're ending... we're actually going to lose the strong position, the different position, the different angle, in order to get access to funding and kudos, even, all the big things out there that community education wants access to.

Although I had in the first instance asked about the impact of *accreditation* on their practice, it became apparent that there was an awareness of another value system which was threatening to take over the traditional value systems of community education, whether or not they identified it as being neo-liberal. And while it is clear from the above that accreditation

had had the effect of causing considerable tensions, I wanted to explore the other impacts that the neo-liberal colonization of community education might be having on them.

An awareness of neo-liberalism and the colonization of community education

Most tutors did not name the colonising system as being neo-liberal, but as might be expected, those who did, did so in profoundly political terms. The ‘system’ was identified as serving the needs of the power elite who were interested in maintaining systems of inequality, in that:

We know that an unequal society is bad for everybody, and yet there are those who won’t accept that or acknowledge that and they hold on to power by ensuring that inequality remains

Another tutor commented that:

community education is a tool for change, in that people can become more involved in the democratic process at a local level. And part of that is happening, and I think that is why we find that funding is being pulled.

Issues of power

The relational power inherent in the classroom had been alluded to when discussing accreditation, but several tutors identified hegemonic power being wielded, both at a sectoral and personal level. ‘Sometimes I think it is more about regulation [of the tutors] than about accreditation’, commented one tutor, while another one argued that ‘you can’t say our learners are enormously special and nurtured and then beat the tutors with a stick!’ There was a sense of hopelessness in the tutor who commented that ‘we can’t use our skills anywhere else—there is nowhere else for us to go’.

Not only was the increase in bureaucracy and accreditation identified as a means to regulate and control tutors, but as a sector it was felt that we need to maintain

this beautiful, disparate, complex web that is community education...but that is easier said than done when you are up against monolithic organizations and policies that are coming down.

Clearly there was concern about the impact of the colonization of community education, regardless of whether it was identified as neo-liberal in origin or not.

Issues of marginalization, alienation and isolation

Along with issues of power, concerns about marginalization and isolation were raised repeatedly by all but one of the tutors, and was clearly a very important issue to them: ‘our learners are marginalised, and our tutors are marginalised’ commented one, while another believed that the tutors were very ‘vulnerable’.

Several tutors identified that they were kept marginalised by the contractual and financial conditions under which they worked. Not only were they all paid as ‘unqualified tutors’ regardless of how many degrees they had, but they were all paid by the hour, with no guarantees of future employment. One tutor compared it to the

casual labour idea from the 40s and 50s that the unions fought on the docks, hours are doled out to the various tutors [...] and I suspect it is quite difficult to refuse hours because you think you might never get offered them again.

The individualising effect of this was identified in that ‘the system doesn’t support tutors working together and sharing, because we are all fighting over the same spoils.’

In addition to not having a sense of belonging to a community of tutors, there was also a sense of alienation from the organization—with most tutors commenting that they dropped or ‘parachuted’ in for classes, without any sense of belonging. ‘It’s not,’ said one tutor

about a rate of pay or hourly pay, but it’s about saying you work for us, and therefore we will support you in this. I mean, if I got less of an hourly rate, but felt that I was part of this ship, that would be ok. But you don’t, and I think that is a shame.

Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that there was a sense of isolation.

Although one tutor did report having other tutors with whom she could talk and share her

concerns, the others said that working as a community education tutor was isolating and there was a suggestion that only way to move beyond that isolation was to move into administration, which would be a loss for the learner.

The future of community education: Voices of opposition and resistance

I had planned to conclude all the interviews by asking what they thought the future of community education held, and to an extent, I got the answers I expected, given the tone of the preceding interviews. There were some concerns that the pressures upon the sector were going to grow, that there would be conflict within the body of community education in terms of the infrastructure and the practitioners, and that it would be ‘wiped out with all the other stuff that this government are wiping out’. However, three of the tutors identified challenges, but then also started identifying the potential for resistance. Even if funding is cut, argued one tutor, someone will say:

lookit, let’s just take this on ourselves, we have the knowledge, we have the skills and expertise, let’s keep going with it. There’s no money, but that doesn’t stop us from finding a room somewhere.

This backed up the view of another tutor that the local initiatives are ‘too disparate, too organic a beast to be able to be contained by bodies like SOLAS’. As these were not the answers I had expected, given the tenor of preceding interviews, I felt it was important to explore them a little more closely.

Identifying sites of resistance

Having identified resistance as a theme, these tutors were happy to expand on it, explaining that there is always the capacity for dissent in any institution, and it is part of their roles to question everything, and get the learners to question everything (including themselves). This resistance is possible, even in a reductive, neo-liberal system. As one tutor commented, ‘when you are in the business of ticking boxes, you just get good at thinking outside the box!’

As I tried to explore more closely, it became apparent that while all the tutors had tried to make the modules they were teaching relevant to their learners' needs, these tutors had actively used accreditation as a site of resistance, or at least recognized the possibility of doing so. One tutor was using Macbeth to look oppressive regimes and encouraging the learners to consider events in Libya and Syria. 'People want accreditation' commented another tutor, 'so therefore you deliver the training in the context of the module descriptor. But you still hold on to the core bits, in terms of the whole thing as a process.' Thus she was using a FETAC module to explore a community development project, where learners worked with the local travelling community to design a model community as part of their assessment project. The work they did on this project, and the reflection that accompanied it, ticked the reductive learning outcome boxes in the FETAC module descriptor, but the personal learning went far beyond that.

Another tutor used Forum Theatre techniques to work with highly marginalised groups to help them explore the issues they were facing, and to challenge the forces that were oppressing them. She was embedding this work within a FETAC Level 4 module. Again, the learning outcome boxes that were ticked in no way reflected the depth of self-awareness and learning that the learners achieved, but, as the tutor commented, while using FETAC to question the system, the learners were still gaining the accreditation that the system valued, and that could help them to get jobs later.

Rediscovering Freire

All tutors had been asked about the relevance of Freire's ideas in community education today. One tutor saw Freire as being of particular relevance to the tutor, not just as providing a methodological model, but in 'our own development as tutors—this praxis, this notion of reflection, action, and changing our practice, and the social context of what we do.' All three

had to varying degrees identified education as a political act, and felt that the ideas of Freire were more important than ever during this current economic crisis. They felt he was even relevant within a system of accreditation, one of them arguing that any module, no matter how technical or reductive, could be amenable to a Freirean approach.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to explore the impact that neo-liberalism has upon tutors who have shown a commitment to the traditional community education ethos in their work practice. It has outlined the tensions and anxieties engendered, with regards to the increasing drive towards accreditation, as well as concerns about bureaucracy, power, marginalization and isolation. However, it has also identified that some tutors managed to identify sites of resistance, even within a system of accreditation such as FETAC, and that these were tutors who recognized the relevance of Freire's ideas in their practice. The next chapter will look at these findings through the lens of the work of Habermas and Freire to see if their theories can make meaning of what these tutors are experiencing.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform

(Freire, 1970, p. 31)

Introduction

In the last chapter, I tried to give space to the tutors' voices and to allow their story to be heard. In this chapter, I will analyse what they have said through the lens of the theories of Habermas and Freire, and will conclude that while their lifeworld is being colonized by a neo-liberal system, with resultant tensions similar to the pathologies that Habermas has identified, those tutors who have found a site of resistance within the sub-system of accreditation are managing to hold on to the values of their lifeworld. While all tutors are attempting to decolonize their learners' lifeworlds, I will suggest that this latter group are counter-colonizing the system, and through this agentic act, limiting the threat to their lifeworld.

Choosing a theoretical framework

In this thesis I am taking theories usually applied to learners, and using the lens they provide us with, to view the experience of the tutor; I am doing so for two reasons. Firstly, I will be arguing that the theories explored in the literature review apply to the experience of the tutors as much as to the learners; their lifeworld is being colonized by neo-liberalism in the same way that lifeworld of their learners is. Secondly, as Collins argued, 'from the viewpoint of an adult education that attends critically to everyday political realities, learners' interests are seen to correspond fairly closely with the interests of those who assume the role of adult educator' (1991, p. xii), a symbiosis recognized by the tutor who argued that you could not claim to be nurturing the learner while beating the tutors with a stick.

In the literature review, I had identified the ideology traditional to community education with its roots in the critical pedagogy of Paolo Freire, and noted evidence that it was being colonized by a neo-liberal ideology. The conflicting discourses of these two ideologies converge upon the tutors when they are teaching in an accredited class. Habermas' theory of the colonization of the lifeworld by the system, and the pathologies that it causes, can shed some light on the impact of that colonization, but I have argued that it does not provide an adequate theory of resistance; we need turn to Freire for that. That was the theory: the purpose of this chapter is to explore the findings of the previous chapter in the light of that theory, and to see whether they do provide us with a useful framework for understanding the situation in which these tutors find themselves, and the impact that neo-liberalism is having upon them.

The lifeworld of the tutor

The discourses of adult and community education include themes such as social justice, marginalization, and learner-centredness, and these were discourses employed by the tutors in the course of the interviews. They all wanted their practice to be informed and shaped by the needs of their learners, to have time to explore issues of relevance to their learners and their lives, and to have time to process that learning. Some of them identified empowerment as a discourse, but the empowerment/emancipation distinction that Inglis (1997) makes is not widely known among most tutors, so in this I would suggest they are simply utilising a common discourse in adult and community education, rather than making any comment on the collective vs. individual nature of community education. All the tutors spoke with great pride of the values of justice and inclusion which they felt made community education unique, and it was obviously an aspect of the traditions of the sector that meant a lot to them, and with which they closely identified.

If, as argued in Chapter 3, the lifeworld consists of the implicitly known traditions and assumptions that are embedded in language (discourses), and drawn upon in everyday life (Cohen & Arato, 1992), then I would argue that the traditions and values of community education have become the lifeworld of these tutors. The traditions, assumptions and discourses may not have been implicitly known initially, but they have been thoroughly internalised, and inform their practice. These tutors have chosen to be part of the community of community education, have adopted its lifeworld and made it their own. It is this professional lifeworld, I would argue, that is at threat of being colonized by the neo-liberal ideology which is now becoming increasingly dominant in the education sector (Connolly, 2003; Finnegan, 2008; Mayo, 1999; Thompson, 2007).

Evidence of neo-liberal colonization

A number of neo-liberal discourses outlined by Collins (1991), Olssen (2008), Thompson (2007) and others in the literature review above emerged in the interviews as having an increasing impact on the tutors' practice. There was complete agreement that there was an increasing push towards accreditation, and it was felt that this accreditation was being used to address the needs of the workforce, rather than those of the learner or the community. Accreditation had become the goal, rather than the learning, and it was accompanied by a considerable increase in bureaucracy and ticking of boxes—the 'trappings of a cult of efficiency' (Collins, 1991, p. 2), that cult of efficiency which tries to make more and more areas of human life measurable, including the community education classroom.

When asked where the push for accreditation was coming from, the tutors repeatedly referred to the demands of funding, and the Department of Education's expectation of accountability for that funding. Habermas' concept of the 'system', outlined in Chapter 3 above, refers to structures of instrumental action, such as governments, so we see clearly here that the tutors

identify a system with its own instrumental rationality, which through its emphasis on accreditation and bureaucracy is colonising their lifeworld. Interestingly, analysis of the funding guidelines for many of the programmes offered within the literacy and community education sector, as detailed in the literature review, shows that while accreditation should be available to learners, it is not a requirement (DES, 2012; DES, 2012). We see here the values of the system being accepted without question, and a hegemonic discourse in action.

The tutors were aware of this colonization of community education, saying that because of the push towards accreditation, they were losing those processes which cannot be assessed but which were central to their ethos, and that there was insufficient time left in the classroom to properly address the learners' needs—the demands of the module descriptor were expected to come first. This highlights the paradox discussed in the literature review of democracy being dependent on both communicative power and administrative power (Habermas, 1996).

Policy makers identify one of the goals of lifelong learning to be about citizenship and democracy. Equally, finding common understanding through dialogue, which is essential to being an engaged member of a democratic society, is a goal of community education. But there is a fundamental contradiction in trying to do that in a subject-led classroom (as dictated by administrative power), rather than learner-led classroom, which depends on communicative power. If the contents of the class are not being developed in negotiation with the learners, then that is profoundly undemocratic. The space which was intended to be used for learning about democracy, becomes itself undemocratic.

Further to the problem of the undemocratic effects of accreditation, there was a strong suggestion that some learners were being pushed into accreditation when they didn't want it. This suggests an interesting double-think. All the tutors claimed to be 'learner-centred', a discourse close to the heart of the entire adult and community education sector. Yet, if learners are being pushed into accreditation they don't want, it is hardly learner-centred. I

would suggest that what is widely called ‘learner-centred’, is actually ‘learner-flavoured’, at best using topics the learner is interested in, to teach the outcomes dictated by the module descriptor. By co-opting the discourse of the sector, the changed meaning of the language has been accepted without challenge, and facilitated the colonization of the sector.

This colonization was explicitly identified as neo-liberal and political in nature. While discussing what community education *should* be, as opposed to what it had *become*, one tutor commented that in traditional community education learners would have the chance

‘to discover what it is that they want to learn, and do what they want do... but I think the government would be quite frightened of that [laughs]. Paolo, Mr. Freire would come back into our midst!’

Finally, there was a sense among some tutors that accreditation had colonized the traditional ethos of equality. They felt that there was a belief that those who didn’t have accreditation were considered to be of lesser value, and it was suggested that accreditation shifted the power differential in the classroom away from the learner to the tutor.

I have argued that the tutors studied here do share the values and discourses, or the lifeworld of community education, and if, as has been argued by Collins (1991) and others, community education has been colonized, then it follows that the lifeworld of the tutors has been colonized. I will now use the theories of Habermas to explore how that colonization impacts upon these tutors, in order to gain a clearer understanding of what is happening in the process.

Lifeworld and communicative action:

The theory of communicative action is relevant in two different ways to the tutors studied here: both with regard to the practice of the tutor in the context of their teaching, and the tutor in the context of the system. The tutors expressed their commitment to the type of education envisaged by Habermas’ (1987) theory of communicative action: forging common understandings through dialogue and questioning and agreeing on validity claims which is

crucial to democratic life. As identified above, that becomes difficult, if not impossible in a subject-led, accredited course, compromising tutors' efforts to develop a democratic, egalitarian learning space, and fundamentally undermining one of the core meanings of their practice. But the theory of communicative action not only has relevance to the tutors in their practice in the classroom, it also has direct relevance to their condition in the context of their role within the system, and what Habermas has identified as the diminution of the public sphere. Unfortunately, as noted in the literature review, Habermas' idealism regarding communicative action and deliberative democracy leaves him, and those who share that idealism, prone to celebrating the democratic potential of adult education while being insufficiently critical of political realities and thus vulnerable to an uncontested colonization of their lifeworld.

Diminution of the public sphere

The tutors I interviewed repeatedly mentioned that they felt very isolated and marginalised. Due to the part-time nature of their work, they went from home, to their class, and then back home again, often not meeting other tutors at all, or just meeting them in passing. Even tutors who worked in centres, commented that they never had the chance to sit down and talk to a colleague or have a cup of coffee together. Essentially, they have no public sphere, no place to:

discuss matters of mutual concern as peers [...] in an atmosphere free of coercion and inequalities, that would incline individuals to acquiesce or be silent.

(Habermas, 1989)

Even were such a space available, the structural effects of the system militate against it being used to explore a shared purpose, common understandings, and a mutual recognition of the oppressive structures within which they are working. As one of the tutors commented, because the tutors are all fighting over the same spoils, because teaching hours and contracts

are so tenuous and because they are so marginal, they are less likely to share with each other or turn to each other for support or to fight a common cause. Thus by being isolated and marginalised, there is less likelihood that the tutors will find common purpose and challenge the system.

A consequence of this lack of a public sphere is that there is no place for communicative action to occur, no space for that dialogue which will allow them to forge common understandings, share values and to partake in that process of questioning and testing validity claims. It also deprives the tutor of the opportunity to learn about, and absorb the traditions and ethos of community education, and in the long term this will lead to the cultural impoverishment of both tutors and the entire sector. This reflects the insight of the tutor who commented that their history of empowerment was being eroded, and highlights the ahistorical nature of an ideology of technique and efficiency identified in Chapter 3 (Collins, 1991). It will be recalled that Habermas claims that communicative action is essential for the symbolic production and reproduction of the lifeworld. If this does not occur, it is at risk of being colonized by the system. We have already shown above, that there is evidence of this colonization occurring. So, while I would argue that the weak discursive and institutional traditions around community education offered a permeable site for colonization (Finnegan, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2008), I would further argue that structural issues around part-time employment and the isolated and marginalized nature of community education tutors have contributed substantially to that process of colonization.

As shown above, there has been much written about the colonization of community education by neo-liberalism. But Habermas can offer us extra insights when we consider this process in terms of the colonization of the lifeworld by the system. He allows us to understand the impact that this colonization is having upon the tutors, by identifying what occurs when this happens.

It will be recalled that Habermas says that pathologies emerge when the lifeworld is colonized by the system. It is important to state here that I am not entirely happy with Habermas' use of the word 'pathologies', especially in this context. I believe it is a medicalized term, has implications of extreme abnormality, and comes with a host of value-laden meanings. I will accept that in the context where someone's personal and social lifeworld has been colonized, the resultant psychological damage may become pathological. In the context of this study, however, we are considering the tutors' *professional* lifeworld. I would argue that while the emotions, and tensions that the tutors experience are similar to those that Habermas identifies, they do not do so to a degree that is truly pathological.

Among the pathologies identified by Habermas are a decrease in shared meanings and mutual understandings, or anomie, the erosion of social bonds, an increase in people's feelings of helplessness, and a lack of belonging, or alienation. I have already shown how a lack of a public space can lead to less communicative action and mutual understanding, and the language used by the tutors points to the existence of a number of these 'pathologies'. There is a sense of anomie, of social bonds being broken down between the tutors, not only because they have no time to spend together, in which to build up those bonds, but also because they are 'fighting over the same spoils' and have concerns about teaching hours and uncertain contracts. There was a clear sense of helplessness, that they 'fear that the changes are more about regulation than accreditation', that having to follow an accredited course and not follow the learners' needs and interests was 'really, really hard', and that they had nowhere else to go, there was no other job where they could use their particular skills. Finally, there was repeated reference to isolation, of being 'parachuted in', and a sense of alienation, a lack of belonging to the organization which was summed up by the tutor who said that she would not mind being paid less, if she felt she was 'part of this ship'.

The language used by the tutors suggested anxiety and tension, with repeated references to 'pressure' 'fear' and being 'worried'. There was also images of power such 'bulwark' and 'monolithic organizations', and violence, such as 'dropping a bomb'. I would suggest that use of this language of power and violence, so at odds with the ethos of community education and tutors who work within its traditions, is indicative of the great tensions, akin to Habermas' pathologies, that are caused by the imposition of the alien values of the system and the threatened loss of one's own values.

But this is a tale of two halves. The interviews revealed tensions, anxiety, alienation and anomie, but they also revealed stories of resistance and optimism. It will be recalled that Habermas does say that conflicts emerge at seams or boundaries between the system and the lifeworld. I would suggest that these tutors are indeed working at that seam, that boundary, and are experiencing those tensions of which he speaks. He further says that it is among the seams between the system and the lifeworld that new potentials for emancipation and resistance have developed. I am not convinced, however, that his identification of the potential of resistance when operating at the boundaries between the system and the lifeworld adequately explains what is happening here.

As I tried to tease out with the three tutors who did identify possibilities of resistance, it became apparent that they were using accreditation, which they had identified as a reductive, neo-liberal instrument, as the site of that resistance. While all the tutors had tried to make the modules they were teaching relevant to their learners' needs, these tutors had actively used the FETAC module as a site of resistance, or at least recognized the possibility of doing so.

Habermas' theory of communicative action suggests the need for a public sphere, for a space to question, to test validity claims, to share understandings and find common purpose (1987). As we have seen, that is not happening in this instance, and in my reading of Habermas, I

have not, as yet, identified an explanation of how that resistance occurs in the absence of a public sphere and communicative action. I would therefore suggest we need to look elsewhere, to the ideas of Paulo Freire to understand what is happening with regard to the acts of resistance I was told about.

In looking at tutors who are identifying acts of resistance in their practice, it is particularly the practical nature of Freire's ideas that make him relevant. All three of these tutors identified the importance of Freire both in their practice, and for the community education sector as a whole. They felt he was more relevant now than ever in the current global crisis. So it is not just that *I* am identifying Freire as a theorist who can explain what these tutors did, *they* themselves identified him as a practitioner whose values they shared, and whose ideas informed their practice. In short, I would suggest, the ideas of Freire have become part of their lifeworld.

All five tutors showed great commitment to dialogical practice and a commitment to encouraging a pedagogy of the question, that the learners should 'question everything, including ourselves!' They showed a clear commitment to the concept of learner-centredness, even if, as I have argued above, the implications of learner-centredness in an accredited system were not fully problematized, and they clearly tried to make the content of the material they were asked to teach relevant to their learners. Finally, they were aware of the dangers of demands of a reductive module descriptor, and for the most part were doing their best to avoid a banking model of education, where they 'deposited' information on passive learners.

However, Freire speaks of '[t]he capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity [which] serves the interests of the oppressors, *who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed*' [my emphasis] (1970). Where these three tutors who identified sites of resistance differed from the

other two, is that they recognized education as being political in nature, identified their role in helping learners identify oppressive structures, and the potential for the FETAC system to be used as a site for that resistance. While Freire, like Habermas, identifies the dialogical nature of learning as an essential part of what he calls conscientization, he also exhorts us to work within and outside of the system, and that ‘every time we can occupy some position inside of the subsystem, we should do so’ (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 203). This is exactly what the three tutors interviewed here are doing, and thus Freire complements Habermas, and contributes that last insight that helps us to understand what is happening here. Just as Payne recognized that under the neo-liberalism of Thatcherism (Payne, 1995) many adult educators found spaces to colonize with oppositional practice, so these tutors are finding possible sites of resistance within the subsystem of FETAC and accreditation. Using the ideas of both Habermas and Freire together allows us to develop a more nuanced understanding of the experiences these tutors described.

Fleming (2000) says that it is part of the defining role of an adult educator to decolonize the lifeworld. This is, indeed, a tremendously important task, and one which all the tutors interviewed here were attempting, even though their own lifeworld was under threat, and at times, as we have seen, at considerable personal cost. They were trying to be a bulwark, to bear the brunt of the impact of the system on the lifeworld of their learners, when, in fact, they were struggling with the colonization of their own lifeworld. However, those tutors who identified the importance of resistance were able to find sites of resistance within the system of accreditation. They used that as a site where in a dialogical process, the learners could explore issues of relevance to them, learning to ‘read their world’; a space where their cultural value systems could be produced and reproduced. In finding space for this within a potential reductive and neo-liberal subsystem of accreditation, the tutors were also holding on to their own value systems, and thus resisting the colonization of their lifeworld. By using the system

as a site where the symbolic production and reproduction of their own values could occur, I would argue that they had, in effect, *counter-colonized* the system as it impacted upon their practice.

Meanwhile, those tutors, who for whatever valid personal reasons they may have had, did not view their practice as inherently political, and did not explicitly identify sites of resistance within the system, were unable to ascribe the meanings of their lifeworld to the system as their colleagues did, and they were therefore far more vulnerable to their lifeworld being colonized. They were doing their best to decolonize the lifeworld of their learners, but were unable to do the same for themselves, and experiencing the resulting pathologies that Habermas has described.

There was a very noticeable difference in the demeanour between the two groups of tutors. Those who had found sites of resistance within the subsystem of accreditation spoke at times with anger, and concern, but also with a sense of excitement at the possibilities of resistance. They were being agentic, and in counter-colonizing had taken active steps to maintain the integrity of their lifeworld; that agency, I would suggest, gave them a sense of control. The others, who for perfectly valid reasons had not done so, spoke with far greater concern and, indeed, showed signs of real anguish. They did not experience the sense of agency that their colleagues did, and indeed displayed a sense of helplessness that Habermas identifies as a pathology which occurs as a result of their lifeworld having been colonized.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the findings of the interviews with the tutors, and concluded that the tutors' professional lifeworld of adult and community education was being colonized by a neo-liberal system. Using the theories of Habermas suggested that this colonization was all the more likely due to the lack of a public sphere, a space where communicative action could

occur, and I argued that the tutors were experiencing symptoms similar to the pathologies that come with a colonization of the lifeworld. There were, however, tutors who used accreditation as a site of resistance, and given the lack of a public space, I turned to Freire to identify that they were occupying the subsystem, as he exhorts them to. Given the difference in tension levels between those tutors who did not identify sites of resistance and those who did, I concluded the former were attempting to protect and de-colonize their learners' lifeworld, while the latter were counter-colonizing the system with their own values, and thus their lifeworld was able to resist colonization. In the final chapter, I will draw my conclusion from what I have identified here, and explore the implications for my own practice, and the implications for the sector as a whole.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

'The shock between yesterday which is losing relevance but still seeking to survive, and a tomorrow which is gaining substance, characterizes the phase of transition as a time of announcement and a time of decision. Only however, to the degree that the choices result from a critical perception of the contradiction are they real and capable of being transformed in action'

(Freire, 1973, p.7)

As outlined in the introduction, this study is set against the backdrop of what I perceive to be the growing dominance of an ideology of neo-liberalism, which has become hegemonic in nearly every aspect of our political, social and private lives. I have been particularly concerned about the increasing dominance of a neo-liberal ideology in adult and community education which is at odds with its origins in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire. In my own practice, I work in a support role to tutors in adult and community education, and was aware of some tensions, which I thought might be related to the imposition of the new ideology. So the question I was interested in exploring in this study was: 'What is the impact of neo-liberalism on tutors whose value systems are shaped by the traditional ethos of community education?'

My study showed that neo-liberalism had a very significant, and in some instances, very troubling impact on the tutors I spoke to. It became apparent that they identified with, and had internalised the traditional values of community education, and that it had, in a sense, become their professional lifeworld, which was now being colonized by a neo-liberal system of instrumental rationality. Starting with the theme of accreditation, which would be the aspect of instrumental rationality most affecting tutors, they expressed anxieties and tensions reminiscent of those pathologies outlined by Habermas when the lifeworld is colonized by the system. While all tutors attempted to protect their learners from the colonising effect of the subsystem of accreditation, to 'de-colonize' as Fleming (2000) calls for, some of them

managed to find sites of resistance within the system of accreditation, and to use that as a site where the learners' cultural value systems could be produced and reproduced. In doing that, they were also holding on to their own value systems, and thus resisting the colonization of their professional lifeworld. By using the system as a site where the symbolic production and reproduction of their own values could occur, I argued that they had, in effect, *counter-colonized* the system as it impacted upon their practice.

Clearly these findings show that some tutors will always find opportunities for oppositional practice. Given that this study expressly set out to look for tutors who share or come from the traditional community education ethos, with its Freirean emphasis on resistance, that is to be expected. What this study also shows is that even this group of tutors, who should be best able to resist it, are showing signs of the colonization of their lifeworld and the tensions which are akin to the pathologies that Habermas speaks about.

Implications for the Sector

As was discussed in the literature review, much has been written about the colonization of community education by neo-liberalism (Collins, 1991; Connolly, 2007; Finnegan, 2008; Fleming, 2000; Mayo, 1999; Thompson, 2007). There is a sense that much of what makes this sector unique is in danger of being lost. There is an awareness of the need to hold on to a non-instrumental concept of adult education, one committed to critical citizenship which retains the values of social justice and equality and which contributes to a strong and vital civil society (Finnegan, 2008; Fleming, 1996; Fleming, 2004). Using Habermas' theory of the colonization of the lifeworld by the system, Fleming identifies the role of an adult educator as 'helping adults both decolonize the lifeworld through democratic, critical discourses and transforming systems' (2000). This study shows, however, that adult educators are experiencing a colonization of their lifeworld, and are thus themselves

vulnerable, and they are experiencing a marginalization in their professional lives that is not dissimilar in its effects to the marginalization experienced by many of their learners. The tutors who were interviewed did see themselves as a bulwark to protect the learners from the demands of the system, but a bulwark that is itself weakened cannot in the long term provide the protection needed.

Influenced by Freire, and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), a central concern for adult education has been learning to challenge and change existing systems (Inglis, 1997), concern that has for the most part focussed upon the oppressive systems within which the learners are operating. But we have seen that the tutors are themselves caught within oppressive systems, and are as marginalized as their learners are. It is for this reason that I would agree with Collins in saying that the needs of the learner are closely intertwined with those of the tutor.

I would further argue that any consideration of adult education as a tool to combat marginalization must take into account the marginalised status of the adult educator. It will not be possible to help adults decolonize their lifeworlds as long as the lifeworlds of the educators who are meant to help them, are also being colonized by the system. The world of academia is concerned about the colonization of community education, and rightly so, I believe. But it is not sufficient to call on adult educators simply to de-colonize without addressing the underlying structural issues within the sector. Tutors are at the coalface of adult and community education; they are the 'worker bee' of the sector. If they are being isolated and marginalized, if their lifeworld is being colonized by neo-liberalism, then community education inevitably will be colonized.

Freire emphasizes the need for a social critique of power, of an understanding of structural and ideological forces of oppression. Within a Habermasian framework, an understanding of power, and the way it operates through the steering mechanisms of power and money is

crucial in order to prevent the colonization of the lifeworld. These tutors were very aware of those steering mechanisms, and yet their lifeworld was colonized. Because of the lack of a space where they could engage in dialogue, and symbolically produce and reproduce their cultural value system, they were unable to resist the colonization of their lifeworld. A few tutors have managed to find sites of resistance on their own, but my personal experience within the sector would lead me to suspect that for the majority of tutors, the oppressive forces that keep them isolated and marginalised militate against that. The tutors need a space, a public sphere where they can, in dialogue, through questioning, and by finding mutual understandings, do what they are meant to be helping their learners to do: to read their world, recognize the structural and ideological forces of oppression, and challenge them.

Implications for my own practice

Having been a tutor myself, and having moved into the role of teaching and learning coordinator, I have long been aware of the isolation that tutors experience, as well as the pressure that the increasing push towards accreditation has been putting on them.

When I first moved into my current role, I was very keen to try and build a sense of community. I tried to organize subject group meetings, where tutors teaching the same subjects could meet, exchange ideas, learn from each other, and offer each other support. Although great interest was expressed in these meetings, time after time I found myself sitting alone in a room. I realised that structural issues were preventing these meetings from being successful. Tutors weren't paid for these sessions, and were trying to get as many paid hours as possible. They, not unreasonably, did not want to give up paid hours for the sake of unpaid hours spent meeting other tutors, regardless of how helpful it would have been. Listening to the tutors talk in these interviews has made me realise that I need to redouble my efforts to

help develop a sense of community among them that could go some way to mitigating the sense of isolation and marginalization.

My next effort was to try and create a virtual community. I developed a Moodle site, in the hope that if they did not have the time to meet together, they could use it as a space to share ideas, concerns and materials. Again this has been very slow to take off. While they are very happy to download any material that I post there, they are very unwilling to offer any of their materials for sharing. Equally, they are slow to use the space as forum to explore their concerns. Again, listening to these tutors in the course of this study has helped me understand this better. After all, if they are all trying to get hours, 'fighting over the same spoils', why would they give away materials that they had created, for free? And why would they acknowledge something that might be perceived as weakness, if it might impact on future paid hours? The system which has isolated and marginalised them, is preventing them from finding that common unity, that sense of community and common purpose which would allow them the confidence to share their ideas and materials freely.

Working on this thesis has helped me to realise how desperately tutors need a public sphere, apart from simply overcoming issues of isolation. I see two reasons why this space is so essential. From a Habermasian perspective it would allow for communicative action, it would provide a space where the ideas and values of community education could be symbolically produced and reproduced. And if, as mentioned in the introduction, it was hard enough to find tutors who understood, and were grounded in their practice in the lifeworld of community education, then this would be the site where those who were newer to the sector and its traditions, could learn from those who were more imbued with those traditions. This public sphere would allow the production and reproduction of the traditional values and meanings which is so essential to the maintenance of the lifeworld of the tutor.

The second reason why I believe this space to be important is more Freirean in purpose. It would provide them with a forum where they could, in dialogue, start to read their world, to become conscientized, and start to address the forces which oppress them as a group.

I started a little experiment towards the end of this year. I organized a 'fun' activity in which the tutors could explore techniques to help them in their teaching practice, but which also allowed the facilitator to introduce concepts such as marginalization, social justice and some of the ideas of Paolo Freire. This was organized on a Saturday morning, when they wouldn't be teaching, and to my surprise, it was quickly booked out and a number of the tutors went off for coffee together afterwards. It is my hope for next year that if I could devise a similar programme to be held every so often, it could become the nucleus of a public sphere in which the tutors could explore the values of community education, name the forces that oppress them, and identify sites of resistance. In doing so, they will be able to de-colonize their own lifeworld and, in turn, help their learners to de-colonize their lifeworlds and in doing so, contribute to the de-colonization of community education. Fleming (2004) calls for the kind of education which helps people to reach their full potential and engage in a learning process where they question; for this to happen, he says educators need the best support and training. Undertaking this research has helped me to start thinking about ways in which I can better support the tutors I work with.

Possibilities for future study

This study was born out of my work with tutors. Hearing the tensions and anxieties of tutors over the years, I wanted to give voice to it, to raise awareness of it, to explore and understand it more fully. To that end, Habermas, and his theory about the pathologies that arise when the lifeworld is colonized, has been a very useful tool to use. This study has been based on the epistemic assumption central to Habermas' work, that shared meaning achieved through

communicative action, which is the basis of social life (Inglis, 1997). However, I am coming to the conclusion that that does not allow us to sufficiently problematize the issues of power which so clearly emerged in conversation with the tutors. While this Habermasian framework has been useful for analysing the impact of neo-liberalism, which was the central question of this thesis, the themes of power that emerged suggest the usefulness of analysing these findings from a different epistemological framework, in the future, one that accounts for the relational and discursive nature of power. It goes beyond the scope of this study, but Inglis calls for a pedagogy of power, and I would support that call. However, given my findings, I would argue that this *must* involve an understanding of the relational power of the tutor within the classroom, but also of the power, both relational and hegemonic which act upon the tutor within the wider system or structure, and, by extension, the impact that that power of the structure has, through the tutor, on the learner.

Final Thoughts

Critical Theory shows us that the possibility for the transformation of education and society is still alive (Brookfield, 2005), and reminds us that the lifeworld of community education is worth fighting for. The ‘Occupy’ camps which sprung up here in Ireland have been bulldozed away, but new sites of resistance will be found, and some of those will be within a community education classroom. The horseshoe nail which will turn the tide of the battle may yet be found within the covers of a FETAC portfolio.

I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hope is an ontological need.

(Paolo Freire 1992)

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