

Geographies of Further Education and Training: Mapping the terrains of FET and adult education¹

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As one gets older, one casts one's memory back to earlier times. It is not that we were better then, but that there is a story to be told. My autobiography, my education and my career span about 40 years of adult education. Adult Education Organisers were appointed to each Vocational Education Committee (VEC) in 1979; the first dedicated staff working on adult learning needs. Their role was to organise an annual learning programme, provide information and advice to adults and prepare an annual report on their activities. In 1984 the Adult Literacy and Community Education budget was allocated; the first allocation of resources earmarked for adult education. This budget, though small, sustained adult education services through the 1980s when other support was absent. Then came the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) in 1988. Thus emerged the basis of VEC adult education services (see McDonnell, 2003, p. 48). I was appointed Adult Education Organiser in County Louth VEC and in Drogheda VEC in 1986.

I am telling these events for a number of reasons:

- 1) That was a time, and it still was the case until recently, that adults were the only citizens in Ireland who did not know where to go for education. Children went to National Schools, and following that to Secondary Schools, and university. The Regional Technical Colleges were opened in the 1970s. Only recently, are there any places known as adult education centres to which adults can go knowing that is the

¹Keynote at the Adult Education Organiser's Association Annual Conference, Athlone, November 19, 2024.

place where adult learning needs can be addresses in a formal setting.

- 2) I am also mentioning these autobiographicals because they are the foundation on which all our thinking is based; these stories of where we come from are the foundation on which we now make meaning. We trace our thinking to what happened previously in our lives. Hannah Arendt (2018, p. 200) held that rigorous thinking should be grounded in lived experience:

...no matter how abstract our theories may sound or how consistent our arguments may appear, there are incidents and stories behind them which at least for ourselves, contain in a nutshell the full meaning of whatever we have to say. Thought itself...arises out of the actuality of incidents, and incidents of lived experience must remain its guideposts by which thinking soars, or into the depths to which it descends.

- 3) This is not a nostalgic tour of my, or your biographies – but I will return to this later. Experience drives learning.

Using Google Maps to reach the conference venue I was guided to this conference location by my satellite navigation. A voice and a moving cursor on the screen tracked and showed the way. The map (Fig 1) is hugely useful and effective. It works. It can be programmed to show motorway services, and petrol stations along the way. Even if the map is without many features these can be added by tuning in a satellite version that is a birds eye view of the terrain (see Fig 2). It may even have a street view or 3-D version if one has the latest technology.

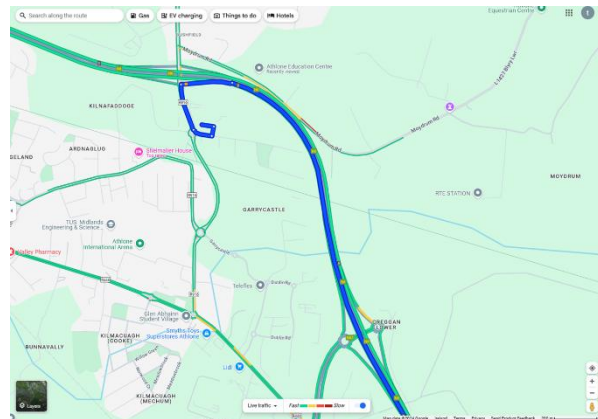


Figure 1 Sat Nav from Motorway to Conference Venue

Even if the origins of these maps are from US military there are more immediate

and relevant comments we can make. These maps have no context. In a real way, having arrived at this destination according to the voice on Google map, I have no idea where I am, or what kind of places I have travelled through. It is the nature of these maps to be so one-dimensional and focused on the task of getting to one's destination. These maps show nothing of the surrounding area or its history or what might be interesting to "see" or visit. In other words, they are functional, they work, they are one-dimensional and without context.

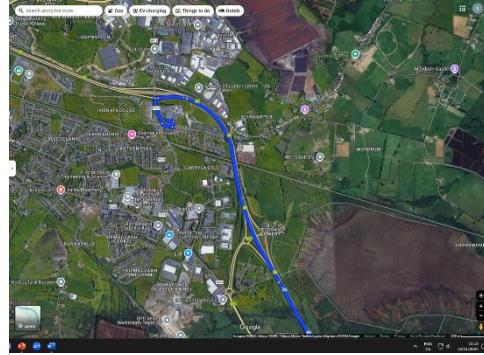


Figure 2 Satellite view of Figure 1

Two lengthy and fascinating presentations at this conference preceded this one. One on the strategic planning of SOLAS² for the Further Education and Training sector of Irish further education³. The other from AONTAS on their research that gathered the findings of Learners Voice project in the FET sector and promoted the findings for inclusion by SOLAS in their national policy and strategic plan for FET. It could be argued that both presentations agreed that presenting the findings of Learners Voice project in a way that is easily included in the SOLAS planning is a challenge. It could be articulated in this neutral statement:

How can the rich qualitative data, and findings, and stories of adult students in the FET provision be expressed (by AONTAS) and be found useful (by SOLAS) when the voice of students is expressed as a qualitative narrative of experiences and the SOLAS world is driven by quantitative data where only what can be measured is useful.

Even if addressing this issue is not in my brief, I nevertheless want to say something useful both at this point in the conference and in this paper. Both AONTAS and SOLAS use different maps to understand their shared project. Both use different maps to make sense of the same landscapes. One engages in a statistical perspective that understands the world of FET

² SOLAS is a state agency and is responsible by law for research, monitoring and coordinating of further education and training provision in Ireland.

³ AONTAS is Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation.

using sophisticated, elaborate and objective data and findings in order to drive accountable and measurable planning for the sector. The other uses a quite different map (or sat nav) to navigate or understand the personal, emotional, experiential and narrative world of adult learners. They may not be worlds apart. But they certainly are maps apart. We cannot just leave that as our respective positions. There is a real and worthwhile task ahead to engage in translations; of one set of maps into a form that makes sense to others. While not wanting to do that translating here, it may help if the task is clarified in that way at just this moment. I will return to this issue throughout the paper. I will later propose that the process of changing the maps one uses is akin to what is meant by changing meaning schemes in transformative learning theory.

Geography and Adult Education

Another autobiographical note is possible. We recently found in in our attic some well-used secondary school textbooks from Ireland in the 1950s⁴. This is the cover page (Fig 3). It was written by Séamus Ó Duirinne (1876-1946)⁵. The editor of the series was the even more famous author widely known as *An Seabhad* and originally as Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha.⁶

In Ó Duirinne's Geography textbook *Tír na hÉireann: Leabhar ar Tír-eolas ár dTíre Féin* (The Country of Ireland: A book on the Geography of our own Country) the first sentence asks the reader to look at a map of Europe. There you can see two islands beyond the mainland. The smallest and furthest

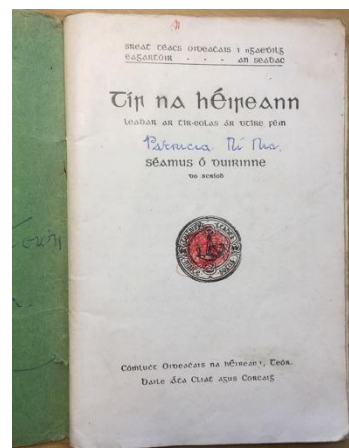


Figure 3 Secondary School Geography Textbook Cover page

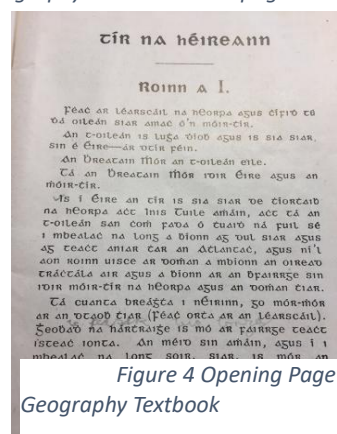


Figure 4 Opening Page of Geography Textbook

⁴ There were “all-Irish” schools in the 1950s; the recent all Irish language schools (*Gael Scoileanna*) developments are not the first attempt to create all-Irish schools.

⁵ <https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=510&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%C3%A1draig_%C3%93_Siochfhradha

west is Ireland - “*ár dtír féin*” [our own country] (p. 5). It proudly announces that there is no land that would get in the way of ships going back and forth to America across the busiest trade route in the world (sic). The key phrase is “*ár dtír féin*” [our own country]. This school book in Irish was part of a remarkable project of nation-building with strong self-images and national pride. Following the Civil War in the 1920s a disastrous Economic War of the 1930s and the World War of the 1940s it was time to build “*ár dtír féin*” – our own country (Fleming, 2019, p. 56).

This is not a nostalgic journey back to the 1950s or any other time indeed in the distant past. This is no nostalgia for a hidden Ireland or a half-forgotten or half-remembered Ireland or indeed an Ireland that in memory seems to have a golden past or even in some ways was a better place because of its simplicity or uncomplicated life. This is an attempt to see history as a repository of stories and experiences that are real, and that prompt critical stories about the depth and seriousness of the events and ideas and ideologies that make us what we are today. And in the process of making sense of today, they insist that we do not wish to return to a time when things were in some ways better! They were not. The 1950s were bleak.

Why am I telling you this? Only one reason, really. Experience drives learning. The experiences that we have prompt our learning, and learning is the search for meaning. The ideas we have and the theories we hold are embedded in our lived experience (Fleming, 2023). Education is the reconstruction of experience (Dewey, 1966) and adult learners bring their experiences to class. And Freire said it well when he said that in adult education, we take what students know already and come to know it in a different way, more critically, more systematically, more theoretically. And adult education always offers a way forward, a system that does not punish but recognizes the unique experience and knowledge of each learner. This is partly a pre-cursor to the very current idea that adult education starts where the learner is at and that the raw material for adult learning is the *learner’s own experience*.

To-day, a huge amount of energy has been expended building our version of “*ár dtír féin*”. The vision of “*ár dtír féin*” is probably best described as building an economy. In this the education system in general and the adult education/FET sector has been an important

participant on this journey, even if at times that participation is ambivalent or at least sufficiently self-aware to know that that vision is partial. We have largely become involved in building this economy through education and training; through linking with FÁS that has translated itself into SOLAS. And yet, in spite of the success of this economy we are still facing problems and crises in our vision and in our practice, in our experiences that make us profoundly uncomfortable and uneasy; knowing there is more. Our ambivalence is driven by the knowledge that there is of course more to this country than it being an economy.

The economy has been a flawed success. But, no version of the country as an economy, is complete. Put simply we are more than an economy. We have used the economy map as a very powerful way of understanding what the country is about. But in adult education there is a shared difficulty articulating, agreeing and even getting any traction from public policy on how to support the other learnings – the other maps - that are required to become *ár dtír féin*. I want to spend our time trying to articulate a vision of adult education that might respond to the widely accepted position that there is “more” to learning and more to being a nation than what is surveyed in the economy map. What map can we use to plot our way through these landscapes of learning. If we are more than an economy, what are we? And how does adult learning (or FET) figure in this project? We are a society, a republic, a democracy and a community. However you want to describe or define these, they require learning, even lifelong learning. How can this be made visible on the maps drawn up for the journey to the future that is going to be made concrete in the next *SOLAS 2025- 2030 - Strategic Plan*?

The Easter Proclamation of Independence

One more attempt to gather resources for the following presentation is useful. How many people that you know, among your students or colleagues could quote a sentence from the Easter Proclamation of 1916 (Easter, 2024) – A foundation document of the nation? It is a real surprise to come to find that a document so fundamental to the origins of *ár dtír féin* is not more widely known and utilized. These are some of the phrases in the Easter Proclamation:

Irishmen and Irishwomen...

In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom. We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland...

The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, (Easter, 2024)

It can be argued that this document is worthy of a more central place in our public policy thinking as well as identifying it as part of what is required for all students to know. Of course, there are conservative and backward ways of interpreting this, but as with any document there are ways of updating and avoiding the tendency to draw a regressive map of these document(s). At some point I want to make a link with the learnings that one might identify as necessary for every citizen.

Citizens Need Learning

A famous debate took place one hundred years ago between Walter Lippmann (1922), a famous American journalist, and John Dewey (1922), America's most famous philosopher of education. The question was: can an ordinary citizen have sufficient knowledge to take part effectively in complex debates in the public sphere? Lacking specialized knowledge and distracted by busy lives citizens are, according to Lippmann, 'outsiders in all but a few aspects of life' (1922: 251). Today, when we consider the knowledge required to understand global migrations, climate change, or food security we too can wonder whether it is possible to have enough information for discussing vital issue or the literacies needed. In addition, the knowledge we accept as genuine may depend on the perspective we hold and habits of thinking we have acquired. Our ways of understanding are not neutral and emerge from our individual life history and culture. They resist change.

Lippmann (1922) called attention to the limited knowledge of individual citizens. John Dewey (1922) was not convinced that locating the problem in the individual was correct

(Fleming, 2023) and proposed that groups of citizens in collaborative discussions could overcome these limitations. This sounds like the beginning of a good argument for educating citizens who would harness the 'cumulative and transmitted intellectual wealth of the community' (Dewey, 1922, 218). The development of communities that are well organized and, in a position, to tap into collective strengths is important for Dewey. We suspect this is what he meant by asserting: 'the outstanding problem of the public is discovery and identification of itself' (1922, 185).

Dewey was also aware of problems posed, at that time (and indeed again today), by what he calls 'prejudice, bias, misrepresentation and propaganda' (1927: 212). A democratic society has the responsibility to improve the 'methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion' (1927, 208) through education. The development of the public sphere thus begins to look important and indeed essential for society. This is consistent with Dewey's belief that education has a mandate to assist every citizen reach their 'full stature' (Dewey, 1922, 286) – in today's language, their full potential.

Dewey certainly sees education as part of the solution. Though many aspects of reality have changed in the hundred years since Dewey/Lippmann, this may be a good moment to re-examine these ideas. We can accept, with Dewey, that citizens play an important role in making public decisions, even if accessing the required knowledge is a challenge. We might also accept that the focus is less on individual knowledge and expertise. We also recall that Dewey thought that knowledge cannot exist without community. We know things better when we combine our enquiries. He also asserted that 'a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience' (Dewey, 1966, 91).

This gives education a shared purpose with democracy. To engage in discussions and debates between those who have expert knowledge and those seeking to acquire it is one way forward. More listening is required between politicians and experts and citizens. Education might accept responsibility to train citizens, scientists and politicians so that all sectors of society would be able to join in a public sphere informed by critical and well-informed conversations and a rich imaginative pursuit of knowledge.

Democracy demands and expects for everybody and not just for officials, administrators, and directors of industry. Because this fundamental general education is at once necessary and difficult to achieve, the enterprise of democracy is so challenging. To side-track, this is in order to begin the task of enlightening administrators and executives is to miss something of its range and challenge (Dewey, 1922, 288).

Education, even a hundred years ago, was engaged in these debates. There are many who in more recent times illuminate this agenda as educators - Jack Mezirow (2000) and Paulo Freire (1972). The task is urgent and even more so than the need to consult and engage in the next iteration of the Strategic Plan for FET (Solas, 2024).

Transformative Learning and Maps

Transformative learning (TL) is the defining form of learning and the most significant kind of learning in which adults can engage. To build on the images used earlier, TL is the process of becoming aware of the maps we use in order to make sense (meaning) of the world around us; our relationships, our lives, feelings, thoughts, language, ideas. TL involves find out from where these maps originate in our individual life stories (and so the earlier autobiographicals in this paper) and from the culture and society in which we are so deeply embedded. School, media, other organizations and our culture provide many meanings we inherit and internalize. TL involves examining these maps - meaning schemes - that function mostly as unquestioned assumptions and in a process of learning develop new more inclusive maps that provide us with transformed maps for understanding all aspects of the world in which we live, work, rear children and act as citizens. Learning skills may be part of this. If we stay with the image of the map, it might be a transformed map; a 3-D map.

Developing a fair and just economic sector in society is part of this but as before – there is more. There is more. And it might be a useful to propose just now a right to adult learning. Adult's right to education has never been established. **Adults have a right to learn everything that it is possible to know and learn.** Adults have questions, curiosities, intelligence, learning needs to do with rearing children in a world like this, that is remarkably different to that of their own parents. We have no idea in Ireland what literacies are required in order to lift us above an

economy to become a Republic, a democracy, a society that works as hard for human rights and worker's rights and freedom as it does for the economy. Who we are and who we will be is a task that requires, as it always did, literate and critical citizens sufficiently informed, learned and educated in order to be active citizens participating in solving the existential crisis of climate change and the other great problems that impact heavily on communities and individuals. We will not Google our way out of this. .

When looking critically at the school textbooks of the 1950s there was a version of Irish identity even if at that time, we hardly noticed its hidden curriculum. We can be more critical today. The current (not so) hidden curriculum is to promote knowledge and literacies that are functional and useful for an economy, and so much FE with its focus on training, ignores education. In the context of lifelong learning and a national jobs strategy it might be a really worthwhile goal to include broader social learning goals and aim for all the possibilities implied in the concept of education. As a result, a competitive economy may also be a healthy, fulfilling and equal society and may indeed contribute to becoming "*ár dtír féin*" – our own country!

According to current ideologies, only the economy will solve our problems by training people for work. The state, in the person of the government, misunderstands the nature of democracy in a modern world. Take refugees as an example. Government departments seem to think that if they make a contract with a local hotel to house refugees and then inform the local population they have done enough. Government departments believe that this is their role in a democracy. Most people are happy to have this thin or shallow version of representative democracy in many matters but protest when they feel they are not consulted, and have to struggle to assert their right to be informed before-hand or consulted or be brought into decision making. This can lead to resentments, grievances and exclusions that fuel radicalizations (Fleming, in press 2024).

We are more than an economy and more than a people who sub-let our democratic instincts to the government. Those who are working on Sustainable Development Goals will know that according to English and Mayo lifelong learning "has been twisted in such a way that

it reduces learning to a set of narrow competences suited to a Neoliberal economy” (2021, p. 1).

What is Neoliberalism?

What is this system, within which we live and work and which has such a powerful influence over how we think, feel, value, and how we interpret what is meant by common sense?

Neoliberalism is...

A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. (Harvey, 2005, p. 2)

Neoliberalism is a political economic paradigm that refers to the policies and processes whereby a small number of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximize their personal profits. (McChesney, 1998, p. 7)

The neo-liberal economic doctrine proclaiming the superiority of free markets over public ownership, or even public regulation of private economic activities, has become the conventional wisdom, not only among conservatives but among the progressives. (Aronowitz, 2003, p. 21)

In the past 25 years Ireland has developed quickly and is, even following the demise of the Celtic tiger, a model of success for many countries. The idea was widely believed that when everybody has a job and the benefits are distributed by government tax policies that a fair society will be created and sustained. The idea that everybody benefitted from the Celtic Tiger is a myth. Having looked forward for generations to having work, the arrival of almost full-employment disappointed. Work was not sufficient to cure all ills. Inequalities of social class continued, and housing, education, and health compared poorly in comparison with other developed countries, e.g., in EU and OECD. The accumulation of wealth by a few was a major scandal showing how work is not necessarily the source of more equality, or better housing, or

better health care, or any other measure of equality. Ireland in 2000 was the second most unequal society in the EU. With 15.3% living in poverty, only the US, among Western countries, was worse with 15.8% in poverty (Cullen, 2002).

The state is encouraged by the economy to dismantle the welfare system and support the growth and reach of the market and its priorities. Government cutting expenditure is part of this process of undermining the welfare state, as is the perennial promise by governments to reduce taxes. Economies are driven by an unshakable and fiercely held belief in the free market. The core belief is that the market and not politics solves all problems. The market is sovereign. Political sovereignty is reduced. Neoliberalism does not aim to increase the well-being of everybody and increases social inequality in order to drive a more competitive society and economy. As Joel Spring (1998) observes;

OECD experts want knowledge to be measured according to its contribution to economic growth. In contrast, Confucius and Plato were interested in determining the ability of individuals to create moral and just societies. (p.168).

This is the core of the tension for society in Ireland - whether it wants to allow the economy or society to dictate national, including education and learning agendas. To frame this with different concepts we could ask: Does the concept of nation building only involve building an economy, or is there also a project that involves building a society? An economy has a sharp focus on profits. A society, at least according to the foundational documents of the State, involves, fairness, equality and cherishing all the children of the nation equally:

The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities of all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally,...

(Easter, 1916)

Instead, today the economy has the last word. This is hugely problematic. In every age education finds itself navigating different social and political landscapes and today in Europe the neoliberal iteration of capitalism, provide the dominant context. Education is caught between

long standing visions of learning as emancipatory and a determined drive by governments to prioritize learning and education for economic development (Fleming, 2016b; Fleming & Finnegan, 2014b).

The preoccupations with the economy and with work and with defining citizens as workers, lead to misreading the importance of education, and the ways in which students perceive the benefits of education. Considerable effort has gone into building an economy, huge resources, imagination and work have been brought to bear on this issue, and rightly so. But one is entitled to wonder what may have been the outcome if similar energy and resources and imagination had been expended on nation building, including support for learning for citizenship and community engagements (Finnegan & Fleming, 2023). We are not only an economy, but also a society and a nation.

At one point in the process, I showed this Matisse painting entitled Dance. I suggested it was the nearest image I could find to represent my own view of what I understood as community Education (Kokkos & Fleming, 2024). Participants were asked what they thought. They rightly rubbished any possibility that this would survive in any Education and Training Board (ETB). They are right of course.

At the end of the presentation I read the closing paragraph from Dancing at Lughnasa by Brien Friel.....see below for the text of the final speech by Michael at the end of the play (Friel, 1990).

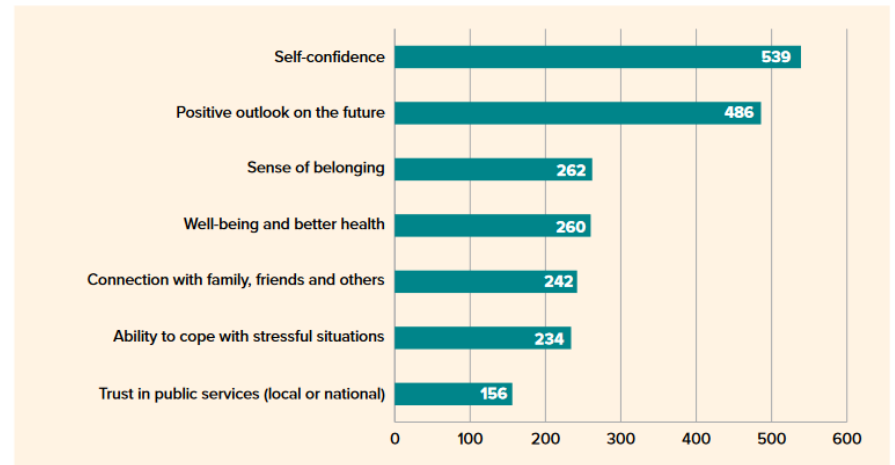
Make a case for the importance of self-confidence (Honneth)

In the finding of the Learner Voice research (AONTAS, 2024) adult learners identified a variety of positive impacts associated with attending FET (Kokkos & Fleming, 2024). The 539 who selected the outcome as “self-confidence” are saying something much more than a personal or individual growth experience. In the paper I simply want to reference the reason why this self-confidence is much more significant than at first appears (Fleming, 2014a).



Self-confidence is the fundamental outcome of the relationship of recognition that we call parenting (Fleming, 2016b). Only by being recognized does a child grow, and grow in self-confidence. Without it individuals cannot become a person of worth and become somebody (Fleming, 2014). Without it we are faced with all the effects of misrecognition in those formative years (abuse is a form of misrecognition). Later as workers and as members of a society with its rules and laws we may experience recognition again

Responses to “During your time in your adult learning course, have you experienced an increase in any of the following?”



(Fleming, 2018a). Laws, especially those dealing with justice, equality, workers rights, etc. are forms of recognition for citizens (Fleming, 2016a). These recognitions are powerfully felt developmental affirmations (Fleming, 2024a). Without them we will not grow and develop as members of the workforce and of society (Fleming, 2024b).

Recognitions are not just private experiences they are moments and processes and experiences in which the system (and other powerful institutions cross the boundaries between the system world and the individual (Fleming, in press 2024). They recognize the rights of individuals. Just as the feminist movement made as its mantra The personal is political, so too in this brief synopsis of the recognition theory of Axel Honneth we can now assert that the political is personal. There is research evidence too to support this and it finds that mature students in Ireland who return to education are in pursuit of recognition – for their intelligence, their dreams, their ambitions and their fundamental right to be somebody. The recognition conferred (in the classroom interactions and again at graduation) are essential for the development of students. In that they grow and become somebody (Fleming, 2014b). This wider argument needs to be made or else the claim that FE and adult education increases self-confidence will sound one-dimensional and lose its resonance.

There is more to the story of self-confidence than most of the research indicates and only by locating the findings (increased self-confidence) in a broader context do we see how political, how personal, how developmental these experiences are for children, for adults when they are workers and citizens of this society (Fleming, 2018b).

Irish Literature and Adult Education

In taking the liberty to even open a school text-book from the 1950s at the beginning of this paper, I want to make an even more substantial point about our Irish literature. We live in *ár dtír féin* that is rich in literature and music. Both were decisive in supporting the reinvention of *ár dtír féin* in a time that is called the Celtic Revival – most often associated with W.B. Yeats and also the creative projects of Abbey Theatre. Without mentioning the authors who are famous around the world we at home have, I think, not explored and integrated their stories, insights and words into our education thinking. If we alert our memories to the times when so many of our authors were banned in those already mentioned 1950s and beyond for daring to mention that abuses of many kinds may be hidden in a world which was greatly taken for granted as Catholic through and through. John McGahern and Edna O’Brien have put up many road signs for us to follow as we reveal stories and events that could not be addressed by the economy. We had to learn our way through this hidden Ireland and the voices of our creative writers from Yeats to Roddy Doyle provide a rich window out into a world can constantly refresh our adult education focus.

In-between workers

It is not easy to argue or discuss with SOLAS that there is more to adult learning than skills for the economy. I suggest that it might be useful to think about and locate AEOs (and others working in the sector) in an ‘in-between’ space. Seamus Heaney had in his thinking and poetry to locate himself in an interesting place I want to call ‘in-between’. This is not to suggest that professionals might be in a kind of no-man’s-land of neutral and unoccupied space. Heaney’s in-between is more inclusive and is powerfully expressed in his poetry. For example, in *Terminus* he describes life in his childhood home;

Two buckets were easier carried than one.

I grew up in between.

(Heaney, 1998, p. 295)

And again, in *Mossbawn 1 Sunlight* referring to baking scones in the kitchen as a child with both his mother and aunt;

Here is a space

Again, the scone rising

To the tick of two clocks.

(Heaney, 1998, p. 94)

Heaney made this in-between space his own. Filled it with possibilities. He occupied the space in-between North and South in Ireland; between Protestant and Catholic; between Irish and British (and indeed a broader global world). He found a space between the chants and rhetoric of each polarity and saw the possibilities of the view from in-between.

This suggests to me that professionals might see themselves as 'in-betweeners'. This might be a worthwhile position to explore and inhabit. It is a particularly good position from which to look at equality and diversity and at the conflicting demands of training for work over against educating as citizens in a society and nation. Being neither a part of the establishment nor an outsider but occupying the space 'in-between' so as to expand it into a credible professional position. Being peripheral may be an important space to occupy after all! It has the strength of being in the system (though peripheral to it) working on behalf of and with those who seek access to HE.

There is an in-between when we think of the old learning the student must leave behind and the new learning and knowledge. The 'in-between' perspective can navigate between the elite and establishment on the one hand and outsiders on the other – the system and the student, the labour market and the exciting possibilities of real lifelong learning; even in between the statistical thinking of state agencies such as SOLAS and the emotionally charged worlds of learners voices. This is not some kind of safe and untrammelled space. This is no

sitting on the fence. As anyone knows who has tried to occupy this space - the system oscillates between rejection and co-option. This is living in border country or boundary space. A border may be too linear an image and Heaney's 'in-between' has the image of a space to be occupied. An adult education project in a university makes this in-between-ness its own. It is in the university with one foot. It is outside the university with another foot and it makes this space viable, of interest to insiders and outsiders; a useful space for the institution that needs this community perspective. Adult education has this dual mandate (Fleming, Finnegan & Loxley 2017).

For example, the 'in-between' works in an environment where both training and education are often mutually exclusive and where training often dominates because the system defines these priorities as good for public purposes. They become the public good. The 'in-between' is able to undertake a range of appropriate modules, teaching methods, subjects, pedagogies and justify and utilise education methods.

One particular argument might be made for this 'in-between' positioning. Most policies, interventions and changes in HE are brought about by the system (Fleming, & Finnegan, 2014a). Such system interventions are implemented on the basis that the system believes that it understands and knows the problem to be addressed and the programme or project is then designed and put in place based on how the system understands the issue. This is done with minimum input from the student! – until now! Very little if any account is taken of how the student (on whose behalf the intervention is made) might experience the programme. Student voices and narratives are not a part of the project. Bringing student voices to this stage is in-between work.

What is education for?

It is vital that we know what education is for (and what it is against). Education is for peace, democracy, the common good, to reduce hatred and address social justice and inequality, to make a better society, for freedom and not just freedom from unemployment. And in the neo-liberal world that thrives on inequality, it is difficult to translate this vision into a quality assurance framework that has in recent times replaced educational philosophy with the

educational sleep of quality assurance language and its mantras. What is required is not just the following of a particular rule, or procedure or policy but the very activity of philosophy itself which is to think about what we are doing. The economy offers jobs. Training offers skills. Education offers freedom.

Just to be academic about this and prevent anyone thinking that this is a bit fanciful, I suggest that Paulo Freire (1972) also described this in-between space when he reconfigured the relationship between teacher and learning in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. When teacher and student together co-investigate social questions and topics they create new knowledge that could (most likely) not have been created by each one acting as an individual. In the other polarities of thinking and doing he called the in-between space *praxis* to indicate that each polarity (thinking/doing, subject/object, theory/practice) was to be understood as being in a dialectical relationship with the other. Such a *praxis* approach to teaching is the ultimate meaning of 'in-between'.

I am reminded too that Hannah Arendt wrote about the importance of creating an 'in-between' among people in dialogue and conversation (1958, p. 182). This happens in classes when people share stories, images, recollections and experiences – a community is created, a democracy of shared dialogues and thoughts.

However, by responding either to students' needs or those of the system we may have forgotten that teachers and educators have a vision too - an imagination that may be different. By following and responding to the demands of students or even their wishes and needs or indeed following the system demands for training, economically useful knowledge and learning we may be ignoring that long standing tradition that education too has a distinguished agenda. By finding ourselves as some kind of neutral facilitator of learning needs we may be in danger of leaving a gap that will be filled by cheerleaders and fakes whose chorus is more about growth, prosperity, wealth creation, entrepreneurship.

The challenge is to imagine a world where everything is supposed to be measured but not everything can be measured. One hopes that these moments are imagined as important,

loaded with recognition; but they cannot be timetabled, set out in a curriculum – they are the curriculum – they cannot be assessed, tracked, funded, tested.

Conclusion

I am reminded of the poem by Seamus Heaney, our literary source for the in-between concept, who invited the reader to County Clare for a moment to experience the power of being in-between.

And some time make the time to drive out west
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,
In September or October, when the wind
And the light are working off each other
So that the ocean on one side is wild
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones
The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,
Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
Useless to think you'll park and capture it
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
A hurry through which known and strange things pass
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

(Heaney, 1998, p. 444)

Or you might prefer to conclude with the words of Brien Friel (1990) from his play *Dancing at Lughnasa*. As Michael comes onto the stage to conclude the play that described a troubling summer holiday with his mother, her sisters and his occasionally visiting father he recounts that in spite of the troubles he speaks:

And so when I cast my mind back to the summer of 1936 different kinds of memories offer themselves to me. But there is one memory of that Lughnasa time that visits me most often; and what fascinates me about that memory is that it owes nothing to fact. In that memory atmosphere is more real than incident and everything is simultaneously

actual and illusory...And what is so strange about that memory is that everybody seems to be floating on those sweet sounds, moving rhythmically, languorously, in complete isolation; responding more to the mood of the music than to its beat. When I remember it, I think of it as dancing. (Friel, 1990, pp. 55-56)

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Appendix

The Easter Proclamation of Independence 1916

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN:

In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment and supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades in arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity

of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline, and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.