Bachelor of Science in Rural Development BSc(RD)
DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMME
(Supported by Dept. of Agriculture Food & Rural Development)

Module Title: Community Education & Development

Unit 1. Module Introduction:

In this module you are introduced to a number of ideas related to adult and community education, and especially to the link between community education and community development.

The presentation of this module is different to what you may be used to from other modules on this course. The core of the module consists of a three units, four academic papers on topics related to adult and community education written by theorists and practitioners in the field, two units related to rural literary writers, and the assignment.

The papers cover a range of ideas related to the development and practice of adult and community education. The papers were written originally either as articles for academic journals or as presentations at academic conferences. You may find some of the content challenging. For this reason, a "companion" text is provided for each paper to set the context and to give you some guidance. This companion includes the following:

- A brief introduction to each paper.
- An outline of some of the ideas raised.
- Questions for you to consider when reading the paper.
- Links to additional web-available resources to supplement information in the papers.

Read the guidelines for reading academic papers.

Guidelines

Reading academic articles

You may wonder why it is that academic papers can be so difficult to read. Why are the ideas so strange and the language so obscure?

You must remember is that these papers are not aimed primarily at students. The authors are writing for an audience composed of fellow academics. The intention generally is not to provide an introduction to a topic, but rather to argue a position in an ongoing debate. (Of course, there are exceptions to this general rule. The paper by Jack Mezirow in the current collection provides a brief introduction to transformation theory.)

You should realise when reading an academic article that you are entering a discussion which extends far beyond that paper, and which provides a context for the paper which may not be immediately obvious to you. This context consists of the theories and contributions of other thinkers, perhaps reaching back over many years.

People will have taken firm positions, and defended them against the challenges and arguments of others. This history of the topic can add urgency and excitement to a paper for an informed audience. A newcomer, however, can find it confusing and disorienting. Because the paper is aimed at an informed audience, the context will often be sketched out in the briefest of terms – perhaps merely by naming a theorist or a concept. Participants are assumed to know the background, so there is no need to spell it out.

The following are some brief points to bear in mind in respect to language and content of academic papers:

- Every domain has its own technical language – its jargon – which serves as a shorthand for practitioners, but which can exclude others. Terms like "post-structuralism" or "reification" can be off-putting. When you are not familiar with the language you will struggle to understand the content.
- Also, the language may include everyday words, which are used in a technical sense, so that the sense of strangeness is heightened. For example, the term "really useful knowledge" has resonances for a community education activist that are lost on the outsider.
- There are also common points of reference – a history of the topic – with which practitioners are familiar. For example, discussions of community education draw on the history of women's daytime education projects reaching back decades, as pointed out in one of the papers by Brid Connolly.
- Author: An academic paper represents the point of view of a specific individual – the author. It is not intended to be a neutral presentation of facts.
- References: Most academic papers will have a set of references at the back. These references to key texts – books, articles, web references – can often provide a very useful entry into the debate to which the current paper is a contribution. Don't ignore them when you are reading the papers.

The academic audience, to a greater or lesser extent, knows the language, knows the topic, and knows about the various points of contention and debate. You may find them novel and strange when you are new to the subject.
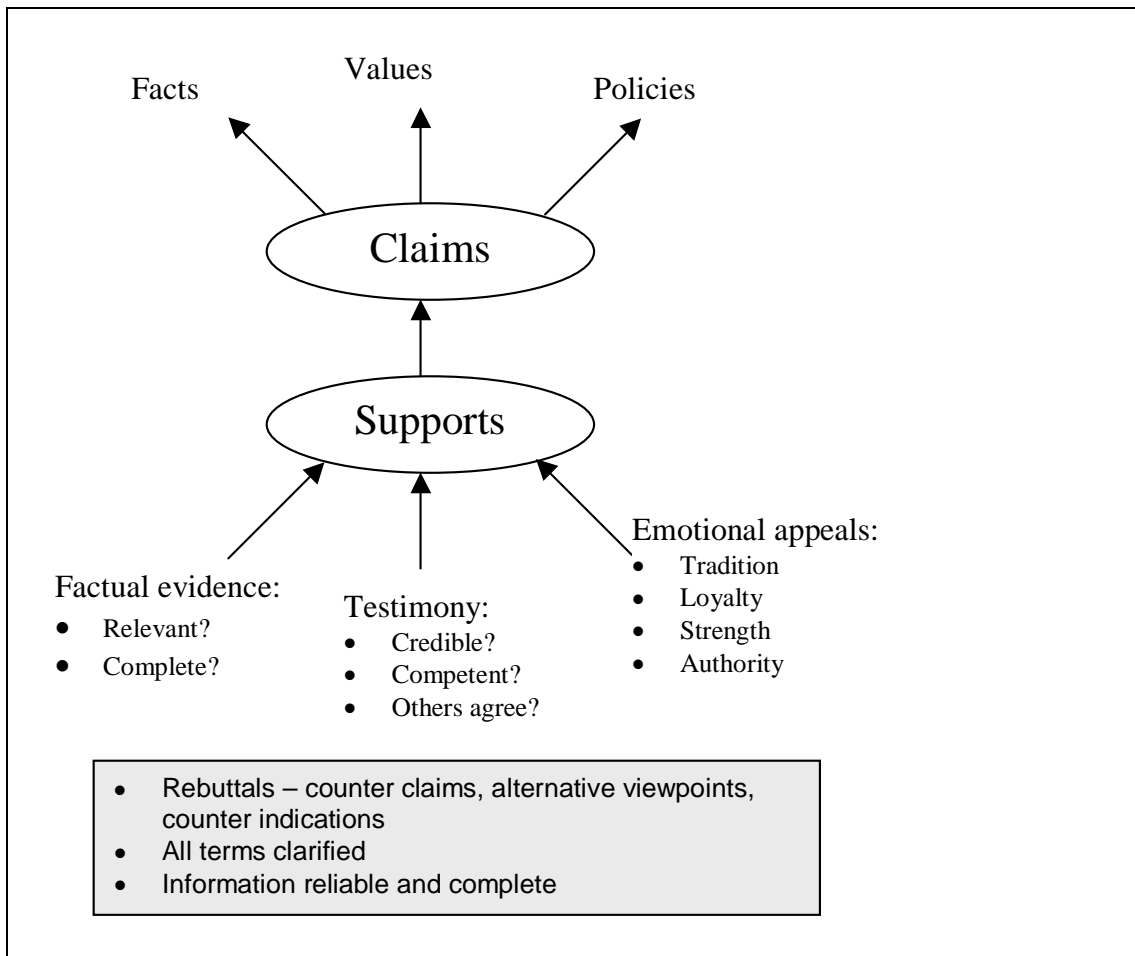
Claim and supports

When reading an academic paper, you should try to identify and evaluate the claims made by the author. The paper has been written as a contribution to a debate, and the writer sets out to argue a point of view, or to describe some aspect of a problem. You need to identify the points being argued and to judge how convincingly they have been argued.

It can be useful to distinguish between two concepts: "claims" and "supports". The author seeks to convince the reader of some fact or to promote some value or urge some policy. This is the claim. The author provides some reasons to support this claim – reasons why the reader should accept the claim as true or worthy. This is how the author seeks to support their claim.

- Claim: What is the author saying? What do they propose, or what do they claim to be true or false? What are they trying to convince you to believe or do?
- Support: How do they support their claim? What reasons do they offer for their point of view? Why should you agree with the author?

Figure 1 shows the relationship between claims and supports. It shows three different kinds of claim:

1. First, there are factual claims. For example, an author may argue that having the Leaving Certificate improves one's income. Statistical evidence comparing income of those who have the Leaving Certificate with those who have not would help to support such a claim.

2. Second, there are claims concerning values, such as moral values. An author may argue, for example, that it is morally wrong to use the threat of withdrawal of welfare benefits to compel an adult to attend a training course.

3. Finally, there are claims concerning what policies are appropriate in particular circumstances. Policy claims often incorporate both values and facts – values concerning the type of society we ought to be trying to achieve, and factual claims about the best way to achieve this.

Figure 1 Claims and Supports

Many different kinds of reason may be offered to support a claim. Figure 1 shows three kinds of reason:

1. Factual evidence: In scientific articles, evidence might involve the results of experiments. In the social sciences, statistical evidence, such as results of opinion polls or census results are more common.

2. Testimony: The author may report on his or her own experience, or on the experiences of others. To what extent can you rely on their claims? Are they credible and competent? Do other competent authorities agree with the claims? If others don't agree, then this may place an added burden of proof on the author to show why you should believe them.

3. Appeals: Emotional or motivational appeals might be offered, such as that loyalty or tradition demands that you accept a point of view. Such appeals may be weak if offered in support of a factual claim.

This is just a brief outline of some of the reasons that may be offered to support a claim. You need to judge whether you find the reasons convincing. Are you persuaded? Are all terms clear? Do the claims correspond with your own experience of the world? Has the author been selective with the evidence – ignoring facts which would go against their claim? Have they dealt adequately with alternative viewpoints and opposing claims?

As an example of how flawed logic can mislead us, you might find the following web site both illuminating and amusing: http://www.dhmo.org/facts.html

Unit 2; Community education is?

In this Unit we will look at three perspectives on community education.

1. **Community Education**, the educational philosophy that underlies community schools, advocates the creation of opportunities for community members — individuals, schools, businesses, and public and private organizations — to become partners in addressing community needs. Community education is most easily recognized in the community school, a facility that is open beyond the traditional school day for the purpose of providing academic, recreation, health, social service, and work-preparation programs for people of all ages. http://www.ncea.com/

This Section is extracted from: An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta; Department of Education and Science

Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education; July 2000

CHAPTER 5; Community Education

The growth, significance and innovation of the Community Education movement were highlighted in the Green Paper (1998). Its contribution was particularly acknowledged in the following areas:-

- o in reaching large numbers of participants, frequently in disadvantaged settings;
- o in pioneering new approaches to teaching and learning in nonhierarchical, community-based settings
- o in taking the lived experience of the participants as a starting point.

It was also noted in the Green Paper that the concept of Community Education is subject to a variety of definitions and perceptions. On the one hand, it has been seen as an extension of the service provided by second and third-level education institutions into the wider community. In this sense, it could be seen to incorporate almost all adult learning opportunities provided by the formal education sectors at community level - it is education in the community but not of the community.

A second view of Community Education - and the one that was adopted in the Green Paper - sees it in a more ideological sense as a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level. Such an approach to Community Education sees it as an interactive challenging process, not only in terms of its content but also in terms of its methodologies and decisionmaking processes.

During the consultation on the Green Paper a number of commentators sought to clarify the distinction between Community Development and Community Education. If one sees Community Development as a process in which those who are affected by decisions are empowered to participate in making decisions, it is apparent that the distinction between it and this second type of Community Education is at least blurred. They share a common goal of the collective empowerment of the participants based on an analysis of the structural barriers to people's life chances, although Community Development usually implies a dimension of organised action or activism following such an analysis.

Community Education: A Feminist Critique

Community Education has evolved in Ireland in recent years as an ideologically driven, highly innovative and large-scale Adult Education provision consisting mainly of self-directed women's groups. These groups have been central in the defining character of Community Education in Ireland and merit particular recognition for their contribution to date.

Such groups began to emerge in the early 1980s in Ireland, mostly in urban working class areas, badly affected by high rates of unemployment and dealing with high levels of youth dependency.

According to Smyth, feminist education is *"where women decide what they need to know and how they want to use that knowledge"*. It embodies:-
   o   an openness to alternative structures and a critique of existing ones;
   o   an emphasis on sharing in learning rather than competing in it;
   o   a blurring of distinctions between the 'teacher' and the 'taught';
   o   an endeavour to locate personal, individual experiences within the broader social and political context;
   o   the elimination of hierarchy;
   o   an orientation to enhanced educational and vocational progression for the participants;
   o   a challenge to the dominant modes of assessment and accreditation.

Perhaps the most fundamental point regarding the conjuncture of feminist education with community-based women's education is the common starting point being the lived experience

of the women participants. In starting from that point, as opposed to a syllabus or institution-driven agenda, Community Education assumes a different character to all other forms of formal education, not merely in terms of its content but in terms of the relationships between the participants themselves; between the participants and tutors; the learning process and outcomes and the modes of assessment.

Similarly, a recent report of the Women's Education Research and Resource Centre in UCD (1999) on such groups talked about an

"approach to learning based on active involvement, inclusive contribution, and developmental participation for adult women…(as) one which potentially redefines education and unfolds what has traditionally been a well wrapped, highly reverential male domain" (p.26).

In starting with the reality of the women's own lives, such education is not only modelling feminist principles but demonstrating a core principle of all Adult Education activity with marginalised groups. Such a starting point also enables the learner to identify the forces shaping one's own life and to move towards changing one's own situation - a process of moving from the personal to the political.

The community-based sector is amongst the most dynamic, creative and relevant components of Adult Education provision in Ireland. The increasing importance of the community and voluntary sector generally in influencing policies and services to address marginalisation is highlighted in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, in the stress on a widening of consultation mechanisms under the Public Sector Strategic Management Initiative, in the participation of the sector on the National Economic and Social Forum and on EU monitoring committees, and in the major role played by the sector in recent National Partnership Agreements.

Key characteristics of the community education sector are:-
  o it's non-statutory nature;
  o it's rootedness in the community, not just in terms of physical location, but also in that its activists have lived and worked for many years within the community, have a deep knowledge and respect for its values, culture, and circumstances, and an understanding of community needs and capacity;
  o it's problem-solving flexible focus based on trust;
  o it's process rather than syllabus focus - participants are engaged from the outset as equal partners in identifying needs, designing and implementing programmes, and adapting them on an ongoing basis;
  o it's respect for participants and its reflection of their lived experience;
  o it's concern with communal values and its commitment to match curriculum and pedagogy with the needs and interests of students;

- o it's promotion of personalised learning and flexibility within the environment of a learning group. Its goals include not just individual development but also collective community advancement, especially in marginalised communities;
- o it's placing a key emphasis on providing the supports necessary for successful access and learning -- particularly guidance, mentoring, continuous feedback and dialogue, childcare etc;
- o it's collective social purpose and inherently political agenda - to promote critical reflection, challenge existing structures, and promote empowerment, improvement so that participants are enabled to influence the social contexts in which they live;
- o it's promotion of participative democracy. It sees a key role for Adult Education in transforming society.

This Section is extracted from COMMUNITY EDUCATION 2004 (Aontas[1])

http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/community_ed_04.pdf

AONTAS supports the second definition, which acknowledges Community Education as a movement and catalyst for social change and not only as a service. Education plays, and should play, a fundamental role in ensuring the redistribution of resources in society in a more equal way. AONTAS therefore offers the following definition of Community Education:

Community Education is education and learning which is rooted in a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formation within the community. It is distinct from general adult education provision, due both to its ethos and to the methodologies it employs. (AONTAS 2000)

Although there is a strong connection between the underlying ethos of 'general' Adult Education and Community Education, there is nonetheless this key difference:

Community Education enables participants to emerge with more than new personal skills and knowledge. They also emerge with a strong capacity for social action, a sense of collective empowerment and an ability to tackle issues of social justice. In this, Community Education and Community Development share common ground and have strong overlap in their underpinning philosophies. As Community Development in Ireland has played a hugely

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[1] *AONTAS is the Irish National Association of Adult Education, a voluntary membership organisation. It exists to promote the development of a learning society through the provision of a quality and comprehensive system of adult learning and education that is accessible to and inclusive of all.*

significant role in tackling exclusion as part of our antipoverty strategy, so Community Education has become one of the principal mechanisms used in Community Development to achieve these outcomes.

Community Education as a Model for Transformation

It can be argued that mainstream or formal education has the purpose of passing from generation to generation, information about existing norms and structures in society, to allow the learner to deal adequately with the world as they find it. Community Education has as its intention the empowerment of participants with the skills, knowledge and collective analysis to challenge oppression and to engage in action to bring about change. Although it can be said that Community Education sometimes fails to reach this level and that its transforming effects are limited, nonetheless it is underpinned by this radical theory.

Traditional views of education place teachers and learners in a particular relationship, where the teacher holds the knowledge and power and decides what information is needed by the learner at any given time. In the Community Education model power is shared equally, and tutor and participant engage together in the education process. Participants identify what knowledge is most useful to them, and this agenda is pursued in a flexible, developmental way.

At the more advanced level of the process, a critique of existing social structures can be achieved, and participants develop the capacity to engage in collective action for change. It can happen that as learners develop on a personal level, they leave behind the community setting and move freely into mainstream education or the workforce.

The desire to bring about change and social justice may be weakened at this point. While personal development is a necessary step towards social and political development, there is no guarantee that one will follow the other. Nonetheless, Community Education providers still strive to achieve the goal of instigating social and political change.

With this view of Community Education as a catalyst or movement in mind, and looking into how it works in practice, we can identify a number of key *dimensions* that merit a brief outline:

Community Education is Holistic Education

The holistic nature of Community Education is such that the programme of learning being undertaken is merged into a wider learning experience within a Community Education group or centre. The whole environment is learner rather than curriculumcentred, with specific attention being paid to welcoming and supporting each participant. Hospitality, childcare

provision, support in difficult times, conversations, counselling and the celebration of people's lives are all elements that feature very strongly.

Community Education is Collective and Responsive

Community Education often caters to those for whom mainstream education is a step too far. It offers a non-threatening and non-competitive environment for learners who feel alienated from education because of a poor early experience or other reasons.

It provides the opportunity for adults to be involved in developing programmes to address the issues directly affecting their own lives. Learner experiences are valued, and become a learning tool. The power rests with the group, usually working in group sessions with a facilitator who recognises their experiences as a base for learning, unlike the formal setting where a teacher holds power and learning focuses on the individual acquisition of knowledge.

Community Education works at Individual, Community & Political Levels

As the AONTAS definition implies, Community Education should work at different levels which are inter-related. At individual level there is learning, both in terms of the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and more importantly in terms of confidence and self-development. At group or community level, participants develop their capacity to interact as a group, to work on local issues that affect the group and to analyse their own and their community's situation. At a political level, the learning is used to form a sense of solidarity with other groups in society who are experiencing the same issues in their lives. There is learning about national policy issues particularly in the realm of social justice. This may eventually lead to active campaigning or support of national movements or lobby groups. All levels are distinct and yet intertwined.

Outcomes of Community Education

As it works at different levels as described, the Community Education process therefore has outcomes at different levels. A mix of tangible and more qualitative outcomes is achieved at both individual and collective level. Some examples are outlined below.

Individual Outcomes of Community Education include:
- o • Improved confidence & self-esteem
- o • Improved communication skills
- o • Improved ability to commit to and reach specific goals
- o • Increased knowledge, skill and competence
- o • Increased motivation and expectations

- o • Increased awareness of educational and life choices
- o • Awareness of self and community
- o • Critical thinking and analytical skills
- o • Accreditation

Collective Outcomes include:
- o • Development of a mutual support network
- o • Development of social consciousness and analysis
- o • Development of capacity to influence policy and decision making
- o • Ability to organise further personal and group development
- o • Action to tackle social and community issues

There is also evidence to show that the improvement of a parent's educational level impacts strongly on the development of children and families. The 1995 Report *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland* published by the Combat Poverty Agency highlighted the link between a mother's level of education and that of her children. Community Education plays a key role in tackling *intergenerational* disadvantage, insofar as is provides an access route into education to the most marginalized learners.

Unit 3; The Role of Community Education

In her article **Listening to the Voices**, (Connolly 2003) suggests that a central function of Community Education has been the provision of 'a forum for listening to the voices of otherwise silenced people'. In its emergence within the women's movement, and in its subsequent adoption by a range of other groups for use as a development tool, Community Education has offered a way in which people who feel excluded can express their views and have them valued. It has provided a means for individuals to find solidarity with others, and to develop mutual respect. This has allowed groups to bond around social issues and become active agents in their communities and beyond.

Any group whether geographical or issues based, can use Community Education methods to analyse, critique and address the causes of the group's poverty or exclusion. This can lead to empowerment, which is often what disenfranchised groups are seeking. Keogh points out that many Irish adults won't have experienced 'explicit' citizenship education during formal schooling, and so are largely unprepared for participation in society outside of their daily experiences. Other authors claim 'that community participation is, in fact, many people's only experience of democratic processes' (Keogh 2003). In this context, Community Education plays an important role in channelling the views of citizens into action. Its democratic processes enable people to make the connection between the personal and the political (Connolly
2003). Those who feel powerless in the face of state and social structures can find ways to influence their own destiny.

Community Development groups and Community Education groups have been to the fore in tackling disadvantage for many years. Programmes such as the EEI
(*Education Equality Initiative)* which funds projects tackling adult educational disadvantage have shown how successful community groups can be in acting as a first point of contact for hard to reach learners. The value of the intensive outreach and pre-development work carried out by community groups is finally being recognised. In tackling disadvantage, the role of Community Education is therefore a critical one.

Increasingly there is a sense that the State sees the Community and Voluntary sector as a service provider, filling a gap in state services at local level. It is also possible to look at Community Education in this way, as a piece of the education jigsaw that caters to a particular group of people who are unable to engage with mainstream education. However, Community Education is about much more than this. It is not only about providing part of a service, but about creating a model of education that will lead eventually to social change.

The White Paper 2000, *Learning for Life*, offers two distinct definitions of Community Education:

- o The first sees it as education that takes place in the community but is not necessarily of the community. This 'service' model sees Community Education as a system of provision within the community by a range of institutions including schools, training agencies, universities, churches and others who make premises and resources available locally.
- o The second ideologically based definition describes Community Education as 'a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level' (p.110).

Process and Methodology

Community Education is most differentiated from the mainstream by its ethos of empowerment, but its group methodologies are also distinctive. The model is rooted in a process of active participation. In group processes, through consultation and partnership between facilitators and participants, programmes emerge and develop with the needs of learners and so maintain their relevance from beginning to end.

Community Education is a flexible educational process above all, and can be adapted and used by any group of learners or 'community of interest' to achieve its aims. The real experiences of learners are taken as the starting point and are affirmed, discussed and challenged in the learning process. The pressure is taken out of learning and those with negative experiences of early education are introduced to learning very gradually through enjoyable and informal activities.

The building of trust, of mutual respect and of confidence through the simple act of listening to each other is core to the learning process. The centrality of the group methodology and of the provision of supports is reflected in the practical elements that make up a typical Community Education model:

Elements of the Community Education Model

Outreach Work:
Extensive personal outreach to, and development of contact with, those in the community who might benefit from participation in the group, and who may be quite alienated from education for a variety of reasons. Non-threatening approaches are used to build trust often over a considerable period before the learner may decide to
first come into a group. Learners are also encouraged back no matter how often they may leave a programme or miss sessions.

Consultation:

The group identifies the issues or content to be explored and in co-operation with the facilitator, develops a programme to meet its needs and interests. *Development with*, rather than *delivery* to learners, is the approach used.

Pre-Development:

Non-academic activities are undertaken initially to help a group to bond, relax, build confidence and begin to associate learning with enjoyment. Crafts are often a starting point for learners in this phase, as are field trips or small social events. Support needs can be identified at this point.

Flexible Provision:

Time, location and programme content in Community Education are flexible and learner centred.

Political Activism:

As effecting change is at the heart of the Community Education model, groups will engage in activism at a variety of levels, through both staff and learners, and will work towards social justice where possible.

Reflective Evaluation:

Community Education groups reflect critically on their work and programmes, to ensure that their centre and programmes evolve and develop good practices.

Supports Provided in the Community Education Model

Childcare:

Community Education groups have been to the fore in providing childcare facilities and support to learners. Adults, especially women, cannot access education without this support. Eldercare may also be resourced.

Mentoring & Support:

Ongoing mentoring is given to participants, so that whatever issues arise for them can be dealt with sympathetically. Learners' ability to participate successfully on entering education as adults will depend on their ability to balance their learning with other complex issues in their lives. Mentoring supports learners in this task, and learners will be referred to other support agencies if necessary.

Allowances:

Some Community Education groups will give small allowances to learners, as an extra incentive to participate and as a support through their learning. Other groups will be able to provide services such as childcare, transport and/or materials, enabling learners to come back into education.

A Model for Progression

The Community Education model has proved very successful in attracting participants who could be described as 'educationally disadvantaged.' It recognises the barriers to learning and tries to eliminate them where possible. Community Education provides a 'safe space' for adults to get a feel for learning. It recognises that education is about more than the acquisition of knowledge and is also about growing confidence, sharing experiences, generating ideas and challenging systems.

The Community Education model can be used by a variety of learners at different levels, as it incorporates and recognises formal, non-formal and informal learning. Its flexibility means the sector can cater for learners at more advanced stages of education, and partnerships between third level colleges and community groups have developed as higher level courses increase in popularity. Community Education is increasingly providing its own internal progression routes, and is not simply the branch of education targeting learners at early literacy or foundation levels.

The Role of Community Education in Civil Society

Education in all of its forms fosters engagement with community, society and the world around us. The outline above of the ethos, purpose and processes of Community Education, suggests that it has a particular role to play in creating a more active civil society. Membership of a community group can in itself be seen as active participation.