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***Praxis, Critical Pedagogy and Critical Adult and Community Education***

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## Abstract

My motivation for undertaking this research stemmed from the fascination I had in the ways of working with adult learners and the way in which adult and community education was a powerful tool for change. The purpose of this study was to explore this interest in close detail, examining how praxis, the cycle of action and reflection, and critical pedagogy in adult and community education might work towards social transformation. Critical pedagogy, the dynamic interaction between ‘really useful knowledge’, the educators and the learners, in the learning environment, lacked an ingredient that I sought to uncover in the study. What do adult educators do that enables them and the learners to act upon the world?

The literature centred on critical pedagogy in mainstream education, feminist pedagogy, praxis and critical consciousness. It conceptualised the study with a brief overview of Ireland, with a particular focus on inequalities and injustice.

To gather data, I interviewed fifteen critical adult educators, policy workers and other stakeholders, asking how they developed their critical outlooks, and further, inquiring how critical pedagogy was carried out. The research endeavoured to be congruent with adult and community education, and thus, focused on the stories that the interviewees told about their lives. Their reflections revealed their aspirations to work for social justice, particularly through adult and community education.

The study found that the practice which aimed to develop critical consciousness comprised a wide variety of methods, ‘really useful methods’, which engaged learners,

motivating them to think critically, to discuss and to question. That was a way to create the environment for acting upon the world.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### *Introduction*

Freire (1997) held that one of the tasks of progressive educators, through a serious political analysis, was to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what obstacles, stemming from the belief that, without hope, the struggle to overcome oppression would be too onerous, too self-defeating (1997: 9). In this research, I undertook this challenge, the task to unveil opportunities to enhance the practice of progressive adult educators, to develop the grounding for the work towards a hopeful, just and equal society. The research is located in the Irish Republic, embedded in the distinctive social and cultural conditions that prevailed in this country, including the apparent decline of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, the war and the peace process in Northern Ireland, and the impact of women's movement in public and private life. Simultaneously, the story of adult and community education in Ireland is distinctive in the ways in which it developed, moulded by the prevailing conditions. This chapter will contextualise the background for this research on critical pedagogy in adult and community education, exploring the story of adult and community education in Ireland, and the specific circumstances that characterised Irish society, focusing attention on the years since the 1970s. I will present my research questions and explore the implications that provide the focus for the study. The chapter will outline the organisation of the thesis, sketching the contents of each chapter.



## ***The Story of Adult and Community Education in Ireland***

This section will look at the ways in which adult and community education developed in Ireland, with a wider perspective on what constituted adult education, before looking at the type of society that Ireland was. While it is difficult to trace the exact history of adult education, it is possible to connect some of the milestones to create a more coherent story. In this account, I include programmes for adults which might have more in common with higher education, for example, courses on industrial relations. The key difference is that the courses were aimed at mature people, rather than school leavers. In any case, O’Fathaigh and Sullivan (1999) trace the influence of the Catholic Church in the provision of adult education, from the 1930s, especially with the foundation of Muintir na Tíre, in 1937, to promote rural development, facilitated by adult education (2008, <http://www.muintirnaitire.com/>). Women were ahead in terms of the educational and developmental approaches in rural Ireland, with the Irish Country Women’s Association, founded in 1910, (2008, <http://www.ica.ie/>). Both these organisations promoted traditional, rural Irish values, in contrast to the type of adult education that emerged in urban society. Workers’ education was provided by the labour movement, largely, especially the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. The People’s College (2008 <http://www.peoplescollege.ie/>) was founded in 1948, to provide education for workers in general adult education. The Catholic Church was active in providing their own version of workers’ education, too, with, for example, The Catholic Workers College, (now the National College of Ireland), established in 1951, by the Society of Jesus (2008, [http://www.ncirl.ie/About\\_NCI](http://www.ncirl.ie/About_NCI)). Thus, the struggle for territory played out in the field of adult education. Simultaneously, the universities were offering intra-mural courses, certainly since the 1960s and 1970s, aimed at adults and based on liberal studies. However, the founding of the National Adult Literacy Association and AONTAS, the

National Adult Education Association, in late 1960s and early 1970s, established the milestones which marked the beginning of the era of adult and community education with Freirean underpinnings (Slowey, 1987), again with the Catholic Church strongly instrumental, with the late Fr Liam Carey playing a pivotal role. However, another marker saw the appointment of adult education organisers in each county, the provision of adult education by the state, in 1979, with a menu of night classes from DIY to accountancy (Kenny, 1984). The emergence of the women's community education in the early 1980s consolidated the field. Thus, by the mid-1980s, five strands of adult and community education shaped the field. Firstly, the workers' education strand, quite small but significant, closely related to workers' education in the United Kingdom and Europe. Secondly, that provided by the universities, with both a strong Roman Catholic ethos, on the one hand, and on the other, a set of introductory liberal studies programme. Thirdly, the statutory provision consisting of evening leisure type courses, or part-time qualifications, located in schools. Fourthly, adult education provided by developmental or social organisations, like crafts, public speaking, modern farming and rural living skills, relationship skills, and so on. Finally, adult and community education organised by key groups and agencies particularly women, but also people from the labour movement, unemployed people, people with disabilities, and minorities, especially from the Travelling community.

This final strand deeply influenced thinking about the social justice dimensions of adult and community education, both in terms of the critical underpinnings, but also in terms of the ways of working in these learning groups. However, while the sector had a highly developed sense of itself as a catalyst for social change, the recent history in Ireland was the background to the why this change was needed, when the state was enjoying

prosperity never before experienced. The next section will look at how the Irish Government envisioned bringing about the distribution of wealth, particularly through mainstream education.

### ***Prosperity?***

The White Paper on Education (Ireland, 1995) maintained the commitment to redistribution through the formal education system, particularly that at second level. It re-asserted this function, with particular emphasis on minority and disadvantaged groups, and how education ought to be concerned with justice and equality for them. However, the culture of inequality was more pervasive than the political will to implement the policies set down in the White Paper (Ireland, 1995), and there is very little evidence that the objective of equality was on the real agenda.

Sugrue (2004: 1) described the signs, sounds and symbols of conspicuous consumption, market forces and materialistic secularism which abounded in contemporary Ireland, as ‘turbo-capitalism’. This context shaped the educational reviews that have taken place since 1996 or so. While some attention was paid to social justice, particularly as a socialist Minister for Education, Niamh Breathnach was responsible for the White Paper (Ireland, 1995) the system has proved remarkably resistant to social transformation.

Sugrue (2004: 6-7) continued:

Despite the depth of dialogue...more deeply embedded educational structures have remained remarkably resistant to change. It is necessary therefore, [...] to identify continuities as well as changes wrought through partnership to explore

the very notion of partnership and the extent to which it has promoted more inclusive participation and more democratic decision-making.

Instead, Lynch (1999: 24) maintained that those concerned with inequality were removed from government policy implementation, and further, that they were not able to propose an alternative to mainstream education that would bring about more equal outcomes. In addition, her work from ten years previously, (Lynch, 1989), which highlighted the issues addressed in the White Paper in Education, (Ireland, 1995), showed that the embedded inequalities perpetuated themselves in the hidden curriculum. Sugrue and Gleeson (2004), when they examined the hidden curriculum in relation to decision making in the wider social and political contexts, identified elements of the hidden curriculum in a number of dimensions, including that of partnerships. They looked at the social process of partnership as an ideological positioning. Ireland (1987) initiated Social Partnership with agreement with interest groups outside of elected representatives, such as the trade unions, farmers' associations, community groups, employers, and so on. These partners created the strategic plan for the national recovery. Sugrue and Gleeson (2004: 277-279) maintained that Ireland was closer to the USA economic model, than the European one of welfare and social care. Further, there was a strong anti-intellectual strain in social partnership, which they attributed to the pragmatism adopted by Irish society since the foundation of the state.

Sugrue and Gleeson (2004: xvi) provided a useful thumbnail distinction, of the knowledge society and the knowledge economy, (courtesy of Hargreaves, 2003): 'The knowledge economy serves the private good. The knowledge society also encompasses the public good'. They continued their discussion on the conflation of these two concepts,

(Sugrue and Gleeson, 2004: 284-286). They asserted that any attempt to address the public good through the curriculum was robustly resisted, in favour of the standardised measurement system culminating in the Leaving Certificate, the examination at the end of second level education. This resistance was located within a number of contexts through the absence of debate, silences and virtual silences. Sugrue and Gleeson, (2004: 293 – 301) included a whole range of elements that synthesised to resist change, including teacher training and teacher unions, parents' associations and most particularly, the discourse of anti-intellectualism and the dominance of the centre right ideology in policy implementation. The centre-right political ideology dominated the Irish state, since the foundation, when one political party has been in power the majority of the time, while the left wing Labour party never had enough elected representatives to form a government on its own. However, it was a socialist/centrist coalition, which commissioned the White Paper in Education, (Ireland, 1995) and the Free Fees scheme in Higher Education. In addition, there were historical and cultural factors which sustained the resistance to fundamental change in education, and, consequently, in society. For example, traditionally, teacher education was controlled by the Roman Catholic Church, which perpetuated Irish Catholicism, against the trend of secularisation. Further, the feminisation of the profession may have led to the reduction of status. The feminisation was not accompanied by feminist changes; rather it led to regression to traditional gender roles, and the perception that schooling was an extension of the domestic domain, rather than a public community activity, the most significant connection for children and adolescents with civil society. Lynch and Lodge (2002) expressed concern about the increasing alienation from learning by the students coming from second level. This applied even those who 'do well', i.e., those who got the high marks, and the university courses of their choice. This alienation was evident almost immediately on leaving

school, coming from a system which promoted conformity, standardisation, and control over creativity, innovation and critical thinking.

Finally, Sugrue and Gleeson (2004: 301-303) identified the lack of research around education as crucial in maintaining silence. They considered that this demonstrated the status of education in the overall social agenda. They found that funding was poor for research, and the main thrust of whatever research there was, did not critique or question the role in the social agenda. They found that there was little or no commitment to informing debate and policy decision-making. In addition, they maintained that classrooms and schools continued to be 'secret gardens', with the consequence that no reform was possible, when teaching stays within the four walls of the classroom. The desire to open up the practice of teaching through research led to the narrow classroom focus: how to improve practice, how to improve the teacher/student relationship. While this was an improvement, taking the practice out of the private, as it were, and into the public domain, it had the effect of taking the focus off the role of education in society. However, this was not the only option, and this research set out to review practice, but without the danger of confining progress to the narrow confines of the learning environment, and ensuring that the social context was always kept to the forefront.

This section aimed to look at the quite small commentary in education and the role that education as a social institution played in the prosperous Ireland. The role of the hidden curriculum was explored in order to unpack the resistance to change in mainstream education. The section provided the background for the next section, the context for the research in the light of the story of adult education, mainstream education and the hidden agendas that underpinned the experience in Ireland.

## **Research Context**

In the 1970s and 1980s, the UK witnessed a radical movement in adult and community education, with projects and initiatives underpinned with emancipatory philosophies and processes (Lovett et al, 1983, Lovett, 1975, Thompson, 1980, 1983, Mayo, Thompson, 1995, Mayo, 1997). Similar trends did not occur in Ireland until the mid-1980s, (Basset, *et al*, 1989) and especially with the women's community education movement (Inglis *et al*, 1993). Indeed, very little was written about adult and community education, although two milestone reports were commissioned, but largely ignored (Kenny, 1973, Murphy, 1983). Thompson (1980: 219) contended that there was some reluctance on the part of adult educators, generally, to theorise, and this was reflected in the literature in the Irish context. My purpose in this research was to address this deficit, in a small way, and to contribute to the theory of critical pedagogy in adult and community education in Ireland. To that end, I sought the views of critical educators and other commentators on critical adult and community education, from people with long experience and historical perceptions, to some with very recent experience, and subsequently, fresh perspectives. Their views on the research topic could contribute to the reflexivity and practice of critical adult educators, applying the findings to all levels, including adult basic education, women's community education, and in the education of adult educators. Thus, adult educators could sustain activist and reflexive roles, continuing the project of social change through their work with learning groups.

This close focus on adult and community education supplemented the research that was more usually funded and undertaken in Ireland, which focused on the impact of adult and community education on a variety of personal and social issues. For example, Smyth

(1999, 2001) looked at women's community education in relation to tackling gender equality, particularly in relation to poverty. Owens (2000) examined the role of adult education in reaching marginalised men, particularly rural men. King *et al* (2002) researched learning styles and gender, and the implications for the provision of adult education. Thus, they examined the *implication* and *purposes* rather than the process and practice of adult and community education. On the other hand, sources for the processes of working with learning groups, such as Jacques (2000), or with adult learners, Rogers, (2001) did not have a critical dimension. That is, they provided practitioners with insights into ways of working with adult learners, but they did not commit themselves to an emancipatory purpose. However, Hope and Timmel (1999) and Prendiville (2004), underpinned by Freire's thinking, (1972) showed that it was possible to have emancipatory processes in training community workers and facilitators. Thus, while they focused on methods, they did not provide an overall model for critical pedagogy in *any* subject area, a major issue for adult educators, who may be teaching a range of subjects from mathematics to aromatherapy, from personal development to feminist research. However, Hope and Timmel (1999) and Prendiville (2004) demonstrated that their focus on methods do not reduce pedagogy to techniques, a key concern for critical pedagogy theorists, such as (Giroux, 1992). Bartolomé (2003: 409-410) explored this resistance to methods in critical pedagogy. She argued that the focus on methods created an environment in which students and learners cannot negotiate with the educator with regards to their needs, and that established methods take precedence over dialogue and discussion in the classroom. Further, methods were seen by student teachers as magical solutions to the difficulties of working with diverse students, easy answers in the form of specific instructional methods, a 'one size fits all' mentality. The focus of this research was to contribute to a deeper exploration of critical methods that enabled adult educators



to overcome the 'methods fetish' and to create their own 'really useful' ways of working critically with learners. That is, 'really useful methods' could form a vital dimension of the practice of critical adult educators, praxis, in dynamic relationship with reflection, itself engaged with 'really useful knowledge' (Thompson, 1996).

Mayo (1997: 119) contextualised the parameters, in her questions about the nature of the challenge for social transformation and adult education. She posed the questions about how to analyse power structures; how to develop critical consciousness about the sources of power, and the limitations of power; how to develop strategies which were realistic and effective in the present as well as for the future; and who were the allies in this quest. This research sought to explore these types of questions in terms of the development of 'really useful knowledge' about the nature of structural inequalities. In addition to the development of 'really useful knowledge' it sought to uncover 'really useful methods'. In particular, it was focused on the future of critical adult and community education in Ireland, and the ways in which critical educators would work for change. This study was located at the meeting points of three areas: the focus on the formative positioning of the adult educators as critical activists, their engagement with critical adult and community education and, thirdly, the ways of teaching adults, *per se*, regardless of subject and the level. Based on these interests, my research questions emerged. The next section looks at these questions.

### ***Research Questions and Implications***

The research questions aimed to address the meeting points of three areas, the formation of the interviewees as critical activists, the ways in which this influenced their

engagement with critical adult and community education and their ways of working with students that furthered critical activism. The research questions were:

*What are the formative dynamics for critical adult and community educationalists in Ireland?*

*What are the characteristics of praxis in critical pedagogy?*

These questions aimed to uncover the motivations of critical educationalists, in order to elicit their perspectives of critical practice. I took this route as I considered that biography was central for understanding why people thought as they did. Giroux (1988) and hooks (2003) spoke about their backgrounds, their experience of class, gender and colour, and how these formative years informed their critical consciousness. Weiler (1999) maintained that feminists took the path to personal and social liberation via self-knowledge through the examination of life story. Torres (1998) also expressed his interest in biography, power and critical education, with his volume of dialogues. I reflected on my own experience of gender and class growing up in repressed Ireland, and knew that it shaped the way I looked at the world, and the way that this perspective underpinned my work as an adult educator. In this research, I sought to elicit key formative experiences of the interviewees, to trace the connections between these experiences, their outlook and perspectives and the practice of adult and community education. Biography was pivotal in adult and community education, obviously as class, gender, ethnicity and race were lived experiences, not structures theorised in a vacuum. As such, the stories of lived experience of critical educationalists were vital motivators in work for social change.

Thus, the formative dynamics of critical adult and community commentators grounded the credentials for their perspectives on praxis.

The research questions sought to draw out how social conditions shaped perspectives and uncover how these perspectives shaped practice, activism and praxis. Thus, while the main research questions were very broad, they facilitated the research to gather data that provided insight into the way in which individual adult educators engaged with learners to bring about critical consciousness, which in turn, acted upon the world. Freire (2005: 40-41) identified the problem of methods, and advocated dialogue, that enabled learners to move from a naïve consciousness to critical consciousness. However, Hope and Timmel (1999) and Prendiville (2004) demonstrated the variety of alternative methods, including dialogue, which can be used for critical consciousness.

With regards to facilitating critical consciousness, Giroux (1988) and hooks (2003) did not expand their advocacy of critical consciousness into the ways of working in their critical pedagogy. They maintained critical pedagogy as an intellectual, political production. Adult and community education, on the other hand, focused a lot on methods and activities in the learning environment. While adult and community education is rooted in emancipation, these emancipatory foundations are not always evident in its provision, in Ireland. Moreover, among the community of critical adult educators, this emancipatory ideal was of paramount importance. Praxis was the bridge between the activism of emancipatory politics, and the intellectual production of theoretical reflection. The research questions sought to build this bridge, by looking at ways in which the social conditions the interviewees experienced or witnessed shaped their social vision and

activism and how their perspectives on activism shaped their views of critical pedagogy with adult learners.

The research questions highlighted a number of concepts, including critical consciousness and praxis, which necessarily augmented the theoretical framework. This was initially explored in the next section, beginning with a clarification around some of the terms used.

### ***Exploring the Concepts***

The theoretical framework for this study developed from my positioning as a feminist, an adult educator, a social activist and a student/learner/participant in learning, working in Ireland. That is, it was not just about the subject matter of the research, but also about me as the person engaged in it (Burgess, *et al*, 2006: 51). The key concept for this study was critical pedagogy. I used the term to include all radical teaching, including feminist pedagogy (Lather, 1991) and engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994), although this contained its own set of problems. For example, a key feminist critique of critical pedagogy was its masculinist positioning, which I reconsidered in the Literature Review. However, the term was appropriate for this study, overall.

In addition, I had a reservation around the term *teaching*. I hardly ever used the word *teaching*, in the normative sense of imparting knowledge, skills and competence to students, in my work. I was more likely to use the terms, *to educate*, and *education*. In adult and community education, teaching and learning occurred in dynamic relationship. Adult educators worked out of a knowledge base, but the learners constantly revised,

reviewed and re-created that knowledge base. This responded to Freire's critique of 'banking education' and proposal of problem solving education. It moved forward to community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and hooks (2003: xv) passionately advocated the building of community with progressive education, but also privileging practical wisdom embedded in practice and reflection. I advocated a *community of praxis* model, which entailed the dynamic relationship of teaching and learning, but also includes the activism of critical adult education, acting upon the world.

The key concept of *praxis* was used in the Freirean sense. Freire (1972) made use of the concept of *praxis*, shaped by Gramsci (1971), to articulate the nature of acting upon the social world, in the cycle with the reflection of conscientization. Conscientization was deepening insight and understanding of the social world, similar to feminist consciousness raising. Critical consciousness was the phrase that is used most in critical adult and community education. Further, the reflective element of praxis was contingent on the principles of equality; going back to an ethical, critical positioning, *what ought to be*, embedding the research in a critical theory model (Burgess, *et al*, 2006:46).

In order to situate the dimensions of justice in the context of critical pedagogy, I reverted to my philosophical education on Rawls' theory of justice, where he advocated that everyone had the equal right to liberty, and that liberty was similar for all, and that redress for those most disadvantaged included economic and social measures (Rawls, 1972: 302-303). Further, this anniversary year of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, based on social justice, freedom, and peace in the world, together with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, provided the minimum grounding for the meanings of the concepts I used.

Finally, I considered the concept of equality, as a central plank in social justice. White (2007: 4-11) discussed the parameters of equality. He identified five forms of equality. Legal equality meant that everyone was equal before the law, and that the law should be unbiased and fair. It should protect each person equally, and dispense justice equally. The second form was that of political equality, in which everyone was entitled to participate in decision making processes. This entailed freedom of expression and association, as the way of articulating grievances and ideals about the political outlook that people hold. The third form was that of social equality, in which social status was not differentiated to the disadvantage of one by another. Further, it entailed freedom from domination; free from the power that one person may exercise over another. The fourth form was that of economic equality. Economic equality was the focus of much thought over the past two hundred years, according to White, and spanned from a meritocratic outcome, whereby people got the economic return according to their abilities and talents, on the one side, to communism, on the other side, in which all economic benefits were distributed equally. Finally, moral equality entailed the respect for each member of society, and that every person was of equal concern to the state. This form of equality underpinned all others, and was more philosophical than institutional.

These forms of equality prescribed the parameters of the concept. However, the difference between the formal rights to these forms of equality, and the *effective* rights, was marked. For example, a society may wish to enforce legal equality, but the absence of social equality militated against it. Further, the right to vote hides the ways in which many groups and communities almost never exercised this right, due to the belief, for example, that it made no real difference to the quality of people's lives. Thus, while in

Ireland there were institutions based on the notion of equality, the will to ensure effective equality among the entire population was absent. In this research, the concept of equality that was used included the five forms, but especially moral equality, with that concern and respect for everyone, particularly those who did not have the social equality to ensure their place in society. The respect and concern was prescribed by the rights agenda, outlined above.

Finally, in terms of concepts, power was a central issue in the analyses of structure, gender and oppression. Lukes (2005: 27-30) argued that power operated at various levels, and not just at the level of coercion. He maintained that undue influence and persuasion were also dimensions of power, especially when the objective was the form of indoctrination or determination to make people work against their own interests, in the interest of the power holder(s). That is, instead of coercion or overt domination, power also worked in both controlling the agenda and the responses to the agenda. Further, Foucault (1994: xix) explored power in relation to the question of repression, which may be obviously and openly evident, but also in relation to the control of the constitution of subjectivity, that is, the moulding and shaping of pseudo-knowledge and ideologies. This was in addition to the shaping of the internal worlds of people, with internalised norms forbidding and repressing freedoms.

Thus, when I considered the issue of power and domination in the research context, I drew on both Lukes' (2005) and Foucault's (1994) takes on the control of the agenda, and control over peoples' reactions to the agendas. As one of the respondents quoted, from Pynchon (1973) '*If they get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about the answers*'.

Thus, the key concepts which underpinned the theoretical framework included critical pedagogy, praxis, and critical consciousness, and the study looked at the relationship between the formative experiences of the interviewees with the social change outcomes. These formative experiences in the interviewees' stories concretised the concepts. These stories, collected from fifteen adult educationalists, showed the development of their critical ideas, in addition to the belief in the process of adult and community education to bring about a more just and equal society as envisioned by those who developed human, economic, social and cultural rights

The conceptual framework, developed fully out of the Literature Review, centred on the key factors in the development of their beliefs, attitudes and values and the relationships between these and the practice of adult and community education, within a critical model of adult education. This practice entailed macro-micro integration, the *how* of agency acting upon the structural dimensions of gender, class and religion. Further, the concept of agency was profoundly connected with re-creations of critical consciousness, as agentic encounters and interactions with the social, in resistance to the dominant order. Thus, the contextual factors of the study provided the connections between the experience of oppressions and the ways of working, as agentic educators, through praxis, on the structures which shape the social world. The study is situated in Ireland, and the Irish context shaped the development of the values and beliefs of the interviewees. The next section introduced the interviewees, and provided the background as to why I asked them to inform me about their formative experiences and their views on critical pedagogy.



## ***The Interviewees***

When it came to who could inform this research, those critical adult educationalists, those who had avowedly sided with the poor and oppressed immediately came to mind. This section introduced the interviewees who took part in the research. I looked at connections between their life experiences and the conditions that prevailed in Ireland since the early 1970s. The fifteen interviewees, nine women and six men, came from a variety of backgrounds and each of them had prior occupations before they came to adult and community education. These occupations included school teaching, community work, business, full time caring for children, unemployment, air stewarding, theatre work, working with computers and psychology. Further, although these occupations were varied, the interviewees were from working class, lower middle class and middle class families of origin. All of the interviewees currently live in Ireland, one came from England, three came from Northern Ireland and the rest were from the Irish Republic. Their stories reflected some of the recent history of this island. While Northern Irish politics were complex and multi-faceted, and the full story is outside the scope of this research, the stories of the NI interviewees reflected their experience, and were presented as such. They came to the Republic in order to leave their Catholic minority status behind. They experienced discrimination and oppression on the basis of their religion, notwithstanding that they were eligible to avail of a better funded UK education and welfare system. Further, as part of the minority, they were highly politicised, very aware of the politics that prevailed in Northern Ireland that resulted in the war that clung on from the late 1960s, to the late 1990s, when the peace process finally adhered. Meanwhile, in the Republic, the story was no less complex, but in contrast with NI, the Roman Catholic Church was very powerful and 95% of the Irish population described

themselves as Catholic. Catholicism influenced all aspects of Irish society, limiting women's rights, especially in relation to women's reproductive rights, but it controlled education and health almost completely. For example, in 1983 and 1986, two constitutional amendments were won by those who wished to enshrine Catholic doctrine into the Constitution of Ireland, one prohibiting abortion and divorce. Bacik (2004) discussed how these conservative Catholic forces held back the changes that were occurring as a result of the women's movement, particularly, but also any social development that diminished its power. The demonstration of this conservative force in the 1980s was a surprise to the Northern Irish interviewees, whose experience of the Catholic Church was as a force for civil and political rights for the minority.

This contradictory experience of the Catholic Church was also evident in the stories of other interviewees. Some of the interviewees had direct encounters with priests and nuns who worked for the advancement of working class people in urban, suburban and rural communities, particularly through adult and community education, seemingly at odds with Bacik's (2004) analysis of the structural power struggle nationally. That is, some the interviewees experienced the Catholic Church as a force for liberation, depending on their circumstances, while others experienced it as the opposite. Thus the research connected with the micro experience of the interviewees with macro trends, which characterised Irish society in the 1980s.

My experience of these years is also relevant to this section, as my own story was parallel to those of the interviewees in many ways. Like the others who started their working lives in different fields, I had a number of false starts. I trained as a catering manager and worked in the industry, which I found to be very uninteresting, overall. As an almost

mature student, I completed a BA in philosophy. I started as an adult educator in 1985, working with the newly emerging women's community education groups. My subject area was Women's Studies, based on my undergraduate thesis on de Beauvoir (1989) and my experience of women's groups, and, simply, I moderated the group intuitively, with the insight garnered from my own experience as a participant in adult education.

Women's community education groups started at a time of tremendous debate in Ireland, as a result of the constitutional amendments and the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

Simultaneously, poverty, unemployment and emigration were huge social problems. All of the interviewees were affected to some degree by these prevailing social conditions.

These conditions contributed to their activism which carried through into their work as adult education workers. This activism and their rationales and motivations emerged in their stories, which were recounted and analysed in this research.

In this section, I contextualised the location of this research, the Ireland which shaped the work of the interviewees. In the next section, I outlined the structure of the dissertation.

### ***Structure of the thesis***

Burgess *et al* (2006:5) encouraged EdD students to reflect on why they embarked on the course. When I reflected on my motivations, I returned to the interest that I had in *ways* of doing adult education, connecting with my experience as a learner, as well as an educator. The purpose of the research was to examine this interest in close detail, and the structure the thesis was to convey that examination in the way in which it was most appropriate. The thesis started with this chapter, contextualising the background to the research, and the interviewees, with a snapshot of conditions that prevailed in Ireland that

shaped their formation and work. Chapters Two explored the policy context which was highly influential in the field, while Chapter Three provided the literature review which underpinned the research. The second chapter reviewed adult and community education in Ireland, especially focusing on the developments within women's community education, with a brief look at the European backdrop. The third chapter examined critical pedagogy, praxis and critical consciousness, with particular emphasis on feminist perspectives, as a feminist researcher, and I sought to present a coherent picture of the meeting points of all these areas. Chapter Four looked at feminist research methodologies and reviewed grounded theory and life story approaches to data collection, as I considered that these are congruent with the spirit and process of adult and community education. The fifth was the story of the research, with a review of the sampling process and the fuller introduction to the interviewees. Ultimately, this chapter looked the credentials of the interviewees to comment on critical adult and community education. The method I used was that of life story, interviewing the people on their own stories of the critical consciousness, and their evaluation of critical pedagogy, that they witnessed, experienced and/or practiced. Chapter Six continued with the stories of the interviewees, and focused on the analysis of formative dimensions of the interviewees, the research data, while the seventh proceeded to analyze the processes of critical pedagogy, as the interviewees reflected on them from their experience. Finally, chapter eight provided an overview and implication of the analysis, and chapter nine finished with an overall discussion and reflection.

## ***Conclusion***

The struggle to find my voice for this thesis pushed my previous experience to the limits, challenging my assumptions fundamentally. It also forced me to work on the articulation of the principles underpinning the research. This chapter set out the basis for this research, by introducing my positioning, as a critical feminist, social justice adult educator. It continued by looking at the research question and introduced the theoretical framework, which was developed in Chapters Two and Three. It looked at the grounding principles for the terms used in the research, relying on a rights-based approach, and attempting to overcome some of the contradictions of the post-structural Ireland. The process of searching for clarity and rigour is something that will stay with me. In addition, the research approach aimed to develop theory from the data that emerged from the stories of the interviewees, which embedded the thesis in the experiential dimensions in the field, and provided a conduit for the voices within this relatively small *community of praxis* in adult and community education.

The next chapter explored the policy context to adult and community education in Ireland.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Policy Context: Adult and Community Education in Ireland**

#### ***Introduction***

Thompson (1980:26) reiterated her contention that no education could ever be neutral. Adult education held the potential for social transformation, as adult learners, with their experience and status as citizens, could challenge and question as a matter of course. This research was on the side of social transformation, in Thompson's words (1980). This chapter will examine papers influential in Ireland, for the indications of their perspectives on social justice. It will look at the milestone publication, the White Paper on adult education, (Ireland, 2000), in addition to a brief backward review of literature written prior to the White Paper. I will look at the contextual factors from Europe, and the thinking that emerged in that milieu. I will seek to assess the underlying values in the light of Thompson's contention (1980), with regards to whose side it was on. The chapter will finish by introducing Chapter Three, a review of critical pedagogy, praxis and critical consciousness

#### ***The White Paper and the Social Justice Agenda***

The publication of the White Paper in Adult Education, in 2000 was a landmark for those of us working in the field, particularly in critical adult and community education. Ireland, (2000: 27-28) defined adult education as the systematic learning undertaken by adults

who return to learning having concluded initial education or training, and it endeavoured to encapsulate re-entry to Further Education, re-entry to Higher Education, continuing education and training, community education and other systematic and deliberate learning, both formal and informal. It (Ireland, 2000: 110-111) defined community education as an approach to learning based on an ideological sense of a process of communal education towards empowerment. In this study, critical adult and community education was taken to mean the conflation of these two strands. That is, the education for adults, in any context, such as FE, HE, Extra-Mural, Intra-Mural, work-based and training, and community based, with the ultimate goal of communal empowerment. Critical educators consisted of those in any of these contexts, who aimed to bring about social change facilitated by adult and community education, underpinned by the social justice agenda, as elucidated in Chapter One.

The White Paper (Ireland 2000: 27-30) identified six priority areas, including consciousness raising, citizenship, cohesion, competitiveness, cultural development and community development, in order to enhance people's lives, to develop social awareness and a collective sense of purpose, and to address societal marginalisation and exclusion through adult education. The White Paper was congruent with the Delors Report (1996), which proposed that education was one of the principle ways of reducing poverty, exclusion, oppression and war. It further held that learning throughout the lifetime of people was vital to untap the buried treasure of human and social development.

The White Paper (Ireland, 2000) was framed by a history that was fragmented and elusive. As I affirmed in Chapter One, in the sparse written accounts, though, Ó Fathaigh, O'Sullivan, (1999) discerned constant trait, namely, the part that the Roman Catholic

Church played in driving adult education as a vehicle for its doctrine on social justice. The social teaching underpinned the drive to address adult literacy, drawing on Freire's analyses of oppression (1972). This was spearheaded by a number of clergy, for example, the late Father Liam Carey, a founder member of the National Adult Literacy Association, NALA, founded in the late 1960s, and the work was implemented on the ground by the vanguard of the liberatory practitioners, some of whom I interviewed for this research. AONTAS, the Irish National Adult Learning Association and NALA set the adult education agenda and eventually oversaw the transition from the domination by the Catholic Church to the secular practice which prevailed to the present. The appointment of adult education organisers in each county or region, in 1979 (Kenny, 1984: 161), with the mandate to identify the learning needs of adults in their areas, heralded the statutory provision. However, in the early 1980s, a new phenomenon emerged, that became known as the women's community education association, which I was when I became involved in the field. This was, in many ways, the synthesis of those two trends: the social justice dimension of the Catholic drive, with an accessible provision of the secular model, but with an essential women-centred component, that adjusted the anti-feminist bias in the Catholic social justice agenda, which focused on poverty and educational disadvantage. That is, the Catholic Church maintained the strict line on private morality with an undue emphasis on sexuality (Inglis, 1998). Women's community education was unique in Ireland in that it was initiated, progressed and developed by non-educationalists, mainly women working at home. Further, it reached out to marginal and excluded people, again, mainly women, and manifested energy and creativity in all aspects of the work (Inglis *et al*, 1993: 59-60). For example, in 1985, in the centres where I worked, women's groups offered many courses, including Women's Studies, Social and Human Studies, parenting courses, crafts, personal development, creative writing, and so on, all offered in the



daytime. Each centre also provided a crèche to enable parents to participate, again, a first for adult education. Finally, tea, coffee and so on, at the breaks were considered essential, rather than a bonus, again, at odds with the adult education heretofore, which took place by and large in empty school buildings at night.

Smyth (2001: 27) looking back on the field, noted that women's community education was very different to adult education before then. The growth and development was contingent on the facilities that they provided including the crèche and catering, as a minimum. She also noted that women's community education started small, with two or three women's groups offering classes. They went on to find accommodation, they set up crèches, sought funding, sometimes with the support of the statutory organisers, but often against the tide also. They eventually grew to over 30,000 participants, with over 1,000 groups, implying that about forty women's community education groups were active in every county in the Republic. As a proportion of the entire population, about three million, this was very high overall. This substantial body of people were also responsible for shaping the entire field, not just women's community education. They also developed a set of principles which proved enduring, to the extent that the White Paper (2000: 110) acknowledged that it contributed in reaching large numbers of people, frequently disadvantaged in different ways; in pioneering new approaches; and in taking the lived experiences of the participants as the starting point. The White Paper also saw it as an ideological communal education towards empowerment, based on structural analysis. That is, it was part of the trend towards community based projects aimed at bringing resolving social problems such as poverty, racism and other forms of social injustice. Powell and Geoghegan (2004: 151) discussed the role of community development in addressing social problems, and concluded that the Irish state was heavily reliant on the

community sector to fulfil the statutory obligation to resolve social problems. Community development was a key strategy in combating poverty, with the attendant difficulties of relatively powerless people trying to tackle deeply entrenched structural problems. In women's community education, addressing deeply entrenched structural inequalities was mediated through education and learning, the process of equipping people for the work of social change. The learning dimension of empowerment was addressed by Basset *et al*, (1989), when they attempted to summarise the story of adult and community education up until the late 1970s. They acknowledged that adult education in Ireland was difficult to trace and describe, but provided a milestone in that story, with their exploration of the field of the 1970s and 80s. Their study of the current practice of adult education, which flourished during those years, was strongly influenced by the social justice model, primarily the women's community education provision. With regards to the learning for empowerment, Bassett *et al* (1989: 14) deduced that the adult education provision covered three forms of learning attaining technical knowledge, practical knowledge and critical reflection. They identified that the synthesis of these forms of learning were the vital underpinning in the sector, and provided a rationale for the activism and social justice agenda that characterised it. These three forms of learning were echoed and expanded some years later in Ireland (2000: 28-29). This demonstrated the scope of the role of adult education, with the exploration of six priority areas including consciousness raising, enabling people to realise their full human potential, which linked personal experience with wider structural factors; citizenship, with the goal of pro-active engagement in community and social decision-making; cohesion, which focused on social capital; competitiveness, in meeting the needs of the knowledge society; cultural development, which referred to the role of adult education in enriching the cultural fabric of society; and community building, hinged on the structural analysis and the collective

sense of purpose in solving the problems emanating from structural inequalities. These priority areas actively challenged the increasingly individualised liberal outcomes of mainstream education, driven as it is by the overt and hidden curricula (Lynch, 1989). Further, Ireland (2000: 110) held that community education was a process of communal education towards empowerment, not only at the individual level, but also at the collective level, highlighting the ideological dimensions of the form of community education that developed over the past twenty years or so, in that it is substantially different to education in the community, towards adult education towards empowerment, driven by the community, for the community. It shares with community development the common goal of collective empowerment, through the analysis of structural barriers, as discussed above, but the Government of Ireland (2000: 34-48) described these barriers in terms of a number of key problems, endemic Irish society, such as the substantially lower levels of literacy in the older age groups, the links between low income and low literacy levels. Also, early school leaving compared unfavourably with most industrialised countries, resulting in social exclusions ranging from poor employment prospects to intergenerational socio-economic problems, poverty, exclusion and inequalities. Further, the social barriers which faced people with disabilities, Irish Travellers and other minority groups, in spite of legislation, were persistent and almost relentless. This vision of social empowerment underpinned critical pedagogy in adult and community education, in which the praxis includes social and community activism

### ***Irish Adult Education and European Lifelong Learning***

The Irish Government published the White Paper at the same time as the EU Memorandum was published in 2000. The development of policy in lifelong learning

demonstrated the role for lifelong learning in the knowledge society, and the information economy. The spotlight on lifelong learning illuminated the part that adult and community education has played in developing human and social capital, and how flexibility and openness have contributed to making learning attractive (Commission of the European Communities, 2005: 5). In addition, the European community was contextualised within other agencies concerned with democracy, social inclusion and economic development, particularly the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The OECD was highly influential in sponsoring lifelong learning, as a key conduit to the knowledge society and the information economy, holding that lifelong learning was a key element in fostering democratic participation and citizenship, as well as social and economic well-being (OECD, 1996). The definitions of lifelong learning are varied, but the OECD (2004: 1) definition was useful and it included all purposeful learning, from the cradle to the grave, that aims to improve knowledge, and competencies, for all individuals who wish to participate in learning activities.

The distinguishing features of the vision for lifelong learning included a systemic, cross-sector, view; a view that accorded centrality to the learner and motivation to learn; and finally, recognition of the multiplicity of educational goals, including personal development, knowledge development, economic, social and cultural objectives. These goals overlapped with my vision of adult and community education, though not completely. The key difference was that it did not unpack the process of how the vision would be implemented, the way in which all these goals would be attained. Skilbeck (2001: 56) maintained that the process should be inclusive, attractive, accessible, well-

articulated, of high quality and of relevance to the learners. It should be appropriate to learners, in functioning, content and style. In this, he emphasised the importance of the *way* in which lifelong learning is carried out. The process had an equivalent status as the content and the purpose.

The European Commission set the agenda for lifelong learning by identifying a set of priorities, echoing but not identical to the interests of adult and community education. These areas again overlapped with my own interests, including the idea of valuing learning for its own sake, rather than a means to an end; investment in human development enabling people to fulfil their potential; innovative approaches in teaching and learning, with particular focus on adult education methodologies; and finally, bringing learning out of institutional contexts and into the community.

These priorities elicited a number of responses, which praised the memorandum on its breadth of vision, but cautioning against the overwhelming pull of the market. For example, the report from Ireland, (COM, 2001) following a round of consultations, reiterated the role of philosophy and guiding principles that ought to underpin the practice of lifelong learning as promoted in the memorandum. It also emphasised the need to give weight to active citizenship, as the ultimate desirable outcome of lifelong learning, and employment skills as secondary outcomes. In addition, it recognised that there was a lack of attention to the issues of equality. The Irish submission (COM, 2001: 16-19) showed the ideological position of lifelong learning in Ireland, putting it on the side of the poor and disadvantaged when social inclusion and active citizenship were added to personal fulfilment and employability/adaptability on the agenda.

Thus, the lifelong learning agenda in Europe emerged at the time when adult and community education in Ireland entered a new era with the publication of the White Paper, (Ireland, 2000) with all the attendant implications for the field, in terms of statutory funding and provision and the acknowledgement of its role for a more just society. But yet another European initiative supported the new focus on adult and community education in Ireland. The Lisbon Strategy, formulated in 2000, appealed to an economic argument for adult education.

The Lisbon Strategy, (2000) held that economic growth, social inclusion and sustainable development were inextricably linked with the knowledge society. To that end, the European Council devised the strategy to make the EU the most dynamic and competitive of economies in the world. However, it also included social cohesion, in which the material conditions of the population was assured through employment, health, education, and housing, connecting economic growth and development with civil society; and sustainability, not just in terms of human resources but particularly in terms of respect for the environment. Thus, the Lisbon Strategy (2000) aimed for economic growth by promoting the learning dimensions of the knowledge society, and acknowledging that learning was a form of participation in civil society. The strategy was distinguished from the neo-conservative economic strategy typical of the USA, at least, in the concern with social inclusion and the environment. Nevertheless, it did inject some of the characteristics of neo-liberal economics into the overall plan for Europe. Further, intentionally and unintentionally, the strategy impacted on the perception of adult and community education in Ireland evident in the White Paper (Ireland, 2000) which marked the beginning of the new interest in adult and community education as a key player in modern Irish society.

## ***Critical or Neo-Liberal?***

The central question which arose from the policy positioning on adult and community education in Ireland, contextualised by the lifelong learning thinking emanating from Europe, revolved around the ideological implications of the stances. Mayo (2005: 18-19) argued that the neo-liberal policies, backed by the Thatcher and Reagan governments from the 1980s, was hugely influential internationally. The neo-liberal characteristics of the free market, deregulation, and the transfer of public service to the private domain were evident in some of the priorities of the White Paper (Ireland, 2000) and the lifelong learning memorandum (Commission of the European Communities, 2000), but were balanced to a greater or lesser degree by critical priorities. The memorandum demonstrated neo-liberal values of the market place, in the focus on lifelong learning for the economy, with personal and social fulfilment as by-products of a free market economy. Further, it showed the belief that the free market could resolve social exclusion, with the assumption that employment and consumption were adequate responses to the issue. On the other hand, the White Paper (Ireland, 2000: 28-29) demonstrated a more critical set of values, with the focus on consciousness raising and community development. In addition, the overall focus of the responsibility of the state for education indicates that the paper was embedded in a critical social agenda. Further, the discussion of community education demonstrated the partiality of the authors, with strong feminist and class analyses. Finally, the arguments of the role of adult and community education in overall vision for society again demonstrated the values of combating poverty and inequality. That is, there are strongly critical dimensions in this milestone policy document. However, while the critical values set down in the Paper, the question about

the implementation of these values remains. That is, the aspirations of document may not always be evident in the practice of adult and community education. The next chapter examined these critical assumptions about the role of adult and community education in generating a vision of a just and equal society, and working towards this vision.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter reviewed a key influential policy document which marked a new era in adult and community education in Ireland, the White Paper in adult education (Ireland, 2000). It looked at the milieu surrounding the re-discovery of lifelong learning, arising from Europe, together with the impact on the Irish situation. I discussed the values underpinning these initiatives, and sought evidence of the hegemony the neo-liberal economic agenda that gathered momentum since the 1980s. I concluded that the Irish situation was, on balance, on the side of the poor and excluded, with more critical analyses of the causes and the resolutions. But I considered that there was a difference between the critical aspirations of some of the messages in the White Paper, and the wherewithal to achieve them on the ground. The next chapter looked at the literature on critical pedagogy, praxis and critical consciousness, and the struggle in Ireland to maintain a critical perspective in the face of the insidious spread of neo-liberalism in all aspects of Irish society.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Literature Review: Critical Pedagogy, Praxis and Critical Consciousness**

#### ***Introduction***

Gramsci (1971), with the concept of hegemony, enabled the interrogation of an agenda such as neo-liberalism, in terms of its pervasive dominance in all aspects of society, particularly in the thrust towards individualisation and the market, with the attendant transposition of the state and the economy. Further, the concept provided the tools of analysis of the responsibilities of the state vis-à-vis the poorest and most vulnerable people. This chapter will review the literature on critical pedagogy, together with connected praxis and critical consciousness. It will review sources for social change, in new social movements and feminist scholarship. It will contextualise these within the story of Irish development, and it proceed to explore the macro/micro integration in order to develop the understanding of how praxis worked on the social world. Finally, I will endeavour to contextualise the literature, to situate the research questions in current practice.

#### ***Critical Pedagogy***

Freire (1972) has been the most influential theorist in critical pedagogy in critical adult and community education in Ireland. His influence was evident when the adult literacy service was established for adults with literacy difficulties in the 1970s. In addition, his influence continued in the work of women's community education, and in other models

of adult education for marginalised people. In this literature review I centred on Freire (1972), his discussion on pedagogy, praxis and critical consciousness.

In adult and community education there had been various attempts to provide the concept for pedagogy specifically for adults. Knowles (1980), borrowing from an older argument, used the neologism *andragogy*, as a word to use in teaching and learning for adults. He held that adults needed to be involved in their learning programmes, to be co-planners in the process. He considered that experience was central to adult education and that the learning must be relevant to them. In many ways, Knowles (1980) and Freire (1972) were seemingly speaking about the same thing, working with adults, using their experience. However, Knowles (1980) did not have a critical dimension to the concept and further, the word was generated out of the Greek for man, that is, *andra*. When I first came across Knowles (1980) as a student of adult education in the late 1980s, I thought it was an exciting and innovative way of distinguishing adult education from children's education. However, as a feminist, I thought he had missed an opportunity to generate another word that would genuinely refer to adults, both men and women. For the purpose of this study, I considered that Freire (1972), with the use of the term *pedagogy*, more appropriate. The literature review was centred on his thinking, and people who were influenced by it. Further, feminist studies, developed both within and without the Freirean influence, also used the term *pedagogy*, with various ways of modifying it, from hooks (1994) to Lather (1992), which I discussed in detail below. Thus, while *andragogy* gained some usage, both in the USA and in Europe, I opted for the wider-used term, *pedagogy*, in this study. The next section reviewed critical pedagogy, with close focus to the Freirean derived concept, applied to the dynamic, consciousness raising, interaction between learners and educators, and the knowledge they generate together.

The definitions of critical pedagogy were fluid and dynamic. Darder, *et al* (2003: 3) maintained that critical pedagogy evolved out of the desire to organise the set of radical ideas and practices that contributed to democratic principles in schooling. They traced the first usage of the term to Giroux (1983), and he continued in his subsequent work (1992, 1988) with the project of linking critical educational practice with democratic principles in the wider society.

Darder, *et al*, (2003: 3-14) discussed the foundations of critical pedagogy. They linked development of progressive education (Dewey, 1966, Bowles and Gintis, 1976, for example) with critical theory (Marcuse, 1969, Habermas 1996, for example) and the struggle against all kinds of dominations, including anti-democratic forces, tyrannical governments, and authoritarianism. They saw the early 1970s as pivotal in the development of critical pedagogy, with the thinking around the role of education in changing the relationship between the school and society, the learners and educators and even the nature of education (Illich, 1978, Freire, 1972 and Boal, 2000). They held that the concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) enabled the analysis of unequal power relations that sustained the ruling classes, and was thus an invaluable tool in critical pedagogy. They also held that, as a pedagogical tool, the study of ideology was able to unmask the contradictions of the mainstream cultures of schooling, and the lived experiences of people, and in the context of critical pedagogy, providing a starting point for asking critical questions.

Thus, critical pedagogy was founded on radical ideas about power, authority and democracy, situated in schooling and education. In the USA, critical education had been

very influential along two strands, that is, via Giroux (1988) critical pedagogy in mainstream schooling, and bell hooks (2003) feminist pedagogy. Giroux (2005) posed the critical questions on schooling, and whose interest schooling served. He argued that that school practices needed to be informed by a public philosophy that addressed the construction of ideological and institutional conditions in which the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority of students became the defining feature of schooling. He asserted that critical pedagogy attempted to create new knowledge through interdisciplinary thinking, which took the lived experience of people into account. This was fundamentally an ethical positioning, which located itself around the categories of race, gender, class and ethnicity in these experiences. Further, Apple (1986: 163) held that, contrary to the ethical positioning of critical educators, teaching was reduced to a technical role, and this technical role was part of the overall decline of education as liberation. He maintained that, far from promoting critical thinking, education in the USA promoted education as consumption and the school as a market place. Moreover, he considered that the market/consumer dynamic pushed the individualistic trend to the logical end-point, that of the disconnection with the social and cultural context. It would be most difficult to generate class/race/gender consciousness with the meritocratic system, and yet, the meritocratic system was perceived as the fairest way in which to distribute educational advantage. McLaren (1989: 230) perceived that it is the role of the critical pedagogue to forge this link, to work as an educator to bring the social and cultural into the individual learning experience. Thus, the role of critical pedagogy was to develop the educators as theorising intellectuals, and to develop in the students, a critical consciousness in the process of education.

Adult and community education (Ireland, 2000) was situated at these meeting points of lived experience and the impact of the gender, race and ethnicity on people, while acknowledging the pull of the marketplace permeating Irish society. Thus, Giroux's critical pedagogy was exemplified in adult and community education in Ireland, while lacking the theorising for the practice on the ground, a failure that Thompson (1980) noted. However, with regards to critical pedagogy in mainstream schooling, Kanpol (1999) asserted that critical pedagogy was theoretically visionary, but lacked the practical tools or process to implement it. Thus, while Giroux's critical pedagogy had the theoretical foundation, it lacked the practice, and while adult and community education in Ireland lacked the substantial theorising, it was rich in ways of working that aimed for democracy and equality. Lynch (1989) was the clearest voice in the critique of education in Ireland. She argued that the role of ideology in education was obscured and disconnected from the practice of education from the role it played in society. Moreover, she found there was no evidence that critical theorists, including Freire, Giroux and hooks, had an impact on the culture of schooling, overall. Thus, in mainstream education, Lynch (1989) found that critical analyses of education were few. In Lynch (1999) she acknowledged that adult and community education held a strong critical agenda particularly in the practice. Bassett *et al* (1989: 27-28) contended that critical reflection and the quest for freedom and emancipation were core underpinnings, including the wider organisation of it, as well as the practice in the classroom.

Freire (1972) was taken up by hooks (1994), in her feminist take on Freirean pedagogy of the oppressed. The next section looked at the literature around this strand of critical education, emanating from both Freire but also from feminist education.

## ***Feminist Pedagogies***

Lather (1992: 121), in foregrounding a feminist reading of post-critical pedagogy, took the definition of pedagogy as prescribed by Lusted (1986: 3). He provided a key characterization of pedagogy, which I considered congruent with my own intuitive take on it, comprising the transformation of consciousness between the educator, the learners and the knowledge they generate in the pedagogic relationship. In this tripartite process, the equality of the educators and learners was fundamental, while the knowledge was dynamic rather than static. Further, his characterisation is congruent with Freire's contention with regards to partiality. Learners, educators and knowledge were situated. Authenticity and transparency around those situated condition would be essential to ensure that pedagogy moved beyond the science of methods, or the mere transmission of static knowledge.

Outside of mainstream education, feminist pedagogies demonstrated the connections between ideology and practice. The feminist strand of critical pedagogy, both parallel to Freire, as well as emanating from his work, opened up the wider milieu with feminist research and, subsequently, feminist epistemology. Gore and Luke (1992: 1), as feminist educators, attempted to create learning spaces that 'empowered' students, helped to demystify canonical knowledge and clarified relations of domination which subordinated not just women, but also people of colour, minority ethnic groups, class and other signifiers of difference. That is, their feminist stances were parallel to Freire, with their distinct feminist background. On the other side of feminist pedagogy, hooks (1994) was deeply influenced by the Freire's thinking. She argued that Freire's lack of gender

awareness, while a major flaw, was remedied by the pedagogy of oppressed, in that it provided the tools to generate a feminist pedagogy. She argued that engaged pedagogy was a development of critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy, in that engaged pedagogy more demanding than either: it advocated the well-being of the students, with attention to the relationship dimensions. That was the essential condition for learning to progress. hooks (2003) added to engaged pedagogy, with her contention that the teaching and learning relationship was essential to building community in the classroom. That is, hook's starting point of the pedagogy of the oppressed was developed into engaged pedagogy, based on both critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy, focused on the well being of the learners; further, engaged pedagogy became the foundation for community building, starting in the classroom. Community building, as an intended consequence of pedagogy, needed the feminist analysis, in order to ensure that it was fully imbued with human values, interrogating hidden patriarchal values. For example, Stanley and Wise (1993: 26) argued that feminism showed that social sciences were sexist and embedded in patriarchal ideologies. Thus, feminist pedagogies problematized critical pedagogy, particularly with the central question, which Lather (1992: 124) posed: *why doesn't this feel empowering?* This question was originally posed by Ellsworth (1992: 93), when she analysed her experience of teaching an anti-racism programme in an establishment university, and found that critical pedagogy was most abstract and obscure with regards to working with learners, leaving her and the students struggling. Lather (1992: 132), rather than set critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy in antagonistic opposition, proposed that the difficulties Ellsworth experienced and the theoretical saturation of critical pedagogy, were opportunities to develop, rather than barriers. In the context of adult and community education in Ireland, that crucial question about empowerment was foremost. The White Paper (Ireland, 2000) highlighted the role of empowerment,

especially in women's community education, in which the processes in the learning environment were congruent with the liberatory principles that underpinned critical and feminist pedagogy.

Thus, the literature on critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy provided the possibilities of theoretical foundations for pedagogy in adult and community education in Ireland, while also providing the opportunities to theorise the actual practice in the learning environments all around the island. The next section looked at praxis, and critical consciousness, in the context of the knowledge base in critical pedagogy.

### ***Praxis and Critical Consciousness***

According to Marx (2000), the purpose of philosophy was not simply to interpret the world, but rather to change it. This precept was echoed by others, (Oakley, 2005, Lengerman, and Niebrugge-Brantley, 2003, and Stanley and Wise, 1993, for example) with their focus on the feminist scrutiny of the social sciences. Freire (1972: 60-61) advocated naming the world in order to change it and he inspired educators to work for social change, through praxis. The key concept of *praxis* was used in the Freirean sense. He used the concept of *praxis* to articulate the nature of acting upon the social world, in the cycle with the reflection of conscientization. Gramsci (1971: 334-336) proposed a praxis which unites theory and practice so that neither is subservient to the other. This was the sense in which I saw it: practice enriched theory; practice was equally enriched by theory. Smith (1999) deemed that praxis consisted of informed activism, committed to human well being, underpinned by reflection that is honed by rigorous self-knowledge on our values and beliefs. Praxis linked theory and practice, in that it removed theory



from a purely abstract, cognitive arena, and embedded it in thinking about practice. In the context of adult and community education, this ensured that the practice of adult education was the basis of the theory, rather than the other way around.

New social movements of the late twentieth century were particularly relevant to this locale, as they forged the link between theory and practice, and subverted the disconnections between disciplines, in the search for insight into the lived, experiential realities. Further, this subversion is political activism in its own right, in the struggle for social justice.

Freire (1972: 81) asserted that critical consciousness, or *conscientization*, the neologism derived from the original Portuguese, emanated from reflection on the condition of existence. He emphasized that people emerged from their enveloping reality, through reflection, and developed the ability to *intervene* between their densely enveloping reality, and their historical awareness of it. Conscientization, he held, was the deepening of the attitude of awareness, characteristic of all surfacing from the enveloping reality. That is, critical consciousness consisted of insight and understanding of the social world, facilitated by the distance created by reflection, such that the reality of experience was seen in a more objective light. This was similar to feminist consciousness raising. This was one of the most basic processes in the women's movement, and was at the forefront of the generation of new ways of knowing. Freire (1972) and his work was crucial in shaping theoretical critical adult and community education, and the primacy of politics in education. Further, Freire was not simply proposing a method; rather he placed the onus on the educator to generate knowledge. However, as I discussed in feminist pedagogy, his lack of awareness of gender was a major flaw (hooks, 1994). He exhorted educators to

become broader intellectuals, to engage in critical consciousness themselves, and to avoid the tendency to remain merely technicians.

This point was central in this research. The technical aspects of working with learning groups led to the resistance to methods (Bartolomé, 2003), but Freire revitalised the relationship between theory, practice and the struggle for social justice. Adult educators needed to resist the pressure to develop the highly technical approach to pedagogy, and to continue to raise their consciousness, to generate new knowledge in process with their learners, to develop their role as intellectuals in the community, and their grasp on the ways in which their individual practice connected with the social world. This was a central pivot in the conceptual framework, and the Irish situation provided the context for it.

### ***The Irish Context***

The struggle to reclaim education for the public good was taking place between a small number of critical educators against the large number of common-sense politicians and powerful partners in the mainstream arenas. Adult and community education, on the other hand, was a marginal arena, and it had an array of fora for discussion on the very topics that are silenced in the mainstream. This was due, in part, by the politicisation of the key players: the participants. An emancipatory ideology, rather than the more reforming ideology of The White Paper on Education (Ireland, 1995) underpinned the White Paper on Adult Education, (Ireland, 2000). This was following the current trends in the field, as well as shaping the future. For example, the consultation rounds prior to the White Paper on adult and community education, included a large number of groups and networks committed to the social justice model of adult and community education, including:

AONTAS, the Irish national association; NALA, the Irish national association for literacy education for adults; The Shanty Educational Project, a radical project committed to social transformation; and several women's community education networks as well as a huge number of participants. There were no such organisations within mainstream education, and participants – students - were particularly silenced, deferring to parents associations, which may be more committed to the *status quo* as Sugrue and Gleeson (2004) maintained, and which I discussed in Chapter One. Adult and community education was explicit in its commitment to educationally and socially marginalised groups, and this shaped the entire field. These were the groups that Freire's praxis was concerned with, and his influence is fundamentally significant. In contrast with mainstream education, critical approaches were vitally important, and the voices of critical educators were heard in all the learning sites: in the national organisations; in the training of adult educators; among the participants; and among the organisers and facilitators, though not theorising, as I found.

This critical voice was recognised in the larger sociological community, in addition to the educational community. For example, Tovey and Share (2003: 197-199) acknowledged the growth in adult and community education as rapid and significant, in that it reached large numbers of people, and especially those who did surface in many other arenas. Lynch (1997: 118) perceived it as pivotal in community development, and Hannan *et al*, (1998: 127) saw it as a positive alternative to the inflexible, conservative mainstream schooling system. Indeed, adult and community education had more in common with new social movements than with societal institutions. Groups such as workers groups, unemployment groups, community development groups, the Irish Traveller Movement, the women's movement, and gay rights movement were underpinned by liberation

ideology. Adult and community education was significant within these groups, as well. This sector was part of the communitarian trend, which characterised the state's formal, (though not always effective) response to disadvantage and marginalisation. (Bell, 1993) characterised communitarianism as the shift away from the highly individualised thrust of modern liberal society. Communitarianism considered that the society needed citizens who were connected in social networks (see Putnam, 2000, for example) and the role of society ought to be to empower communities, rather than driving them to further individualism and estrangement from one another. Etzioni (1993) built on the notion of social networks, towards a much more radical version, which repositioned the responsibility of the state towards communities. That is, communities need the state to support and promote their role in shaping the coherent, inclusive and cohesive society.

The White Paper on Voluntary Activity (Ireland, 2000: 49) described community development as the interactive process of knowledge and action designed to change the conditions which marginalise communities, and which was underpinned by a vision of community self-reliance and self-help. This vision was an all encompassing one, and put the responsibility for social change on to the communities themselves. Kelleher and Whelan (1992) perceived that the way people change those conditions was through the process whereby the members of the community identify their needs and work collectively to meet those needs. Powell and Geoghegan, (2004: 1) maintained that community had emerged as a new site of politics in this changed political landscape in Ireland. Communitarianism, with the emphasis on social networks and cohesion, was at odds with the full-blown neo-liberal society (see Mayo, 2005) Moreover, even within the general trend towards community building and development, this site of politics was itself torn between a form of social emancipation and social control. This kind of

plasticity had advantages in terms of how accessible community politics could be to people at the grassroots, when participation was as close as a local meeting on a local issue. That is, it was much closer than representational democracy, characterised by distant, elected representatives. As party politics became more remote, together with the decrease in voting rates, particularly in marginal areas, community had become more meaningful. People could voice opinions, dissatisfactions, praise, and differences, without the customary 'cap-in-hand' trappings of clientalism that was practically synonymous electoral and local politics.

However, on the other hand, ideology was simple to hide in the community label. There were examples in Ireland of community candidates who stood for election, only to join right wing, individualist political parties on their entry to Parliament. That is, they built their base in the empowering, accessible site of the community, but their allegiances lay with lower taxes, fewer community facilities, and the general trends of neo-liberal ideologies. In such ways, social control was exercised on the supporters of these candidates, with people ultimately voting for policies that militated against their interests. This seemed to be against the spirit of the thinking behind the promotion of community development, yet this was unquestioned, perhaps because the actual politics of the activists was not transparent. Notwithstanding this flaw, though, community development continued to serve as the main route out of poverty. For example, it was the key strategy of The Combat Poverty Agency, (CPA, 2008) the state advisory agency mandated to identify causes of poverty and to develop policy to prevent and tackle poverty. The ideological positioning they took was a middle ground between right and left. Bassett (2007: 2) found that the strength and distinctiveness of the community development programme lay in the principles of empowerment, participation, management and control

by groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion and flexibility in responding to needs. On the other hand, she found that, while these principles had been long established in the sector, they were not understood nor supported at state level. Thus, a key strategy by the statutory advisory agency did not have a reciprocal counterpart at national level. In terms of the state's official, formal strategy for combating poverty and disadvantage, community building, community development and community education were part of the array of responses, yet, effectively, in real terms, there was a slippage between the vision and the implementation.

However, I considered this was a key challenge for adult and community education, to keep social justice, equality and the elimination of poverty on the agenda, in spite of the absence of political will to fundamentally tackle them. The models for politicised communal activism were varied, and the next section looked at these in greater detail.

### ***Sources for Politicised Communal Activism***

Critical adult and community education drew on the range of sources for the underpinnings of the activism that it advocated through praxis. In this, new social movements provided the most fertile ground for the development of the seeds for the community strand of the sector, while the women's movement was the key source for the radical learning dimensions.

#### *New Social Movements*

As I maintained earlier, Freire (1972) was deeply influential in the foundations of the phase of adult education that developed from the late 1960s, with the two national associations, especially, and in the innovative women's community education of the 1980s. Critical pedagogy in adult and community education had the explicit and particular intention of enabling disadvantaged people to claim their civil status in an envisioned just and equal society. Tovey and Share, (2003: 449 – 451) characterised new social movements with the high visibility of gender, race age, ethnicity, and dis/ability issues, and they maintained that their sites for political activism was more likely to be in civil society, rather than state and mainstream politics. They continued that new social movements were more likely to be ethically based, rather than interest-based, and were, by and large, non-hierarchical, equal and fair, relying on networking and informal organisation, instead. Further, they were less concerned with sectional interests and more interested in values, ideals and an envisioned fairer and just society

Tovey and Share (2003: 452) claim that the concept of 'lifeworld', that is, the life as lived, was very useful in the discussion on the part that new social movements played in bringing about the just and equal society. They understood the lifeworld as including the everyday interpersonal relationships, within and outside of the family, where everyone was orientated towards mutual understanding and common ground. They held that lifeworld explained or, at least, helped to explain, the new ways of living, new takes on relationships and, particularly, the new emphasis on personal development or the development of the self. They continued that the emergence of new social movements could be interpreted as a response by the lifeworld to the threat of colonisation by the forces of the economy, by the objectification of the population, and other forms of domination and coercion.

Thus, in their review of modern Irish society, with the ubiquitous neo-liberal agenda, and the resultant gaps between rich and poor, advantaged and disadvantaged and core elite and marginalised people, new social movements attracted groups dedicated to changing the ways things were. While many members of new social movements may not be completely aware of the origins of the thinking that underpins their activism, the ideas, nevertheless, were enacted and embodied by them. That is, members of new social movements groups found meaningfulness by belonging to the groups, and these groups had the capacity to mobilise populations of people with raised consciousness, ethical positions and reflexivity. Ultimately, despite operating outside of the traditional political pathways, new social movements achieved political objectives and in many ways, they have managed to redefine politics itself. An example of a new social movement group was the ecology movement. The drive by the state to involve itself in environmental issues, including the economics of pollution, was initiated by ecology groups, around in Ireland since the late 1970s. One direct outcome was the plastic bags levy, which was introduced by the Government, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, against severe pressure from industry, but which was warmly greeted by the people. Other examples in Ireland included the disability movement, which pressed for fundamental legal changes, and shaped the portrayal of people with disabilities in society, from being 'invalid', the usual term that was applied to people with disabilities, to independent living, buttressed by rights and privileges.

It was difficult to explain the emergence of new social movements as they were broadly outside of existing models of political change, a form of communal activism that was capable of deep change, without resorting to representations, hierarchies or elite voices.



Tovey and Share, (2003: 456) considered that new social movements were innovative in the extreme, and that social structures or ideological characteristics of societies could not explain the emergence of new social movements. That is, new social movements were ways of working towards political change, defying the Marxian dialectic, nor resorting to force or dominance that characterised social change outside of these movements.

When I considered adult and community education through the lens of new social movements, I thought that it helped to position it more clearly in society. That is, in the main part, adult and community education existed outside of the traditional social institutions. The emphasis on dialogue and common understandings; underpinned by ethical considerations such as respect for difference and diversity; driven by the key players; and devoted to growth and development, and fulfilling the potential of all the participants, were major characteristics of adult and community education. I saw it as an example of a new social movement in its own right, and also as the key route that enabled people to gain the understandings of the same social movements. In this dual role, it gathered a momentum as a force for social change, and in so doing, it fulfilled its stated and implicit objectives, that of social transformation. It had also a key role in personal change. In order to look at this more closely, I went on to consider the influence from feminist scholars, and the women's movement, by reviewing the position of critical research and epistemology in the adult and community education arena.

### *Feminist Scholarship*

Williamson, (1998: 172) held that all personal change is a form of learning or questioning. In his discussion on the lifeworld, concerned as it was with the minutiae of

everyday, (extra)ordinary living, the face-to-face realities of interpersonal relationships, he positioned personal change in the sphere of adult learning. The concept of the lifeworld provided the wherewithal to the study of this sphere of human life. When 'turbo-capitalism', the term coined by Powell and Geoghegan, (2004) to describe the type of society that Ireland became during the so-called prosperous years, colonised the lifeworld, it objectified people and reduced them to consumers, helpless in the maelstrom of market forces. Yet it was this very site that adult and community education was most concerned. The feminist slogan, 'the personal is political' could be the mantra for this sphere. Adult and community education reclaimed the personal from the consumer/client/customer domains, for the domain of active citizenship and agency.

Adult and community education was more than the continuous development of skills; it embraced self-knowledge, covering both thoughts and feelings about identity.

Williamson, (1998, : 173-174) held that the forms of self understanding open to us were both private and public, part of the wider cultural discourses on identity and experiences. The differences in roles and identities reflected much more than the functional importance attached to them, and the exercise of power by the power elite was ultimately decisive in attributing status and value to those roles. Thus, for the Irish sector, the overall aim of adult and community education was to change the distribution of power, and to create the means to do so. In this, feminist thinking was vitally influential, particularly in deconstructing discourses around subjectivity. Politicised adult and community education included the contribution that feminist thinking has made in subverting the traditional treatment of the person: as individualised, unitary, rational and asocial. Further, Ryan (2001: 5-6) considered that the radical view of the person combined the internal with the external, conceptualising 'subjectivity as multiple,

dynamic and continuously produced in the course of social relations that are themselves changing and often contradictory'. Weedon (1997) broke with the humanist conceptions of the essential self in her assertion that 'subjectivity' referred to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, and the way a woman might have of understanding the world. Both Ryan (2001) and Weedon (1997) articulated post structuralist feminist thinking, parallel to the process which happened in adult and community education over its recent history, since the early 1980s. Further, Kristeva (1986) argued that it was timely to re-theorise the person, in which the subject is both the product of meaning, and the creator of meaning. Almost from the beginning of women's community education, from the mid-1980s, in my memory, courses centring on personal development, assertiveness, self-awareness, and so on, were asked for by participants, and were provided in various formats within the programmes. If the traditional gender discourses were dominant in this milieu, it was unlikely that it was the force for change that it has proved itself to be, as demonstrated by the prominent place it was given in the White Paper on adult and community education (Ireland, 2000). In the light of this, it was important to examine this 'feminist ways of knowing' (Ryan, 2001) which seemed to inhabit the environment in which adult and community education grew and developed.

When women's community education started in the early 1980s, the ways of working, the content of the programmes and the learning environments were radically different to anything that had gone on in Ireland, before, especially as it was initiated and maintained by non-educationalists, in the accepted sense. Elsewhere, (Connolly, 2003) I explored the phenomenon which seemed to be a very feminine set up, with loose, informal networks which allowed the entire phenomenon to develop. The lived experience of the participants was the fundamental starting point. Most women did not identify with the

women's liberation movement, which they perceived as removed from their lives. This (mis)interpretation was fed by media ridicule of the movement; while, in reality, women were beginning to enjoy the benefits of the changes, such as contraception, work outside the home, and the provision of childcare. However, the net impact of the women-led project was the feminist dimensions, which subverted the traditional, hierarchical, and conventional models of adult education. That is, feminist methodologies emerged, underpinned by distinct feminist epistemologies. Stanley and Wise (1983) were pioneering feminist sociology in Higher Education, from the 1980s onward, yet, in Ireland, this was more evident in the marginal world of adult and community education. Stanley and Wise (1993: 200) advocated feminist research in order to create the common ground for academic acceptance and social power, and contributed hugely to the development of feminist ways of knowing. Their insights and arguments are particularly pertinent in looking at critical adult and community education, with the stance that feminist theory should be at some level consonant with experience, that the researcher (educator) is on the same critical plane as the participants, and that 'reality' is constructed by the subject. Luke and Gore (1992: 1) were congruent with Stanley and Wise (1993), when they spoke about the attempt by feminist educators to create pedagogical situations which empower students, demystify canonical knowledge and clarify relations of domination and subordination, which are marked by gender, class, poverty and other differences.

Feminist research inherently captured the dramatic decline in the absolutes of positivism and rationalism. Lather (1991: 50-51) welcomed the notion of research as praxis, the direct linking between theory, practice, and reflexivity. This again was congruent with the possibilities in adult and community education, and had the potential to disrupt the old

orders. Luke and Gore (1992: 1) added the perspective on male critical educators, when they acknowledged that, as feminist educators, they have 'uneasy' readings about where feminist educational work stood in relation to male-authored critical pedagogy. Their uneasiness lay in finding themselves as feminist educators within patriarchal systems of knowledge, scholarship and pedagogical relations. This resonated with my own experience as a feminist educator, and brought this discussion back to the beginning, in the feminist critique of the masculinist slant in critical pedagogy. Kanpol (1999: 1 and 185) questioned the ineffectiveness of critical pedagogy in making a lasting impact on inequality and unfairness in USA society. He suggested that it could be that it was still embedded in patriarchal relations, silencing the feminist voices, or at least marginalising them. Whatever the reason, this study was intent on ensuring that feminist voices were not silenced. One way of guarding against this was to integrate feminist voices in praxis. The next section went on to look at structure and agency as cornerstones of feminist thinking and of praxis. Structure/agency integration was key concern for feminists when they claimed that the personal was political, and it was increasingly important for praxis in adult and community education.

### ***Macro/Micro Integration***

Conventional divisions in the disciplines of sociology and psychology separated the personal from the social, but more recently, sociologists have caught up with feminist thinking, in structure/agency integration. Over the past twenty years or so, sociologists have attempted to integrate micro and macro theories of society, the micro-macro linkage. Ritzer and Goodman (2003: 483-485) looked at the debate between various sociologists who plump for the macro or the micro perspectives, but they asserted that the founders of

sociology were acutely concerned with the personal, private impact of sociological phenomena.

Ritzer (1979, 1981) provided a matrix that helped to analyse the macro-micro linkage, together with objectivity and subjectivity. He proposed a four-level analysis of society.

**MACROSCOPIC**

<p>I. Macro-objective</p> <p>Examples – society, law, bureaucracy, architecture, technology, and language</p>	<p>II. Macro-subjective</p> <p>Examples – culture, norms and values</p>
<p>III. Micro-objective</p> <p>Examples – patterns of behaviour, action and interaction.</p>	<p>IV. Micro-subjective</p> <p>Examples – perceptions, beliefs; the various facets of the social construction of reality</p>

**MICROSCOPIC**

(Ritzer, 1979,1981a, cited in Ritzer, 2003, p. 487)

These categories had inherent problems. The underlying assumption in this meaning of objectivity was that the elements, such as the law, architecture, and so on, were impartial, free from uninformed bias, while the subjective is biased, prejudiced and all too human.

But feminist thinking about subjectivity questioned this. Weedon, (1997: 32) expanded on subjectivity:

‘Subjectivity’ is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world...

That is, Weedon’s (1997) take on the concept of subjectivity encompassed the macro and the micro, with the different personal levels of ‘knowing’: the conscious and the unconscious. She also linked it into Ritzer’s objective sphere, especially with the regard to actions and interactions: the relations that the person has with the world. However, I thought that Ritzer’s matrix was useful because he circumvented the problems inherent in dualism. Micro and macro were co-existing dimensions in that any one was not prior to the others. Thus, his four-dimension matrix enabled me to view these as equally co-existing and influential. Further, it laid the foundation for thinking about the purpose of this research, which aimed to link the small-scale interaction of pedagogy with large-scale outcomes of social and personal change.

Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (2003: 474-475) said that women learn to perceive themselves as unequal to and less than the super-ordinate group, in the process of internalising society’s norms and values, along with the way in which the self as a social actor must operate out of established knowledge (*cf* Foucault, 1994, Lukes, 2005 on power). That is, women, with these internalised inferiorities, were different to the dominant cultural norms. Dominant groups and individuals developed their sense of identity through feedback from their peers. Women and other subordinate groups saw

themselves through the eyes of these dominant norms, and therefore see themselves as less than them, inadequate fundamentally. Most of all, this disjointed sense of identity denied the validity of their own experience. Davis (2006: 426) expanded on this theme of the fragmented sense of identity.

The formation of subject thus depends on powers external to itself. The subject might resist and agonise over those very powers that dominate and subject it, and at the same time, it also depends on them for its existence.

These feminist analyses of subjectivity represented a highly complex set of elements, from the outside social norms and values, to the internalised imperatives, both conscious and unconscious. Through the feminist analysis, and eventually through macro-micro integration, it was possible to develop an understanding of subjectivity as a powerful aspect of the human condition, rather than an inadequate, deficient opposite of objectivity. Further, subjectivity was holistic and multi-faceted, including the rational and logical with the emotional and intuitive. Moreover, objectivity must be dislocated from the prime position as unqualified truth or uncontested knowledge. Feminist research promoted subjectivity to locate it alongside objectivity as valid knowledge. I regard that the research methodologies based on subjective data and analyses can capture these complex elements, and provide a meaningful account of the experience of adult and community educators. That is, adult and community education could extend its depth by virtue of feminist analyses. But there was another aspect of this issue that needed to be explored: that of structure and the way agency operated within it as well as creating it. For adult learners, this is vital. Personal change through adult and community education could remain at the level of the superficial unless it was accompanied by the sense of self



as actor, agentic within his or her own life, able to make choices and decisions about his or her destiny.

### ***Agency and Structure Continuum***

Ritzer and Goodman (2003: 508-509), located the micro and macro ends of social phenomena on a continuum rather than regarding them as opposites, as dichotomies. They associated the agency/structure dilemma with micro to macro continuum, with distinct differences. While agency generally refers to micro-level, individual human actors, it can also refer to (macro) collectivities that act on communally. That is, this characterisation took into account that agency can include collective action, and not just individual action. Their view of structure, similarly, locates it also within the macro and micro:

...while structure usually refers to large-scale social structure, it also can refer to micro structures such as those involved in human interaction.

This is essential when we consider a social movement such as the feminist movement, where groups of women, acting counter-hegemonically, are consciously working towards an explicit goal. As well as changing their community and society, the feminist movement went right into the domestic sphere, fundamentally questioning human interrelationships.

Bourdieu (1977: 3) considered that *practice* was the key way out of the false conflict between the individual and society. He focused on practice as the outcome of the

dialectical relationship between structure and agency. When I considered pedagogy as practice, I could perceive this relationship: pedagogy directly connected the content of the subject or discipline, with the process of teaching it. Critical pedagogy transformed this relationship by focusing on critical ways of looking at the world. Included in this critical mode in critical pedagogy and in the women's movement, was consciousness raising. Reflexivity was an indispensable component of consciousness raising, located within the concept of praxis, the process of action and reflection.

The integration of the micro and macro, and the agency/structure continuum was essential for this research. Praxis was contingent on the possibility of acting upon the world, yet, without this theoretical integration, it was impossible to engage with how it could be done.

Thus, the conceptual framework pivoted on the concepts of praxis and critical consciousness, macro/micro integration, together with the agency and structure continuum and how these interacted in critical pedagogy to bring about social transformation.

## ***Conclusion***

In this review, I looked at the literature on critical pedagogy, praxis and critical consciousness. I looked at the sources for the activism and social change for adult and community education, in new social movements and feminist scholarship. I reviewed the Irish context, where I found that critical adult and community education was an arena which subverted the traditional boundaries, crossing between community activism and

feminist critical education. I explored the implications of how to work upon the world, with the discussion on the macro/micro continuum, subjectivity, and the agency and structure continuum, as pivotal concepts in praxis. The next chapter will look at research methodology appropriate to this study.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Research Methodology**

#### ***Introduction***

Lather (1991: 2-3) built her work on the assumption that ways of knowing were inherently culture-bound and perspectival and such a stance necessarily raised the issue of the values of the researchers and the need for self-reflexivity to develop awareness of these values. A further assumption for her is the politics of empowerment, with the implication that critical social sciences need research approaches which enable researchers involved in change to counter powerlessness. This chapter will discuss the research methodologies which are congruent with practice of adult and community education and with the needs of the interviewees, critical commentators with experience in all sorts of levels in the field. Thus, the chapter will look at feminist research, applying the principles of the emancipatory underpinning of feminist research to critical adult and community education. By adopting a feminist approach, my intention will not just to assess gender implications: in this chapter, I will discuss the potential of feminist research to illuminate other areas of structural inequality. In this chapter, I will consider what feminist research means, reviewing key contributors of this past thirty years or so. However, as the field of critical adult and community education is lacking a substantial knowledge base, it was appropriate to aspire to generating theory from this research, and to this end, I will draw on grounded theory to help build this base. Moreover, the chapter will contextualize the study, by looking at the microscopic and macroscopic implications of the research topic, which holds the personal and the social simultaneously. Finally, the chapter will consider the dimensions of narrative research methodologies, with the

intention of situating the research in the experiential nature of adult and community education. It appeared to me to be the key way of remaining faithful to the field, while adopting the method that could facilitate the interviewees in reflecting on their own life experience. Further, the narrative approach, focused on life story, facilitated the single, reflective voice of the interviewee, while I, the researcher, listened to the life story, on one level, but also sought social trends on another level. In this way, the research will uncover the intersection of the personal and the political, the site of critical adult and community education.

The next part of this chapter will look at some of the debates in feminist research, and continued with the micro/macro contextualization, before looking more closely at grounded theory and life history research.

### ***Feminist Research***

In her reflections thirty years on from her ground-breaking work in the mid-seventies, Oakley (2005: 207-209) pondered on the social sciences, feminism and the methodological dilemmas. She articulated the kind of issues that I faced when embarking on this research, in critical adult education. Firstly, she identified masculinism, the orientation within sociology which is highly resistant to change, the stance identified by Stanley and Wise (1993) as patriarchal values. Masculinism and patriarchal values were also strongly evident in critical pedagogy, and to some degree, in adult and community education in Ireland, but, unlike sociology, adult and community education was often at the forefront of change. In this research, I aimed to integrate the feminist perspectives, as Oakley (2005: 207) contended that, due to the masculinist stance, sociology's response to

feminism is stuck at the stage of the recognition of the fallacies and gaps, without progressing to full integration of gender analysis. This parallels adult and community education, where, in spite of the predominance of women at all levels, as participants, tutors and coordinators, together with more generalized emancipatory ideals, gender remains highly contentious. Oakley (2005: 208) argued that this is due to the over-attachment to theory. However, as adult and community education was under-theorised, I considered that it might be an easier task to ensure feminist perspectives were integrated in the research. That is, by connecting with the real-life experience of the research cohort, I aimed to contribute to critical pedagogy with integrated feminist insights, but also to contribute to feminist thinking, *per se*, on feminist pedagogy and the engagement with the causes of oppression.

Oakley (2005: 209), in her discussion on the methodological wars, that of qualitative versus quantitative research, refers to her own critical research, both qualitative and quantitative. This is particularly pertinent for me, as I had opted for qualitative methods without really considering the implications for research, in general, and for my own topic. She argued that feminist research contributed to the problematisation of quantitative research, but that quantitative research still had a vital place in research in the social sciences, in order to influence social policy, and to change society. This argument is compelling. It is not enough to describe and analyze social trends, it was also vital to change society. Oakley (2005: 246) spoke about how her own research into housework in the 1970s, when she researched the nature of housework and women's work and the role that it played in society, transformed her into a feminist. I hoped that the research cohort would reflect on their own ideals as a result of this research, as I gathered their stories for the study. Oakley stresses the need to choose methods appropriate for the research

question, methods that will be sensitive to power relations and for the ethical conduct of research (pp. 249-250). On reflection, I opted for qualitative methods, as I consider that it was more congruent with the field of adult and community education: generally small scale groups, in a relaxed, informal setting. However, I also saw the need for more quantitative research in this field, as it needs to take its place in social policy, in order to fulfil its agenda, not only the lifelong learning agenda, for employment and competitiveness, but also for critical democracy and active citizenship.

As a feminist, my research aimed to address gender oppression. But more than that, my feminist stance was towards creating a better world, not only for women, but also for all oppressed groups. Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (2003: 437) asked 'How can we change and improve the social world so as to make it a more just place for women and for all people?' and they contended that this was the key question for feminists, and connecting with Marxism, neo-Marxism, and critical social theory developed by racial and ethnic minorities and in post-colonial societies in order to transform the status quo of power and control. Further, just as the masculinist tendency in critical pedagogy was discussed in the literature review and I asserted that it was vital to integrate feminist pedagogies in order to overcome that masculinist stance, so also in research. Feminist research was the route to ensuring the diversity of voice for a more integrated picture of those involved in critical adult and community education.

The second consideration was that of over-reliance on theory. This was addressed by the influence of the grounded theory approach. There were two distinct knowledge fields in this research question, that of critical pedagogy and adult and community education. The literature on critical pedagogy is positioned in mainstream education, with very little

reference to adult and community education. In addition, the literature on adult and community education, in Ireland was quite sparse. This was not a real difficulty, in this research, but, in order to take its place as an equal in the education arena, I considered that it was important for this sector to have a distinct knowledge base, drawn from the practice, which provided a solid foundation for the field in Ireland.

Finally, in regards to the question of appropriate methods for the research topic, I was drawn more to the qualitative paradigm. I looked at appropriate qualitative approaches, congruent with a fluid, empowering process that underpins adult and community education. I considered the aspects of grounded theory were congruent with the overall approach, connecting with qualitative feminist research. Further, life experience and experiential learning were very important in adult and community education, and I wished to maintain this congruence in the research methodology, by adopting biographical, life story research methodologies.

The next section began with a discussion on what it meant to me to be a feminist researcher. It continued with an overview of feminist research and a rationale for the methods I considered most suitable for my research topic of critical pedagogy in adult and community education.

### ***Researching as a Feminist***

Stanley and Wise (1979, 1983a, 1983b, cited in Stanley, 1990: 12) argued that feminist research was not one single method, nor even broad category, for example, qualitative rather than quantitative. They asserted that the feminist researcher ought to locate herself



within the activities of her research, as an essential feature of what is 'feminist' about it. As a feminist researcher, aiming for an authentic reflection on the topic of critical pedagogy in adult and community education, I wanted to ensure that the research project maintained the feminist credentials, as an overall emancipatory approach. That is, what is feminist about this project was that personal and social transformation must address gender, in addition to class, race and ethnicity. Byrne and Lentin (2000: 2-4) pondered on the identities of feminist researchers. On the one hand, feminist researchers were committed to political change, while also aiming for credible, authentic, ethical social research. On the other hand, academic feminist researchers were located in their elite institutions, bound by conventional perspectives about the production of knowledge, removed from real-life transformative politics. But mostly, they questioned the notion of a unified feminist position across race, ethnicity, etc. They asked: 'Should feminists, having protested male academics and political orthodoxies that have excluded women for centuries, establish a new 'feminist' orthodoxy?' They argued strongly against a new orthodoxy, resisting the imperative to say what feminist research *was*, and opting rather to say that it *included* certain elements. They maintained feminist research should stress gender as a basic theoretical concept; it should seek the deconstruction of power relationships between the researchers and the researched; it must have a political commitment to the emancipation of women; and, finally, it ought to privilege models of research which promotes participation, representation, interpretation, and reflexivity.

These elements were vitally important to me, as a feminist researcher. However, it was not just feminist researchers who challenged traditional assumptions about research.

Walford (2001: 2) maintained that it is misleading to claim that it is possible to conduct a careful, systematic research process. The thrust of manuals in research methods persisted

in the emphasis on objectivity and distance from the research topic on the part of the researcher. He contended that many social science and educational research methods textbooks continued to abstract the researcher in the same way as have natural science textbooks. That is, that the researcher was the outsider, the observer, separate from the topic. Again, these views have changed over the years, particularly in educational research where the insider perspectives were accepted and promoted.

I considered that objectivity implied impartiality, in addition to other attributes, such as scientific and impersonal, but objectivity has been highly contested, not least by feminism, as I discussed in Chapter Three. In this context, I located myself as an insider, and participant in my research topic, congruent with the research agenda I addressed which was about social transformation, and, as such, I was committed to political emancipatory change. Even though I work in an academic institution, my academic practice stemmed from what I learned in community education, and constantly challenged conventional academic practice. I maintained close links with community education, frequently facilitating or participating in groups. In the community education practice, a basic understanding or requirement for the group was the notion of equality, and I wanted to bring this into my researcher role. Indeed, it would be totally at odds with the research cohort to revert to an old hierarchical researcher/researched relationship.

However, conventional academic practice established the principles that are accepted to ensure rigour and credibility, but challenging these conventions left the way open to undermining the research. However, I considered that the literature and the status of the interviewees established the foundations for the validity of the research. The findings were capable of being generalised, as they provided insight into the practice of

experienced critical adult educators, either directly, as practitioners, or as a learner. Concern with the validity and generalisability were congruent with feminist research methodologies. Indeed, Bryne and Lentin's (2000: 4). motivation was to create awareness of how comprehensive feminist research methodologies were, and should perhaps be the mainstay of social science research agenda, rather than an add-on. Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (2003: 436-437) concurred that feminist research was overtly committed to seeking social justice and to confronting injustice. Feminist theory derived from the work of a multicultural, interdisciplinary, international community that included an entire gamut of researchers, thinkers and practitioners from creative writers, to academics, to political activists. Byrne and Lentin (2004: 4-5) argued that epistemology and methodology were difficult to separate in any research enterprise, but that paying attention to feminist epistemology invited reflection about *how we know what we know*, and was part of the basis for developing principles for guiding research, while methodology was the medium through which we transform these principles into practice. Feminist theory emanated from research that facilitated reflexivity about how we know what we know, as Byrne and Lentin (2004) said, but also reflexivity on the *scope* of what we know. That is, feminist research created knowledge about gender, but, crucially, also about the nature of society. As a feminist researcher, I wanted to ensure that my research was valid, credible, and that it would contribute to thinking about the emancipatory capacity of adult and community education, as well as adding to the research repertoire in the field. That is, that research in adult and community education would *always* take gender into account when it looked at inequality and exclusion and that it would help to develop the sector such that is always committed to emancipation.

This discussion on feminist researching outlined the scope of feminist research methodologies, showing that the key consideration was that it addressed gender as a basic requirement, and that it questioned the power relationships, in the topic, the researcher/researched transactions, and that it was committed to emancipation. It did not narrow the range of approaches, opting rather for the method to be congruent with the topic. Critical adult and community education sided with feminism in that the perspective that it was possible to bring about social as well as personal change. It positioned itself within the feminist paradigm of the personal being political, and while it practiced within the small-scale human interaction of the learning environment, it simultaneously located the practice on the foundation of the thoughtful reflection on the nature of society. This foundation necessarily accommodated a series of dimensions: objectivity and subjectivity; the macro-social and micro-social; and structure and agency (see Chapter Three). Adult and community education had a lot to borrow from feminist researching, as it developed its own methodologies. Mason (2002) urged researchers to be aware of their own beliefs and attitudes when undertaking research. I located myself as a feminist open to the relativity of social construction and reality. My research approach centred on methods that enabled and allowed people to develop their own voices and be recognised as experts in their own experience. Mostly of all, I wanted to privilege ordinary lived lives, undertaken with the approach that was characterised by a fluid, person-centred mode.

### ***Quantitative and Qualitative Paradigms***

The paradigms within research were areas of complex interactions with the person, the wider social context and the purposes for the research. The paradigm debates in the social

sciences centred, in the main, on the pros and cons of quantitative and qualitative research methods, and how these methods serve to illuminate the human condition. Kane and O'Reilly-de Brún (2000: 12-20) provided a useful outline of the dimensions of the paradigms, identifying four broad categories: positivism, post-positivism, phenomenology, and critical theory. They contended that positivism had been the model of research for about 300 years, based on the idea that the only knowledge that counted was observable, objective, hard facts. Further, it was based on the belief that the world is stable, predictable, consistent and orderly. In response to the undermining of this belief in more recent years, a post-positivistic paradigm emerged, which focused on the researcher, with all-too-human frailties, such as bias and values. Post-positivism still aimed for objectivity, but employed a very wide range of methods that can overcome the inherent weaknesses in positivism.

They continued the consideration of the other two paradigms, phenomenology and critical theory, which were more embedded in the human construction of the world, rather than the orderly, predictable world of positivism. Phenomenology contended that facts did not provide meaning and understanding, which was contingent on multiple realities.

Phenomenology was holistic, and naturalistic. Finally, critical theory was the overtly ideological enquiry, and shared the view that there is a reality 'out there', but asks: 'whose reality are we talking about?' Each of these paradigms had implications for the researchers, and social science required that researchers think about where they are coming from when they begin their projects, in order develop thinking about both the product and creator of meaning.

Oakley's (2005: 248-250) feminist researching was premised on the claim that method was harnessed to the service of the social problem itself, not that the social problem was to be harnessed to the method. She went on to argue that quantitative research was necessary to distinguish between personal experience and collective oppression. She asserted that large-scale, comparative data were the clearest and most compelling way to determine to what extent the situation of women, and how women were structurally differentiated. Further, she discussed the credibility of quantitative research in comparison to qualitative research. She found that qualitative research must go to great lengths to establish its credibility, but it did not establish its credibility to the same rigorous standards as quantitative methods. However, she understood that qualitative methods did have their place, but she strongly contended that researchers ought to select the method suitable to the research question, rather than the unqualified allegiance to any one paradigm. Finally, she argued that the tendency to ally feminist research with qualitative methods only, risked the distraction from the nub: what are research methods for? And she contended that all methods must be open, consistently applied and replicable by others.

This made a compelling argument for maintaining a wider vision and for openness. This was consistent with the underpinning philosophy of adult and community education, and it guarded against the tendency to become fixed on any one position. My research on the potential for personal and social transformation of critical pedagogy was exploratory. It was contingent on the research cohort reflecting on their experience and how their experience is carried through in their practice. In addition, the boundary around the set of critical adult and community facilitators was not fixed or impermeable. Thus, it would be very difficult to measure them, or to get a representative random sample, no matter how

useful that would be ultimately. I considered that qualitative methods would be more suitable to collect the reflections and descriptions from the interviewees, which enabled them to think about their experiences. Adult and community education encouraged people to raise their consciousness on their experience, to connect with the collective. This overcame Oakley's (2005) problem that personal experience may not connect with the collectivity of group or class. As I discussed in Chapter Three, critical consciousness enabled people to analyze their experience with reference to structural inequality. With regards to methodology, the approach I adopted was designed to engage with the interviewees, and I actively sought to connect with them

The next section explored this in more detail, leading into the discussion on reflexive approaches to critical research.

### ***Critical Consciousness and Reflexivity in Research***

Bourdieu (1984: 468) developed the concept 'habitus', as an invaluable lens in which to look at the mental or cognitive structures through which people deal with the social world, that is, 'internalised, embodied social structures' (*cf.* Foucault, 1994). With consciousness of both macro and micro aspects of society and agency and structure, we could overcome the implicit determinism of powerful social institutions, but simultaneously we could recognise the extent of individual power. One way of overcoming the implicit determinism of the powerful social forces was through reflexivity.

This echoed the position of Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000: 1) when they introduced reflexivity as an essential dimension of new approaches to and possibilities for qualitative research:

Traditionally research has been conceived as the creation of true, objective knowledge, following a scientific method.

Firstly, they rejected the objectivity of positivism, and proposed a post-positivistic stance. And they promoted reflexivity as a means to meaningful interpretation of the data, which necessarily problematized the researchers' assumptions, and provided an instrument to review those assumptions. Denscombe (2003:96) discussed the role of phenomenology, which emphasised subjectivity and agency, in contrast to objectivity and structure, and description and interpretation, rather than analysis and measurement. Walford, (1991: 5) contended that reflexivity was essential in the position of the researcher as part of the research. Further, critical consciousness implied the commitment to social justice, and Kemmis (1993) held that this commitment to justice, democracy and equality required a methodology to address the social justice agenda. He made the case for action research as a form of political action and emancipatory work. I did not opt for an action-research-only model as I wanted to engage with a method that emerged from feminist practice. However, Denscombe, (2003: 73-74) explored the utility of the cyclical elements of action research, and its commitment to change, which I found persuasive. However, Walford, (2001: 109-110) held that action research may refer only to the micro-level of the classroom; it may not be transferable to the wider arena of education in society I want to illuminate practice, but with the explicit aim of addressing adult and community education, in contrast to improving methods used in the adult education learning



environment. In some ways this is solved by praxis, and Kemmis (1993) proposed this, whereby practitioners carry out research into their own practice. As I already maintained, praxis was the key element in the practice of adult and community education, and, while Kemmis(1993: 177) used the concept of praxis in a slightly different way to Freire (1972), but with much overlap – practice underpinned by the cycle of action and reflection. As I said before, Gramsci (1971: 334 - 336) shaped the praxis which united theory and practice, such that theory did not preside over practice, nor did practice gain a foothold over theory. Thus, in the discussion on reflection and critical consciousness in research, praxis played the part of developing reflection out of research, to be applied in the practice in the classroom. This research operated at the level of enquiring about the practice, and to deduce and infer at the theoretical levels. This suggested some of the elements of grounded theory. This privileged the practice of adult and community education, and laid the foundations for a more substantial knowledge base in this field.

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, it was vital to select methods that were congruent with the research area. Hughes, (2002: 9) asserted that research design needed to take into account the conceptual framework of the study. In this research, this meant that the methodology coped with structural inequality; that it aimed for deep data possible in qualitative methods; and that it coped with the complexities of experience and reflection in the voices of the interviewees. In adult and community education, experience is central to the politics of adult and community education, just as it is central to feminist politics.

The next section will consider the positioning of the life history approach, examining the part that reflexivity plays in helping people to engage with their own experience. Then, the section will connect this reflexive narrative approach with some basic tenets of

grounded theory. I will discuss how a grounded theory approach can develop theory from life histories, again, congruent with the topic that has just a strong grounding in practice.

### ***Life History Research***

The congruence of the research with the field of adult and community education called for a way of engaging with the interviewees' lives, in order to access their formative experiences, to establish their motivations for the work for social transformation.

Biography seemed to me to be an obvious route to go. Roberts, (2002: 33-47) traced the journey of biographical approaches to methodologies. Life history research had a circuitous route from the Chicago school, through the interest in oral history and including feminist research Roberts discussed how life history research connected the individual lives to the wider social structures that shape those lives. Further, he asserted the reliability and validity of this approach in terms of authenticity and plausibility, rather than in terms of measurement and testing.

Roberts (2002: 3) expanded that life history research was taken to refer to the collection and interpretation of a 'life'. In this research, I wanted to collect the stories of the critical educationalists, and engage with those stories in order to gain insight into the critical outlooks and perspectives on social life. Goodson and Sikes (2001: 7) held that life stories had the capacity to disrupt the assumptions about knowledge, that is, what is 'known', by intellectuals in general. Further, life stories forced the confrontation with others' subjective perspectives. This was very attractive for me in this research, to confront canonical knowledge, with direct experience, on the one hand, and to re-position practitioners as intellectuals, as creators of knowledge, grounded in their reflections.

Goodson and Sikes (2001: 27-28) continued with their case for life story research, in their contention that the interviews conducted for this research methodology, were grounded conversations, grounded in the experience in and outside the classroom.

Andrews (2008: 12) added to the meaningfulness of the grounded conversations of others, in her assertion that narrative approaches in research methodologies were capable of the multi-level dimensions, and connected life stories with the micro-political and micro-social effects; they infused the past events with the dimensions that educationalist needed to connect with. Clandinin and Connelly, (2000) considered that narrative approaches were capable of capturing depth and richness, particularly when applied to life events. As such, life history was congruent with adult and community education practice, as it began with the experience of the interviewees, as far as possible, and enabled them to make sense of their experience.

### ***Grounded theory***

Before I came into adult education, I did not realise that this was a valid route for bringing about profound change. I imagined it as an innocuous way of passing time, while learning something new, perhaps. In adult education, I realised that there was a whole new world of practitioners and students, many of them inspired by the possibility of social change. As a critical educator within a community of practitioners, I recognised that not all critical educators came to their critical practice through feminism, but through other routes, depending on their circumstances. I felt that this (hi)story of how people became critical educators could help to make a knowledge base that could underpin the practice and illuminate the future practice in Ireland.

Robson (2002: 191) held that grounded theory was useful when pre-existing theories were hard to come by. He made the case for generating theory out of data, in the process of carrying out research. On the issues in the adult and community education in Ireland was that there was not much time or resources devoted to theorising. Thus, Glaser and Strauss (1967: 249) held that grounded theory is applicable *in* situations as well as *to* them')

Glaser and Strauss, (1967: 237) asserted that rounded theory enables the generation of theory with at least four characteristics: it fits the topic or areas of study; it is understandable, and therefore 'really useful' for the sector, especially those without higher education. It is general enough to illuminate the areas, and it provides partial control over the structures and processes as they change through time. Strauss and Corbin (1990: 9), when they shaped their models of grounded theory asserted:

Formulating theoretical interpretation of data grounded in reality provides a powerful means, both for understanding the world 'out there', and for developing action strategies what will allow for some measure of control over it.

To generate knowledge is to take a lot of power, and this is a fundamental element of adult and community education. Strauss and Corbin (1990: 23 - 29) explained that grounded theory inductively revived theory from the study of phenomena. That is, theory was uncovered and discovered and developed by systematically collecting and analysing data. Therefore the data collection, analysis and theory stood in reciprocal relationship with one another. Ultimately, the purpose of grounded theory was to build theory that

was faithful to the area of study, and to illuminate these areas for intellectual engagement. Further, theory used concepts, and concepts were related to statements of relationships, which were very important for adult and community education. However, they continued, (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 190-191), the nature of the knowledge is 'not to generalise, but to specify', but to look at each instance of information, and seek significant absences or presences, and analyse the reasons for them, Thus, in the topic of adult and community education in Ireland, grounded theory appealed to me in terms of the congruence with the field, but also in terms of the need, as I saw it, for more theorising, too. However, as Burgess *et al*, (2006: 47-48) suggested, it may not be necessary to adopt the full process of grounded theory methodology, on the basis that grounded theory needed a lot of practice to fully appreciate it, but it was still possible to derive the benefits of it, without the full process.

Real world research (Robson, 2002) made a very powerful case for this validity of knowledge garnered from ordinary life, locating the creation on knowledge in the grasp of ordinary people. It is grounded in the lived experiences of ordinary people, and it was possible to derive the abstract dimensions of politics and ideology, by theorising from within, as well as reflecting in hindsight. Robson (2002: 535) also defended the advantages of practitioner research, focused on the areas that I felt inadequate about: the advantage of 'insider' knowledge and the advantage of 'practitioner' knowledge, and the synergy between them. He also drew attention to the disadvantage of being an 'insider', and the preconceptions about issues which was a hazard for me, as I needed to ensure that I did not simply confirm my own views in the research. Thus, real world research was attractive in terms of the parameters in which I wanted to conduct the research.

This is again consistent with the view that the process should be empowering, that people involved, both the research cohort and myself, are inextricable in our relationship. Together, we create the knowledge. However, the nature of the knowledge is 'not to generalise, but to specify', but to look at each instance of information, and seek significant absences or presences, and analyse the reasons for them. That is, encompass difference and diversity, but to look for an underlying principle of justice and equality. Grounded theory enables us to look at how change comes about, by examining the 'real life' situation that interests us

### ***Towards an Integrated Research Methodology***

In previous feminist research, which I undertook in Equality Studies, Weiner (1998: 59) emerged for me as an educator and researcher who had integrated feminism and research. Even in 1994, when she forged this link in women's studies, she alerted us that feminist research ideas had been appropriated by the model of teacher-as-researcher, but without the due regard to gender equality. She further stressed the value-laden component of research, which must be transparent.

In rejecting the possibility of value-free research, feminists instead assert the commitment to changing the position of women, and therefore society

This tied in with Thompson's (1996: 21). work, which the commitment to changing society was inextricably linked to the women's movement and to generating 'really useful knowledge' for politicisation, the key objective of adult and community education:

Deriving theory from experience and in turn relating it to practice is far from being a crude mechanical or behaviourist approach. It allows for the exploration of 'meaning' and of how people make sense of their lived experiences

Oakley (2000: 47) expanded on this.

... The methods of 'qualitative' research – interviews, observations, focus groups, life histories – are notable for the closeness they require between the researcher and the researched. ... Many of the reasons for preferring a 'qualitative' approach centred on in-depth interviews are the obverse of the objections which feminist critiques have levelled against 'quantitative' methods: the advantages of 'connected' as distinct from separated' knowing, dissolution of the artificial boundaries between knower and known, the opportunity to ground knowledge in the concrete social contexts and experiences.

Oakley's perspective was helpful in uncovering my own approach. The personal history was crucial to the social understanding, and being an insider in the research process, it is vital to rely on the experiences of other feminist researchers in order to ensure the validity of the endeavour. Thus, from the feminist perspectives, I acquire reassurances about the place of drawing theory from experience, and grounding knowledge in the social milieu. But research methodology needs to look not only at the objectives of research; it also needs to look at the outcomes. The main outcome of my entire research process is to create a knowledgeable, reflexive perspective that will contribute to the field of adult and community education, with due attention to social justice that will be consistent with the philosophy and practice of adult and community education; and which will enhance the

social role of the researcher in the field. To this end, conducting interviews that will, hopefully, generate meaningful knowledge must be underpinned by an understanding of the dynamics that occurs in social interaction. While the narrative is the interviewees' stories, it is the case that they are speaking to me, and that my position is transparent. Bell (1999) has just recently become interested in the use and interpretation of stories of experience, and defers to colleagues in making the case for the validity of the approach for education and social science. She quotes Dr Janette Gray, (Gray, 1998: 1, cited in Bell, 1999: 17).a member of a group which developed the narrative enquiry approach:

‘Narratives allow voice – to the researcher, the participants, and to cultural groups – and in this sense they have the ability to develop a decidedly political and powerful edge’

Voices always were, and are increasingly important in adult and community education. By listening to the voices of reflexive practitioners, I discovered a source of knowledge that is, as Gray, and by implication, Bell, (1999: 17) said, it was the route to develop the political edge

Mason (2002: 68) maintained that the focus on lived experience, rather than hypothetical scenarios, or abstract concepts, necessitate a great deal of prior thinking and attention to expectations and an understanding of the contexts of the stories. Middleton, (1993) provides a model for the life history approach in her own learning journey as a feminist educator. I found this very reassuring, as I was uncertain about myself as a researcher researching my own experience. Walford (2001: 99). took this even further; not just desiring to research the questions set by others, but to set the agenda himself, based on



his own experience. He had been in the position to select his own research topics, and his thinking, based on his background in sociology drove him to 'make questions' that are critical of the status quo

Further, as Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) maintained, I needed to challenge my own perspectives. I will start with my own story in order to begin the process of challenge, by setting it down and analysing it in the same way as the other stories. I am embedded in adult and community education, and the life history approach will contextual my story with the other stories, subjecting it to a 'radical looking', that is as Clough and Nutbrown, held, (2002: 44).

What we mean by radical looking is exploration beyond the familiar and the (personally) known, to the roots of a situation: for this is exploration which makes the familiar strange

## ***Conclusion***

Etherington (2004: 25)

By allowing ourselves to be known and seen by others, we open up the possibility of learning more about our topic and ourselves, and in greater depth

My aspiration in carrying out this research was to learn more about my field, and myself as a practitioner and to find new aspects of this very familiar terrain. As Goodson and Sikes (2001) held, learning from my peers' lives was a rich ground for this. This

enhanced my reflexivity and capacity for self-awareness, but I hoped that it would also enhance the interaction between me as researcher and the cohort, and the data resulting from it. This chapter looked at research methodology in feminist research, grounded theory and real world research. It discussed the congruence with adult and community education. This chapter laid the foundation for a praxis-orientated process, resulting in raised consciousness on the crucial issues facing adult and community education, and politicised practice, modelled on feminist social transformation. The methodology chapter led into the discussion on methods, and the story of the actual research, which I dealt with in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Research Methods**

#### ***Introduction***

This chapter will recount the process I adopted for my data collection. I will discuss my positioning as a researcher, *vis-à-vis* my research interests and the fact that as a practitioner I am therefore embedded in the field. It will review the implications of the elements of the conceptual framework for the type of data that was gathered. The type of data entailed a set of decisions about who I wished to interview, and what kind of areas in which the interviewees were experts. This meant that I had to decide on the different areas I needed to investigate. For example, many experts in the adult education world are not currently practitioners at the time of the research. Some had been practitioners in the past, but some had not. However, all of the interviewees were in the position to reflect on critical pedagogy in adult and community education, due to their knowledge of the field, arising from their work in pivotal areas of the field. In addition, the conceptual framework for this research, connecting social transformation, underpinned with social justice, feminist thinking and human and civil rights, with critical pedagogy and praxis, provides the matrix for the selection of the interviewees, the research methodology and methods, and the process of carrying out the research. I will discuss this fully in this chapter.

In the previous chapter on methodology, I looked at the issues that arise from my positioning as an ‘insider’ researcher, not only in the sense I was looking at a limited field, one I was immersed for so many years, but also that know most people in this field,

either directly or indirectly. Taking up from there, I will look at the research design appropriate for the study and the process involved in conducting this research.

## ***Research Design***

When I set out to on this research journey, I wanted to deepen my understanding of critical pedagogy in adult and community education. The theoretical gap in the knowledge centred on the motivations of people committed to critical adult education, and the process of critical pedagogy. The world of adult education in Ireland is quite small, and it was a straightforward matter to get to know the people involved, through networks, publications, associations, and so on. As a practitioner for over twenty years, many people in this world knew my work, and had reason to trust in my honesty, integrity and commitment. This immediately raised the question of the reliability of the research. I asked myself if I could ensure that the finding were valid and generalisable. As a reflective practitioner, I constantly checked this. I reflected on my practice with students, of course, but in addition, as a public practitioner, I place my ideas out into the public domain, through publications, conferences and so on. I did not have hidden dimension or covert agenda. This honesty ensures my integrity and commitment.

Flick (2006: 44-51) provided a clear set of ethical parameters for research. The ethical issues that arose in relation to this research included fully informed consent, open and transparent data collection, ensuring that no one was harmed, including their reputation; doing justice to the data; and ensuring confidentiality; and ensuring that their dignity and rights were respected.

With regards to informed consent, all the interviewees were aware of the purpose of the research, as I explained it before we made the appointments. Further, they were able to comment after the interview, when I asked them what they felt or thought about the process. As adults, they were neither vulnerable nor powerless, as children might be. I did not have power over any of them, as we were all peers. Finally, as peers and co-workers in the field, they knew what consent entailed and were able to consent freely and without constraints that may have arisen if there were unequal power relations.

The next point was open and transparent data collection. I asked each participant if it was acceptable to tape the interviewees, and they agreed. I also said they could turn off the tape if they wanted, in any particular discussion. This did not happen in any interview. The tapes were available afterwards. Some of the tapes were transcribed, and the transcriptions were kept with the entire thesis, electronically. As part of the interviews, about formative experience, was sensitive, I assured them that this material would be kept safely, while the other part, on critical practice, was reflective of their views which were in the public domain, in any event.

Ensuring that no one was harmed, including their reputation, was the next ethical point. Again, the interviews collected data that was sensitive, but I would not use any piece of data that would identify a person with any damaging item, if the case arose. As their reputations preceded them, when I identified them from their public personas, I was watchful for any issue that could be seen as difficult. In the event, no such issue arose.

Flick (2006) identified the issue of doing justice to the data. I certainly tried to, as I considered it enriching and insightful. I endeavoured to honour the spirit of the

participation in the research, and felt that, overall, I did the best I could. This brought the discussion on ethics to confidentiality.

I used alternative names for each interviewee, and separated distinguishing facts from the stories. That is, when a fact about an interviewee was in the public domain, I kept that away from their particular stories, such that they could not be associated with it.

Finally, the last point of ensuring that their dignity and rights were respected was part of the overall approach in adult and community education, and was part of the way that I work every day. This was vitally important to me, and I would consider it a huge failing on my part, if I did not respect their dignity and rights.

Thus, with regards to the ethical considerations of this research, I endeavoured with ensure that the research was carried out with the highest standards, and that the outcomes were evidently ethical and principled. As an 'insider' researcher, I was open about my own story in adult and community education, in the same spirit of openness, transparency, on the one hand, but also protecting privacy of the interviewees. Moreover, I wanted to collect stories from people I did not know well, in addition to those I knew very well. Therefore, the data collection involved a mixture of interrelationships, including interviewing colleagues, former colleagues and former students, in addition to people I got to know through their work. The mix includes a mix of power relations. Regarding the ethical issues that arise from the interrelationships I had with the interviewees, I was confident that any issue of abuse of power on my part is subject to scrutiny by the part of the interviewees, and I constantly reflected on the possibility to safeguard against it.

The next issue was that of validity and reliability.

Burgess *et al* (2006:62) asserted that validity and reliability in research can be addressed through honesty, depth and richness, as powerful concepts to be considered, and I paid a lot of attention to in the research methods. In the main, though, this process was collaborative (Burgess *et al*, 2006: 37). As my intention was to deepen my understanding about critical pedagogy in adult and community education, I considered that I was learning from the interviewees, as they were reflecting on their own lives and experience. I deeply appreciated this engagement. The key power relationship in adult and community education was that of empowerment, whereby adult educators created and maintained democratic processes, promoting the power of the participants. That is, adult educators necessarily questioned the traditional power attributed to the authority of the educator, and relinquish it in their practice.

Concerning reliability and validity, Burgess *et al* (2006:62) reminded us, if we opted for qualitative research, to be mindful of data that could not be scientifically measured and tested. Critical pedagogy in the context of work with adults overcomes any questions that may arise about the reliability of data coming from younger students or practitioners. Focusing on adults endeavoured to ensure that the research findings had a validity underpinned by the mature reflections of the research cohort, rather than the risk that the validity be undermined due to immature years on the part of the interviewees.

Thus, emanating from this, the design for the research encompassed a life story research method, whereby the interviewees spoke about the formative experiences in their lives that have shaped their critical consciousness. The process was similar to an adult learning

environment, whereby I created an informal atmosphere, sometimes sharing a meal or coffee with the interviewees, and enabling dialogue in the course of the interviewees.

### ***Sampling***

The world of critical adult and community education was quite small community, and most people know others. In order to gather a wide spectrum of opinion on the field, this entailed that some of the interviewees were not practitioners, but I decided that the scope of the research cohort had to include people who, while expert on critical adult and community education, were not currently practitioners, a decision that includes learners, policy workers and consultants, in addition to practitioners. Finally, on the point of sampling, the potential participants fulfilled dual or triple roles in these areas. For example, one of the colleagues was a key consultant to the Irish Government, when the White Paper when it produced the White Paper (Ireland, 2000), in addition to her work as a face-to-face practitioner, and the first Professor of Adult and Community Education in the Republic of Ireland. Thus, in terms of the Burgess *et al* (2006: 69) thinking, this is *probability* sampling, which allows that the data collected is generalisable to the wider group of critical adult and community education workers. Thus, of the fifteen interviewees, I looked for people who straddled community development and adult education. I wanted to get the stories of people in the formal sectors, particularly in my own area, colleagues who straddled the academic and the adult education worlds. I wanted to gather the stories of a wide age range, which spanned from the thirties to the sixties, with various levels of experience between them. I also sought both men and women, with nine women and six men contributing. The interviewees were from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, but all currently working in the Republic. In addition to their current work, many of the interviewees had long experience in other



areas. For example, one person who now heads a national organisation was a literacy tutor earlier in her career. Others include two interviewees who started as adult learners in daytime adult education, and went on to establish what became known as the women's community education movement in the early nineteen eighties. Two interviewees were practitioners in the non-formal arena, in community education, one in community drama and the other in basic return-to-learning community education. Two newcomer adult educators, whose experience is mainly as adult learners complete the research cohort.

As I recounted earlier, the fifteen interviewees were drawn from all aspects of adult and community education, from the education of adult educators, to policy formation, from long standing adult educators to more recent newcomers. One of the key interesting aspects of these interviewees was that none started their working lives as adult educators, and, as I said in Chapter One, their occupations spanned a range of work from unpaid, to higher status professions like teaching. They also came from working class and middle class backgrounds, but their current work brought them into a more professional class. The Northern Ireland interviewees were Catholic and that had a direct bearing on their life stories. In the Republic, the subject of religion was background to the general oppressiveness in Irish society, especially around feminist issues. While Northern Irish politics were complex and multi-faceted, and the full story is outside the scope of this research, the stories of the NI interviewees reflected their experience. As members of the minority religion, they were very aware of oppression and the ways in which their society was structured to their disadvantage. The implications of this status came out in the data, and were engaged with in the discussion.

At the time of the data collection, they worked in various facets of the broad field, including higher education, adult education, community education, community building, national agencies and statutory agencies. They generally were working at the social justice and democracy end of the spectrum in the field. My criteria for justice and democracy included commitment to human, social and cultural rights. All the potential candidates had explicitly expressed critical opinions, and their areas of work demonstrate this commitment. For example, the National Women's Council of Ireland is committed to equality for women, and one of my interviewees works there, having established her credentials in years of work with marginal communities. Thus, in the selection of possible candidates, I looked for overt evidence of critical work, in addition to their expression of commitment.

I invited them to participate from the time I started on the course, and conducted the pilot study in the early stages. I asked these particular people because I knew them from their reputations, as all of them were public about their critical motivations. These public declarations included articles in Irish and international adult education journals and newssheets; chapters in books; books; speeches at conferences and seminars, etc; membership of or employment in critical organisations; and social networks that were characterised by critical thinking, such as interests groups and so on. That is, they had proclaimed their critical positionings in public fora.

Further, I looked for possible interviewees in all aspects of adult and community education. Foremost were those who had direct experience as critical adult educators. When I reviewed this, I understood that I needed to have input from people who have direct experience as learners. They were in the position to add weight to the findings.

They were able to identify critical pedagogy from the receiving end. So, I added adult learners to the mix. As I introduce the interviewees, some of them fulfil two or three categories in adult education. For example, two policy workers were also critical educators. The head of one national organisation was an adult learner in my university, but was not in my department.

It was important to reiterate that none of the interviewees were in a subordinate role to me, at the time of the research. Three had been students of mine, a number of years ago, but at the time of the research, were heading up their own organisations or working at a high rank at national level. I was the student of two others, nearly twenty years ago, but I am in collegial relationships with them now. Three others were students in the same university, but in different departments, and again, one is the head of a national organisation, and two others are professional educators.

As I rehearsed, my research interest lay in the impact of critical adult education in social activism. Therefore, I looked to the national platform to get the perspectives of people with opinions of critical adult education. Three interviewees head up national agencies, showing evidence of their commitment to critical adult education, two as policy makers in adult and community education and related fields

I invited all of the interviewees in face to face meetings, and followed up with those who requested it, with both phone calls and emails. We arranged appointments of about two hours, and I followed up with final reflections at later stages. I stated at the beginning of each interview that if they said anything that, on reflection, they regretted, that I would expunge it. I promised to protect their identities, and to separate their stories from any distinguishing element of their biographies. Thus, I endeavoured to ensure that they were

free to speak openly, about their formative experiences. I considered that these formative experiences added hugely to the richness of the data on critical practice.

While the overall way of collecting data was centred on biographical approaches, the actual process was a form of interview. These interviews were semi-structured, in that I posed an opening question to each interviewee, after the preamble which explained the research again, the research approach, the way they could withdraw any information if they wanted, without question, and ensuring they were comfortable. Each interview was taped on an old-fashioned cassette tape recorder, and I transcribed five of them, for the analysis of the findings. However, I found that I enjoyed listening to the tapes, and considered that they were more interesting to listen to repeatedly, rather than a single transcription. The opening question was:

*What were the formative influences in your life that contributed to your critical perspectives?*

I created the space for them to speak uninterrupted, to tell the story as they saw it themselves. That is, I did not have a series of questions, or prompts prearranged.

When they finished with their stories, I moved on to the next question, again with the preamble of explaining this part of the research, on critical practice. The second question was:

*What do you think are the practices in the learning environment that would bring about social change? In other words, what kind of methods and processes do critical educators use?*

This question required more intervention on my part, with requests for clarifications and examples. However, as the interviewees were prepared for the research, they had thought about the question and were forthcoming about their own practice, and also practice they witnessed or in which they participated.

When they came to the end of their interviews, I enquired if they had any questions, and reminded them that they could come back if they wished to clarify or withdraw any issue. In the event, no one contacted me about any problems.

As I was writing up the research I did check with the interviewees if they were still ok about the process. In the early draft, it was possible to recognise some interviewees, to keep order on the data, but in the final draft, this was changed.

Thus, of the broad range of areas in critical adult education, I endeavoured to capture the voices from the formal and the non-formal sectors; the voices of feminist adult educators; of community education and development practitioners and policy development workers. Having discussed the sampling for the data collection, I now turn to the biographies of the interviewees.

## ***Interviewees***

As I said above, the world of adult education in Ireland is quite small, and most adult educators know of other adult educators or others working in the arena, directly, through meeting at conferences and so on, or indirectly, through their writing or by reputation, such as knowing someone who know them. Thus, when I started thinking about my potential interviewees, I was aware of their commitment to critical adult and community education.

Those voices carried years of experience with them, together with a diverse set of backgrounds. Among the people that I knew directly were some of my colleagues where I work, in the Department of Adult and Community Education, in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. This department was overtly committed to critical education. We expressed this in the curriculum of the programmes we offer, the publications we issued collectively and public events, such as conferences. So, looking at the individuals within the workplace, I selected three of those who expressed their commitment to critical education through their work. They are Jack, Kim and Frances. I will introduce them briefly here.

Jack was one of the first people in Ireland to have a doctorate in adult education, which he earned from a USA university as no academic department in Ireland offered doctorates in the field, in the early nineteen seventies. In his career, he was a county-wide adult education organizer and an adult educator in a variety of adult education institutions. At

the time of the research, he worked in the department. His research interests are in the nature of learning, and the impact of education in addressing social inequalities.

Kim was the first professor of adult education in the Republic of Ireland. She started her working life as a second level teacher, but she quickly moved on to development education, arising from her work Africa as an adult educator and development worker for many years. In the late 1990s, she was the second consultant on the White Paper on adult education, supporting the key consultant, ensuring that the critical dimensions of adult and community were included. She had a small teaching load at the time of the research, as her time as head of department responsibilities take up much of her time, but recently, she has focused on reflective practice and research in adult and community education.

Frances recognized the value of adult education when she worked in a home-school liaison capacity, in her work as a secondary school teacher, over twenty years ago. She initiated a programme of non-formal adult education to assist parents, who themselves had little prior education, to help their children. She realized that she loved working with adults, and started on her own adult education journey, eventually gaining her PhD in feminist adult education. Her subject is research, mainly, though she writes about ethical living and life balance, as well.

These three interviewees are firmly within the formal provision of adult and community education, straddling the academic world and the adult education world, in addition to their areas of expertise and their backgrounds.

In addition to those with whom I work currently, I also looked at past colleagues. Those included two people with whom I worked on a community programme in the early nineteen nineties, and collectively we devised a course for community activists based on the philosophy of Paulo Freire. Both of these men, Aran and Mal, were unemployed in the nineteen eighties, a time of severe unemployment and emigration. Both started working with unemployed centres, community development responses to the devastation of joblessness and poverty. Eventually, in the early nineteen-nineties, I met with them, and we as a team devised a community development education programme, funded by the EU, which we coordinated and taught on in disadvantaged urban and suburban communities around Dublin. Aran brought his experience of working in a trade union funded unemployed centre to the team, particularly the labour movement analysis of unemployment. Mal, on the other hand, accumulated his experience in a community led unemployed centre in a highly disadvantaged city in the west of Ireland. He brought with him the understanding of community-led initiatives, and the role they could play in addressing not just unemployment, but also other social issues that affected the area, particularly housing and estate management. I brought my background in women's studies, ensuring that women's issues were addressed in the programme, and also the women's studies approach to the other social issues that affected that community. The programme reflected these influences, and influenced the subsequent work we became involved in. Mal and Aran straddled the community education and community development world, with this programme.

My next interviewee spans a similar spectrum. Val was the director of a national agency for community development. She had a background in youth work when she came to the organization as a student of community development. She enjoyed the experience and



discovered an aptitude for adult education, and she remained on in the agency as an educator/trainer before attaining the post of director.

National organizations featured in lives of three further interviewees. Pat is the Chief Executive Officer of a national agency for adult and community education. She entered adult education as a primary school teacher, in her role in liaising with the parents of pupils who were experiencing difficulties with their schoolwork. She discovered the literacy difficulties of some of these parents, and she subsequently trained as a literacy tutor in order to become more effective. Ultimately, when she uncovered the extent of adult literacy difficulties, she co-founded one of the first national agencies for adult learners, together with a number of other advocates. This led her into the wider world of adult education. She was highly influential in the consultations following the publications of the Green Paper in adult and community education, especially ensuring that the critical dimensions of adult and community were included.

Kerry is the national coordinator of a national collective, in a field directly related to community education. Her background is in community and youth work, arising from her own experience as an adolescent. However, her travels in South America raised her awareness of women's issues, and, on her return to Ireland, she embarked on her own learning journey, exposing her to critical adult education. Her involvement in women's groups built the experience she required to fulfil the role of national coordinator of the collective. The collective was a recently founded national agency, which emerged out of the recognition that women's groups needed to organize in order to ensure that their views were added into the mix. This was a strong statement, as the National Women's Council of Ireland, NWC, which was established in the mid-seventies, was the accepted

channel for representing women's issues to the national social policy makers. However, women's community groups did not consider that they were adequately represented, and with Kerry at the helm, filled that gap. I considered that Kerry would have considerable experience and insight from her role as coordinator of this collective, and could make a vital contribution to my research.

At the same time, I believed that the National Women's Council of Ireland has changed fundamentally in the past ten years or so. When it was founded in the early seventies, it was middle class, with a high proportion of women's groups from political parties, business, and the professions. It was named the Council for the Status of Women, but the women in community education and development called it The Council for Women with Status, illuminating their exclusion and alienation from it. However, in recent years the leadership has been drawn from community development and adult education, with at least three key posts filled by three women who have been closely associated with women's community education. On this basis, I spoke to Terry, who has responsibility for the campaign development in local communities, for the NWCI, and who was herself an adult learner, when she joined a adult education class in women's studies in the late nineteen eighties (I was the tutor) and had just finished a MA in Equality Studies. She was also a founder member of a women's group in a very disadvantaged suburb of Dublin, and she worked in this sector prior to her current post in NWCI.

Finally, in terms of the national platform that each of these interviewees played an active role, Jamie was the national coordinator of the training and support programme for community education workers in the field. Jamie took up the position as the national coordinator of the training and support in order to ensure that community education

remained vibrant and to support these workers, to support the disadvantaged communities with which they worked. Jamie herself lives in one of these disadvantaged communities, and with Terry, was one of the founder members of a women's group in her area, in the eighties. She has continued with her own education, and has written on women's community education.

The next interviewee is Jill. Jill is from Northern Ireland, and has worked in the Republic for about twenty years. She has worked as a freelance community support worker, evaluator and facilitator. Jill came to my attention when she undertook work on behalf AONTAS to conduct a viability study for a quality assurance framework for women's community education. Her report showed the deep commitment that she has to the critical aspect of women's community education. She was the director of an educational and development programme for young people in a very disadvantaged Dublin community. She applied the principles of critical adult and community education to this position. The next two interviewees also apply critical principles to their work as practitioners, among their other roles. Gus was an actor, director, playwright and founder of a theatre group in the midlands of Ireland. However, as these ventures were not paying propositions, he earned money by facilitating community drama classes, workshops and courses. He based his work on the principles of Boal (2000) who, in turn, is influenced by Freire. Gus used community drama to highlight social injustices and to help students and participants to develop tools and skills to work for change. Petra also demonstrated this same commitment in her work with very disadvantaged women, in a rural town in the midlands of Ireland. Petra has had a very long lead up to her current work, ranging from radical student activism to feminist issues and settling on community education as the key route

to fulfilling all her interests. She studied, wrote and broadcasted on dividends of community education for disadvantaged people.

My final two interviewees are two men who have returned to learning later in life. Mack completed his PhD and Nick is completing it, both in sociology, both researching social justice issues. They were the ones with the most experience as adult learners probably, and have very interesting insights into critical pedagogy, from their direct experience of a variety of teaching environments. Further, I was interested in the ways they have put that experience into practice as critical adult educators. Mack was from Northern Ireland and was an early school leaver. He has had a very long road leading to his study and his more recent venture of just two or three years, as an adult educator. His research was on governance, and the process of involving – or ignoring, as he uncovered in his research – local people in decision-making about their communities. Nick was different in that he completed second level schooling and was well established in the business world, when he decided to take time out to look after his son. Almost as a past time, he signed up for an adult education course, and never really stopped studying since. He tutored traditional students when he was completing his MA, his first experience of the broad world of teaching. He progressed to lecturing, again, traditional students in traditional lecture theatres. Finally, over the past five years or so, he started working as an adult educator. These two interviewees complete the research cohort.

I grouped these individual interviewees, within the broad categories that were identifiable in the research conceptual framework: practice of critical pedagogy, the experience of critical pedagogy, and the impact of critical pedagogy on the wider social policy sphere. However, a number of other patterns emerged as I progressed in the interviews. All the

women were committed feminists, with a slight wavering on the part of Jamie and Val, who had class analyses as priorities. Three interviewees were from Northern Ireland, Pat, Mack and Jill, and this background as members of the minority group was crucially influential in their critical stances. Val, Kim, Aran, Jamie, Jack, Mack, Pat, and Petra were from working class backgrounds and this was very significant in their worldviews. Experience of hardship in the nineteen eighties was also important, such as unemployment, the economic depression, the oppressive suburbanisation of cities like Dublin, the war in Northern Ireland, and the difficult role of women, arising from many factors, including the resurgence of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Kim and Kerry were very influenced by their experience in developing countries, and Jack and Mack were deeply affected by their experience in London. But these were categories that emerged as I was thinking about the interviews subsequently, and they had a bearing on my approach to analysing their individual stories. This section looked at the backgrounds of the interviewees, establishing their suitability for reflecting critically on critical pedagogy and praxis.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter reviewed at the story of the methods I employed in this research. I reflected on the attributes of the interviewees, in terms of their backgrounds, experience, work and commentary in relations to the conceptual framework which underpinned the research. I looked at the sampling that I used, the probability sampling, and the fit of the interviews to comment from the multiple vantage points emanating from their experiences, again connected with the conceptual framework. The next chapter turned to the analysis of the

data, demonstrating the connections between the conceptual framework and the perspectives prevailing in critical adult and community education.

## Chapter Six

### Analysis of Commentary on Formative Experiences

#### *Introduction*

The research focused on two strands of enquiry, firstly, the formation of the interviewees' critical consciousness, on the one hand, on the other hand, their views on the practice in the learning environment that connects with the social world, working not only on the empowerment of the learners, but also working for social justice. The experience of gathering the interviews was exciting and terrifying in equal measure. I felt energised listening to people's stories, which has been a vital and fundamental aspect of my work as an adult educator, and this felt like an extension of that educational process, familiar in the sense that I use life stories and life history as a method in my practice.

Simultaneously, it was terrifying. I was supposed to be doing research. The familiarity of the process convinced me I was doing something fundamentally incorrectly, that pedagogy and research were in different worlds. However, on reflection, I got valuable data, using my experience as a critical educator, creating the space for people to tell their stories, and to reflect analytically as they spoke. That is, as the researcher, my role was to allow it to unfold, and this enabled the stories to emerge.

The question that I posed was:

*What were the formative influences in your life that contributed to your critical perspectives?*

This question connected with the conceptual framework by seeking out the ways in which the interviewees' developed their sense of social justice, and the motivation for the work in adult and community education.

Collecting hours of interviews created a daunting task as I started transcribing the material in preparation for analysis. I wanted to do justice to the interviews and I also wanted to guard against affirming my own beliefs. In the event, the analysis of the data proved to be interesting and exciting. Burgess et al (2006: 84- 86) advised students to think about the analysis from the beginning. This happened quite automatically for me, as each interview was completed, I made notes of the bits that struck me. However, as I looked at the transcripts, I found that they did not convey the same interest. Thus, I listened to the tapes several times, instead of transcribing all of them.

Miles and Huberman (1994: 10) described the process of data analysis as three concurrent procedures. Firstly, the data reduction, which the data was reduced to workable chunks, so that extraneous material was left aside, in order to focus on the analysis. Secondly, data display, which enabled the data to be worked on, to assemble and organise it and finally, drawing conclusions. These three concurrent procedures were satisfying to work on, as they were sort of revelations as each chunk developed into a theme or sub-theme.

For life history, I looked to Roberts (2002) for guidance. He looked at how life history was analysed. In some cases it is left to speak for itself, but in others, it is analysed with a reference to a wider commentary. However, I opted to analyse it with reference to the



wider commentary, the situation in which Ireland found itself over the past thirty years or so.

I considered that Strauss and Corbin (1990) proposed a form of analysis that was too dense and not meaningful for this research. Thus, the partial grounded theory approach I adopted did not include the analysis mode. With regards to the analysis, it focused on the two strands, formation and critical pedagogy, the formation underpins the respondents capacity to express informed, reflexive views on praxis.

### ***Themes: Formative Influences***

The pivotal theme that emerges from the data centres on the formative experiences of the interviewees, including experiences, directly or indirectly, leading to sort of epiphany, an insight or revelation resulting in critical consciousness.

The interviewees contextualised these epiphanies in their wider worlds, and these included family backgrounds, both ideologically but also in the sense of personal difficulties. They included fortuitous meetings with people who acted as catalysts in their lives; these meetings played deeply significant roles in their formation. Finally, in terms of their formation, their exposure to knowledge, writing, thinking and practice shaped their perceptions of what adult education could do as a form of social activism. Their formative influences included the following categories, though the formative experiences are not exclusive to each of these categories. Rather, some formative experiences overlap with others. For example, Val's experience as a young adult was both difficult personally for her, but she also witnessed very difficult social conditions. Further, she had a very

positive experience of the Roman Catholic Church, while many others had negative experiences of it. Thus, in this analysis, the data provides evidence in two or more categories.

Theme One: Very difficult experiences as children or young adults, due to

Religion,

Class

Family circumstances

Poverty

Community

Theme Two: Positive and negative influences of the Roman Catholic Church, which was extremely powerful shaping attitudes and institutions in Irish society, including:

*Positive*

Influential local clergy who mitigated community and family difficulties

Leadership in social justice with regards to deep social structural issues in society

Leaders in critical adult and community education

*Negative*

Repressive Catholic doctrine

Repressive attitudes to sexuality

Domination in politics

Anti feminist

Control of education and health institutions in Irish society

Leadership of pro-Catholic lobby groups

Theme Three: Exposure to political and critical ideas in:

The home;

University;

Travelling, especially in developing world.

Theme Four: Influential people they met, including

Influential clergy

Inspirational teachers

Inspirational community leaders

Random, fortuitous meetings with key people

Theme Five: Desire for engagement and frustration with current status including

The women's movement

Women's community groups

Community development movement

Local participation

Lobby groups

Human rights organisation

Groups for other marginalised causes, including

Gay and Lesbian rights,

Animal rights,

Environmental concerns

This introductory section summarised the themes, and the rest of the chapter explored these in greater depth, starting with the formative influences, continuing with the views on critical pedagogy, and will finally combine the two strands of the research, analysing how the formation underpins the rest of their views.

### ***Analysis of Themes***

Theme One Very difficult experiences as children or young adults, due to:

Religion,

Class

Family circumstances

Poverty

Community

As with any study, it is no surprise to uncover that growing up in specific communities shape our ways of being. Many of the interviewees spoke about this. Val is from a part of Dublin City that endured continuous difficulties. From the sixties onward, government policy determined to move people from very sub-standard accommodation in the inner cities, to the newly built housing estates in new suburbs. Those who stayed behind had very inadequate facilities, and Val's family was one of those who stayed behind.

Well, I grew up in the inner city, and you couldn't get a job if you had this address. There was nothing for kids.

Mack, Pat and Jill belonged to the minority in Northern Ireland. The minority was composed mainly of Roman Catholics, mainly allied to the Republic, and many of whom experienced deep discrimination on the grounds of religions. Jill said

Well, I suppose my accent gives it all away, growing up in the North had to have an influence [...] and understanding that society isn't a homogenous environment, with an equal kind of place for everyone in it

Mack knew his status in society very well. His family, including himself, emigrated from the North

I was born in 1967, and this was a time of great social upheaval in the North [...] We just had to get out. It was too dangerous for the family.

Pat, older than both Jill and Mack, was an adult when the Troubles started, but she knew discrimination and powerlessness

We always knew about politics. We were a Catholic family, and we knew that we were discriminated against. The Protestants held all the power

It was a welcome relief to get out of it, away from the sectarianism and, when she qualified as a primary and a remedial teacher, she moved to a Dublin suburb. Her first experience of the Irish Republic was eye-opening, as she found out very quickly that huge proportions of people in the new suburbs were very disadvantaged, with literacy levels among adults frighteningly low.

I was astonished when I met the parents. It explained why the kids were having such problems learning

Thus, the experiences of the interviewees, as young people shaped their views of the world, creating the conditions for re-interpreting these experiences in different ways.

Theme Two: Positive and negative influences of the Roman Catholic Church, which was extremely powerful shaping attitudes and institutions in Irish society, including:

*Positive*

Influential local clergy who mitigated community and family difficulties

Leadership in social justice with regards to deep social structural issues in society

Leaders in critical adult and community education

*Negative*

Repressive Catholic doctrine

Repressive attitudes to sexuality

Domination in politics

Anti feminist

Control of education and health institutions in Irish society

Leadership of pro-Catholic lobby groups

In Northern Ireland, Roman Catholics, as the religious minority, looked to the Irish republic as a place of freedom from the oppressions in their daily lives. However, in the Republic, the Roman Catholic church was deeply influential in all aspects of life, from the legal system, to the educational, health and social policy systems. Some of this was

negative, with the Church's stamp on the law, in particular. Sexuality was a particular interest. For example, the laws prohibiting contraception and homosexuality were not repealed until the 1990s. Currently, the state avoids the issue of abortion, because of the church. However, there were positive influences also, and many involving religion religious, both nuns and priests, fought for social justice and equality when the political system was recalcitrant.

For Mack, who grew up in a small rural Irish town, as a Catholic in a Catholic controlled state school, the experience of being gay was difficult in school.

I was sixteen or seventeen when I heard a teacher saying that being homosexual was an abomination. The church disapproved, but it felt right to me, so I thought the church must be wrong.

For people like Mack, growing up gay in rural Ireland meant he was subjected to homophobic attitudes that people derived, at least in part, from the Catholic teaching. This was also the case for feminists, who were also subjected to a kind of phobia. For example, Frances found that her mother, a woman in her own right, but with a deep faith in Catholicism, had a very negative perspective on feminism.

She thought that it might mean, or that people would believe, that you would become a lesbian, for example, a strange radical, she felt that feminism was closely associated with this extreme thing, outside of the norm, or something like that. Yeah, they were shown as shrill, silly or ...extreme. Certainly, they were not portrayed in an even handed way.

However, for Val, the desperate state of her community was a catalyst, but in her case a priest of the Roman Catholic Church was very supportive of both her community activism, and also her personal life.

He said, I had a responsibility to myself, as well as my parents. I left home at sixteen.

Jack also had a positive experience of the Church, when he worked with homeless, alcoholic Irish men in London. Jamie's introduction to learning was through a community nun, while Pat was encouraged by a nun to set up the literacy project, which eventually grew into a national association, with the support of radical priests. Kim also had encounters with radical priests, which brought her to the academic level in her adult and community education journey. Petra met with a nun in the midlands town that she moved to, also, which opened doors for her. That is, these members of the church were very positive catalysts who opened the adult and community education doors.

Apart from the influence of the church, many of the interviewees were introduced to political and critical ideas at home, in university, in social gathers and through their travels.

Theme Three: Exposure to political and critical ideas in:

The home;

University;

Travelling, especially in the developing world.



Jamie grew up in a small rural town on the south coast of Ireland. She remembers the conversations around the table.

Even with a family of six, we always had a strong political outlook, about voting, and that, and when we were eighteen, they [my parents] made sure we were always registered to vote

Jack had similar recollections, again from a small rural town

We spoke about politics. My grandmother was from Germany, and that gave us a different perspective.

Aran was also familiar with politicised stories from his father.

He only went to primary school, but as he tells it, he was bright enough, but in a rural town, farmers' children got preferential treatment, and the children of working class, working men, didn't get the same input, because it was never seen that they would have any use for education. That's why he was always interested, [in politics] and why I was interested

His counterpart experience of this was as an unemployed man, the major difference being that he had a degree. He finished college in the eighties, a time of huge unemployment, and he was faced with the dole or emigration. That is, the belief that education would counteract the class differences was demolished by his own, direct experience. In the

event, Aran chose the dole, and became involved in a local action group working with unemployed people, which did, to some degree, mirror his father's social action.

I came from a political background, and my dad was always interested in politics, in radical politics, looking for a change of the old guard. ... I was the first in the area to go to university, and that was my motivation, to do something that would be useful, that would make a challenge to the system.

For Mack, it was the experience of his father's interaction with current affairs on the TV, when he would vociferously argue, one-sidedly.

Politics were always spoken in the house, for instance, if you're watching the news, my parents, they tend to shout at the TV, they tend to disagree, they're quite vocal, in how they perceive the politicians, the authority figures, whether it's the police, or the army

Thus, the first hand experience of political ideas in the home had a lasting impact on some of the interviewees.

For other interviewees, the conversions did not become deep or critical until they went to college. Frances remembers how this happened

Well, it was when I was a student in the seventies and we all joined the various societies, and I joined the feminist society [ ... ] and it wasn't that popular with the younger students, and there were mainly older students in the society, older

women with more developed ideas and experience about feminism, they had thought about the issues before, [...] it was the place I sort of felt I could speak what I believed. I could talk about what mattered to me, and I was considered seriously.

In Frances's case, it was her experience in the feminist society that was pivotal, not her university course. This was probably disappointing for university teachers, but not for universities as entities, as entire learning experiences.

It was kind of seen as radical, as extreme, you know. Feminists did not have a good image at the time.

At university, Jill also encountered critical influences, but she had to flee from these. She had the urge to be a community activist, arising from her experience of belonging to the minority, but this was a highly dangerous direction, when violent organisations took over community activism.

They had their analysis, I had mine, and over time, you know, especially as the hunger strikes proceeded, again, it was a very violent time, it was very hard to do anything developmental, or reflective, ... it wasn't a very reflective environment.

Petra, an English woman, had interesting experiences at university in the 1980s, where she joined anti-nuclear and anti-vivisection groups. These groups channelled her energy, developing her sense of making a difference. Mack, Nick, Terry, and Val were mature students, and their experience of university was not the moments of critical consciousness

as such. Rather, their studies brought their prior thinking together. Mack had left school early, as he considered that, in the time of high unemployment, there was no point in continuing. He and his family emigrated from Ireland, to London, and saw for the first time, the wider impacts of disadvantage, poverty, homelessness and unemployment, which he brought with him to his studies. Nick was a stay-at-home father, a formative experience. There were reactions from his fellow students on his degree course, that he wasn't a 'good housewife' because he was studying, and his former colleagues from his working life could not believe he would give up his career to 'read and look after a kid'. Indeed, these former colleagues took it as an indication of a mental breakdown, or that he was gay.

They thought the worst. But I was always an outsider, and I was always a questioner...

In his time as a student, he was very active in the learning cohort, and organised the students into learning and study groups, and started tutorials for the group. Thus, the experience of university did expose people to critical ideas, but through social life, rather than necessarily through lectures or courses.

The next category is that of exposure through travelling.

For Kerry, her epiphany was when she went to Peru, in her twenties.

I was staying in a friend's house in Lima, in a very run down sort, kind of a slum area..., and the sister in law was raising two daughters, never knowing if she was

ever going to see her husband again. He was working there illegally, sending money home. She was an amazing woman, with a teenage daughter and a younger daughter. They were very, very welcoming and as I was staying there, all the neighbours would come, the women would come around, a couple of times a week, sit around, drink some tea, talk about stuff. I couldn't believe what they were talking about. They were talking about how to make their own communities better. It was just this informal gathering, really a social evening; they were planning together, bringing their kids to school.

For Kerry, this changed everything for her, when she came back to Ireland. Due to this experience, she changed from working in administration in the private sector, developing her consciousness of inequality and injustice in Irish society.

Kim's life was totally different to her parents and siblings due to a scholarship that enabled her to progress to post-primary schooling, but it was on a project in Africa that really impacted on her consciousness.

We were all these young people, realizing that we could **do** (stress) something.

We could make changes.

When she came back to Ireland, she also returned to learning, and continued on to doctoral level, eventually becoming the first professor in adult and community education in Ireland.

Petra travelled to Ireland, from her native England, and encountered levels of disadvantage she had not witnessed before. Ted had worked in London, and he brought his experience of working with homeless and alcoholic Irish to his studies. In his studies in the USA, he met with key figures in adult education, completing his doctoral studies, one of the first in Ireland, which brings us to the next category, that of the influence of people the interviewees met along their journeys.

Theme Four: Influential people they met, including

Influential clergy

Inspirational teachers

Inspirational community leaders

Random, fortuitous meetings with key people

This is the richest category for the data, in terms of the interviewees experience. All met with people who were hugely significant on their journeys. These people were from many different backgrounds, from academics to community workers. Jack saw that the people he met in Columbia University, where he studied, in a very different light to traditional lecturers or teachers. He described the relationship with them as a critical mentoring relationship.

That is the mentoring role, we are talking about critical, critical mentoring also has a role, opening the right door.

Frances was a beneficiary of Jack's sojourn in the USA, as he was a key influence on the education of adult educators, among people who brought these ideas to the classroom.

Frances subsequently enrolled on the only programme at that time, in the mid-eighties, the postgraduate Diploma in Adult and Community Education.

So, when I started the diploma, I found all these ideas, and it was there I found the place to express my views, and to meet with people who were open to thinking about these ideas

Pat also met with people with whom she resonated. At a conference, she heard one speaker in particular. This conference took place in the late seventies or early eighties, and the person she heard subsequently went on to be the key consultant on the White Paper in Adult Education.

I remember hearing [name] speaking for the first time and he was saying what I wanted to say. It was great!

On the basis of that speech, Pat returned to do her Masters in Adult and Community Education. Again, this was very significant for her, studying ideas and principles that made sense of her experience. This is where she encountered Freire's thinking for the first time, even though she had trained as a teacher. She continued on, committed to the Freirean analysis and process, influencing the training of adult literacy tutors, in particular.

Kim was similarly inspired, when she met with another key figure in adult and community education, in the early eighties. He was the Director of the Centre for Adult and Community Education, in Maynooth. This Centre was transformed into the

department, in the late nineties, and she is now the professor there. Her return to education meant that she transformed her experiences in Africa and her earlier life, into her critical practice.

Petra, an English woman, had interesting experiences at university in the eighties in the north of England, where she joined anti-nuclear and anti-vivisection groups. These groups channelled her energy, developing her sense of making a difference. However, it was when she moved to Ireland, to a small rural town the Irish midlands that she started to see the need for activism in terms of women's equality.

I was shocked at the status of rural women, this was in the eighties, but this was before feminism arrived.

She became involved in a community project, initiated by local Roman Catholic priests and nuns, the main figures in a group called the Conference of Religious in Ireland, who advocated the community development and education approach to social transformation. She co-ordinated a women's programme, and set up a lone parents group. With regards to her approach,

I was doing community education, without knowing what I was doing.

Terry and Jamie's journeys were similar, even though Terry was from a city, and Jamie from a rural village, they both ended up in the new suburbs, with no facilities, no shops, no playgrounds, no employment, nothing except the initiative set up by local nuns. Each in her own suburb, Terry and Jamie eventually progressed to women's daytime education



with crèches, Jamie in the eighties, and Terry in the nineties. These progressions were part of the women's community education movement that spread rapidly in the suburbs in the early eighties.

Terry was encouraged by the Home-School Liaison teacher to join the classes. Home-School Liaison teachers work in schools, but their job is to liaise with parents to support them to support their school-going children. Frances was the Home-School Liaison teacher in another suburb, around the same time, when she set up programmes for the parents that subsequently led her into adult and community education. Similarly, Pat liaised with parents, before the post of Home-School Liaison teacher was created, in the seventies. In Terry's case, with the encouragement of the Home-School Liaison teacher, she went along to the daytime adult education classes.

I was brought to a stage of awareness, and really wanted more, so I signed up for women's studies. This was a big commitment, £5 deposit. But I didn't realise that I was back in education!!

Jamie met a local community nun, who encouraged her to join the women's education group. Community nuns worked in the new suburbs, to support young parents, especially those who did not have their extended families nearby. They started Mother and Toddler groups in nearly every community, dotted around the city of Dublin.

In Val's case, she met a woman who, twenty years later, became her colleague in the organisation of which she is the director. When Val was a teenager, the local priest set up a sort of homework club, with students from the universities working as voluntary tutors.

When the colleague was a student, she came to Val's community as a tutor in the after-school project, aimed at encouraging the school students to stay in school. This young woman introduced Val into another way of thinking, and with the local priest, and of course, others she met along the way, her life led her to the organisation, where she became the director.

Mal met with the same person that Pat met, about ten years later, but in his case, it was through a 'friend of a friend', and he ended up working on the project where I met with him, and we went on to work with Aran, working with people who were unemployed. This leads to the final category, that of the desire to engage and to do something about the bleak state of affairs.

Theme Five: Desire for engagement and frustration with current status including

- The women's movement

- Women's community groups

- Community development movement

- Local participation

- Lobby groups

- Human rights organisation

- Groups for other marginalised causes, including

  - Gay and Lesbian rights,

  - Animal rights,

  - Environmental concerns

Eventually, all the interviewees arrived at the space where critical adult and community education flourished. Mal and Aran met with people in unemployed and community centres that clarified the route to the critical space. Aran now works in ICT, brought his adult education perspective to his work with students, while Mal worked in the counselling and adult education nexus. Pat met with key figures in adult and community education in Ireland, and was one of the founders of the national adult literacy scheme. Currently, she is the CEO of the national adult education association. Jack, in addition to being a pioneer in the academic strand in adult education, was one of the first adult education organisers, and is now a lecturer in the only academic department in the Irish Republic, while Kim is the first professor. Frances completed the first PhD in adult and community education, in an Irish university. Terry, Kerry and Jamie were active in the consolidating the women's community education project, eventually at national levels, while Nick and Mack continued with their own studies, with the experience of adult learning influencing their perceptions. Petra and Gus work in community education, Gus as a community drama specialist and Petra in feminist community education. Meanwhile, Jill and Val work in community development, within critical frameworks, Jill with young adults in an extremely disadvantaged suburb in Dublin, and Val with a national organisation committed to social change through community development.

These findings related to the conceptual framework in the dimensions of social transformation, and the part that individual people work collectively towards social change. That is, the activism of the groups and communities, in which the interviewees participated, resulted in changes, albeit small changes in some cases, but against very powerful forces working against these changes.

## ***Conclusion***

This summarises the journeys of the interviewees to their experiences of critical consciousness. The themes that emerged as I listened to the tapes ranged over a wide variety of experiences difficult and illuminating. An essential part of these experiences was not their uniqueness. Rather it was the very ubiquity of them. In most groups that I have worked with over twenty years, I have heard stories similar to these. These stories are part of the fabric of Irish life. The interviewees had difficult experiences as children or young adults, personally and socially. The role of the Roman Catholic Church is complex, as it was influential in creating inequality and oppression for large groups of people, particularly for women, but it was positive and radical for many of the interviewees. The interviewees were exposed to critical ideas in both the private domains and in their education, but most particularly in their travels. The role of key people, both in adult and community education, but also from NGOs, students and so on, cannot be underestimated, all the more so, as some of these meetings were completely fortuitous, chances that could easily have passed them by. Finally, in their desire to change things, the interviewees discovered adult and community education as key routes to community activism. These experiences have positioned them in a vantage point where they can contribute to an analysis of critical pedagogy in adult and community education, which I look at in the next chapter

## Chapter Seven

### Analysis of commentary on critical pedagogy

#### *Introduction*

This chapter will look at the responses of the interviewees to the question about their views of critical practice. Their experience came from direct experience as learners or from their experience as critical educators, although not all of the interviewees are currently practitioners. However, all of them are in critical spaces, and able to comment on this field. This study aimed, at least in part, to identify specific elements and dimensions of critical pedagogy, and the interviewees were competent to comment on the those elements and dimensions, as practitioners, learners and commentators. The question that I posed was:

*What do you think are the practices in the learning environment that would bring about social change? In other words, what kind of methods and processes do critical educators use?*

Giroux (1992) as I outlined in the context of this research, was concerned about a close focus on methods, as he considered that it would diminish the critical aspects of the education. Bartolomé (2003: 409-410) explored this resistance to methods in critical pedagogy, and guarded against a 'one size fits all' mentality. However, it was possible to discern critical processes in Prendiville (2004) and Hope and Timmel (1999), but without the theoretical background. For me, the focus on critical content could leave a space for unquestioned power dynamics in the traditional model of teaching and learning. The

second danger is that interpretations of critical pedagogy will lead to a sanitised version of Freire's conception (1972). As he contended, there is no such position as a neutral position. The positioning of the critical educators is crucial in ensuring that the education includes a social analysis, taking care of the personal simultaneously.

### ***Themes: Critical Pedagogy***

Seven themes emerged in this aspect of the research with sub-variations on the themes.

They included:

Theme One: Connecting the political and the critical in critical pedagogy including:

The reflections on the meanings of political and critical

The applications of the terms

The way of uncovering hidden agendas

The site for counter-cultural ideas

Theme Two: Group process, including:

Starting from the experience of the participants

Building confidence

Building interpersonal trust

Managing emotions

Creating the space to encourage everyone to speak especially in small groups

teaching methods

Theme Three: Questioning teaching methods including:

Socratic questioning, which entailed asking deeper and deeper questions, such that the learners think more critically about the subject

Making the familiar strange questions. This entailed taking a familiar topic and presenting it from unusual angles, with questions that encourage the learners to go beyond their usual assumptions about the familiar topic.

Open questions, the Why and How questions which encourage students to go beyond the simple answers towards more complex and multi-layered.

Theme Four: Feminist and social analysis including:

Providing the learners with the analytical elements developed in women's studies and equality studies, for example.

Providing the learners with alternative ways of looking at mainstream curricula and canonical knowledge.

Exposing learners to new sources of knowledge, for example, feminist literature, critical literature.

Theme Five: Writing including:

Expressing and disseminating critical ideas

Enabling learners to develop their ideas

Opening debate, with more clarity than the spoken word

Theme Six: Dialectic discussion and dialogue including:

Discussion of content in the classroom, encouraging the learners to engage with input.

Building on discussion, to infuse it with more analysis and complexity, transforming it into input, and material for further learning opportunities

Providing the opportunities for dialogue, between educators and learners, and learners and texts, and educators and texts.

Theme Seven: Desire to work for social justice including

Activism in the wider community.

Engagement with critical social movements, such as feminism.

Working with marginal groups, including educationally disadvantaged and socially excluded people.

### ***Analysis of Themes***

This section will continue by looking at each of these categories, before summarising and drawing the disparate elements together.

Theme One: Connecting the political and the critical in critical pedagogy including:



The reflections on the meanings of political and critical

The applications of the terms

The way of uncovering hidden agendas

The site for counter-cultural ideas

The perspectives on critical pedagogy started with the political and critical dimensions of critical pedagogy. Frances reflected on the deeper level of the implications of the links between critical and political.

Yes, this idea of left wing, socialist thinking that we think of when we think of politicisation, with a small p, it has been replaced to some extent by critical, you know, critical thinking, critical reflection, analytical thinking

Jack maintained that the purpose of critical pedagogy was a kind of archaeology.

Critical pedagogy for me is really about unearthing the paradigms, that underpin, the systems, structure, the economic, the political, sets of ideas, whether radical or critical are the same, they are capable of being hijacked, and the question is whether educators can hijack them back.

Kim considered that as a critical educator, she needed to produce very powerful counter-cultural rhetorical lectures/inputs, delivered in the classroom or in her writing. They pose questions, queries and positions, leaving it to the students or listeners to reflect on what

she says. Then, they can form their own ideas, and act out of them. Jill identified with her political positioning with regards to critical education, maintaining that it takes place in the community

Critical education takes place outside of the academy for the most part, I would say that society is the biggest critical educator.

This is a crucial aspect of this study, with an exploration of the meanings of critical in this context, in order to clarify the parameters of the topic. The interviewees held that critical adult education needed a catalyst of sorts. On the one hand, it needed the critical educator for their inputs, animation and argumentations, and on the other, the wider society to contextualise these inputs, as well as the inputs contextualising society.

Theme Two: Group process, including:

Starting from the experience of the participants

Building confidence

Building interpersonal trust

Managing emotions

Creating the space to encourage everyone to speak especially in small groups  
teaching methods

An essential part of critical pedagogy for the interviewees was the group processes involved in small group teaching and learning. The interviewees advocated learning groups of not less than twelve, but not too large that people were too daunted to contribute. This was especially pertinent for those who returned to learning as adults,

where the learning groups actively included them, and also reached out when they were uncertain. But, crucially, it also included the entire centres of learning, the non-classroom spaces and the informal spaces.

Mack was in a particularly well placed to comment, as he was an early school leaver, and returned to learning in his late twenties, in an adult education project dedicated to adult basic education and English as a second language. He was working as an adult educator, at the time of the interview.

I had no idea that this was going on. It really opened my eyes.

He continued into higher education, eventually completing his doctorate. He is the most recent of newcomer adult educators.

I always thought of myself in terms of politics, being fairly critical and I always think that it follows through in working as an educator. However, it wasn't until I came here to work, [in adult and community education] I said, I **like** (stressed) that, so, yeah, that is what I like in adult and community education. You know, there is a lot of lip service paid to critical pedagogy in my own discipline, (sociology) and it is almost a buzz word, getting the students to become critical thinkers, having critical standpoints, but there is no actual thought gone into what it actually entails.

Mack also reviewed how critical pedagogy is NOT done. In his experience in a large sociology department, the stated mission of the department was to help students to

become critical. Yet they were in huge lecture halls, it was not possible to engage with students except through exams.

Mack and Pat were less happy with academic inputs. Pat preferred to facilitate learning groups, allowing people to start from their own experience, and reflect on that experience within the learning group. She considered that these learning groups centred approaches were more likely to challenge the *status quo*.

Kim learned her adult education trade in Zambia, working with people from all walks of African life, and with all levels of prior education. What she took from that is the power of the gathering.

It was logical to sit on the floor, to shuffle into circles, to listen to what people wanted to do. And because I was young, they did not see me in a different light. Like, I learned to dance from them, and they learned something from me.

Mal contended that working with groups helped him to dig deeper, when he was challenged fundamentally.

The group I have just finished with were very challenging, yet I have discovered resources that I never would have, only for them.

Learning from the groups, as the educator, as well as the participant, was very important for Mack, Petra, Kerry, Jamie, Val and Terry. For example, Terry said that it was vital for her when she returned to education, to learn in a learning group. She considered that this

was most essential for women's community education. Further, saw the entire environment as crucial, that is, the welcoming group process in the learning centres, as well as the inclusive group process in the classroom, regardless of what course people did.

The atmosphere has to be supportive. You have to be flexible, you have to meet people where they're at. It doesn't matter what course they want to do, arts and crafts or social and human studies. You might be saving her life, her mental health. You have to be responsive to their needs.

Kerry spoke about her own experience in a learning group, in which she was encouraged to share her experience in the group. Pat gave the example of literacy learners getting so much affirmation from the group, more than she realized or hoped for, when she tried it out in the beginning. For many people, this is may be seen as too close to 'adult education as therapy' (my words), or something to get out of the house for, but Terry was clear.

There's not enough feminism, no. But you can't talk above their heads. You have to be friendly, approachable, you have to set the atmosphere. After that, you can change people.

That is, taking care of the personal is as essential as consciousness raising, to help people to feel that their voices are heard.

Small groups were vital for creating the atmosphere for discussion. Each of the interviewees spoke about the need for spaces that allow the learners and participants to

speak, and small groups were most conducive to people. Petra maintained that the qualities of a supportive environment help to build these small groups.

People need to develop confidence and self-esteem, and they can do this in small groups. To be fully listened to... Not to be judged... To share... The kernel of this is the group contract, that creates the safety that they are able to clear some of the darkness in their lives.

Further, within small groups, activities, for example, Hope and Timmel (1999) and Boal (200) enabled people to engage with critical citizenship and the deeper community and structural issues. Jack mentioned teambuilding activities, provided that they are underpinned by critical ideas, helped groups to clarify their thoughts and perspective. Petra said that these kind of activities changed people's attitudes, and she gave the example of a community drama for International Women's Day.

That raised awareness, they were able to celebrate together, allowed to think, getting their teeth into the issues.

Small groups also developed trust. This was considered very important, especially with people returning to education, vulnerable, and unsure of themselves. Mal and Gus felt their roles as critical educators entailed managing emotions, that anger, rage, came up in critical adult education, and it was their responsibility to work with the participants. Frances also felt that her own emotions were both driving forces for her critical practice, but conceded that she could not work in a 'blue rage' all the time. She needed a way of working that dealt with that.

Groupwork also creates the environment for creative processes. Storytelling and drama are crucial elements for Jack and Gus and the use of creative materials, like novels, short stories, poetry helped people to articulate difficult issues in their lives. All of the practitioner respondents use activities that they have developed over their years of practice. For example, Jack said that the story telling process enabled hidden structural issues to be uncovered. The case he gave was a bit difficult, but illuminating.

[A]nother thing that students do, is making the personal story, 'I have been beaten by my husband', taking this away from just **my** story to a **'we'** story. This is another way of being critical. Being able to move the debate out of the personal, out of the 'me', that may take a long time, and it may be very difficult, but it seems to me that this is a key ingredient, is the move out of the personal.

This process brought out the experience for the adult learner, and the learning environment and facilitation enabled her to analyze it in structural and wider terms. This process of seeing the story in a different light, also resonated in Val's interview.

We [in this organization] help people to look at their own stories, their own experience in a different light, for example, seeing their situation in a systemic way, not a personal or community.

Thus, the small group process, including active listening, sharing, confidence building and trust is part of these interviewees' perspectives on critical pedagogy. The interviewees raised role of questioning in the practice of critical adult education. This

theme was difficult, as I found it hard to articulate the meanings that the interviewees conveyed when they spoke about questioning.

Theme Three: Questioning teaching methods including:

Socratic questioning, which entailed asking deeper and deeper questions, such that the learners think more critically about the subject

Making the familiar strange questions. This entailed taking a familiar topic and presenting it from unusual angles, with questions that encourage the learners to go beyond their usual assumptions about the familiar topic.

Open questions, the Why and How questions which encourage students to go beyond the simple answers towards more complex and multi-layered.

In his analysis of critical pedagogy, Jack started with the Socratic theme.

Being a teacher means that you have the ability to stir the pot, to ask questions, the radical as educator, the educator as radical, as Socrates did.

Nick was clear about the role of questions. He used the quotation from Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, (1973): *If they get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about the answers.*



Critical adult education is especially about providing the students with the wherewithal to ask the right questions.

These 'right' questions included sociological questioning about the nature of society. Mack opted for 'making the familiar unfamiliar or strange' (*cf* Clough and Nutbrown, 2002) and posing questions that help people to reflect on the questions outside of their usual terms of reference. Aran also said that posing questions was vital to critical pedagogy.

My beliefs are not set in stone. I have to be open to questioning about them. I think the difference [in adult and community] is the difference between open and closed questions. I have no definite answers, and it gives me the opening to look at myself and the society in which I live. And this applies to the students.

This is centred on uncovering the hidden material, the invisible structures and the discourses that keep these under wraps. The interviewees were intent on creating the environment where hidden dimensions emerge through questioning and critical thinking. This led to the next theme, that of analysis.

Theme Five: Feminist and social analysis including:

Providing the learners with the analytical elements developed in women's studies and equality studies, for example.

Providing the learners with alternative ways of looking at mainstream curricula and canonical knowledge.

Exposing learners to new sources of knowledge, for example, feminist literature, critical literature.

When the interviewees spoke of analysis, they included not just the classroom, but also conversions in informal settings, and particularly in essays and so on that the learners produced. Frances identified with feminism, an overtly political positioning, but going beyond the structural statements, into a way of doing things.

But feminism for me was also a methodology, a way of doing things, making changes, the discussions, just meeting with people and talking.

Jill echoed Frances with regards to the consciousness raising, in the social analysis that that she encountered growing up in the minority group in Northern Ireland.

I never met a Northern Irish person who didn't have their social context, whether unionist, nationalist [...] Social analysis is one of the most important things of the critical educator, to frame one or a variety of analyses, which particular stream where they place themselves. I see it as multi-layered. And my own particular frame would be across gender, and class.

Jill went on to say that critical education took place in all kinds of environment, including her own social life growing up, and in the networks she was involved in. She also held

that it took place in the classroom, of course. In particular, she considered that critical knowledge, knowledge for critical consciousness, such as knowledge on human rights, civil rights, was essential, along with the process that enabled engagement with it, especially through group process.

Theme Six: Writing including:

Expressing and disseminating critical ideas

Enabling learners to develop their ideas

Opening debate, with more clarity than the spoken word

Frances, Mal, Nick, Mack and Jack all named their own practice of writing as a key foundational building block for their practice in the classroom. Frances said:

Well, I certainly think that writing is a central aspect of critical pedagogy. You develop your content in your writing.

This illuminated the role of content in critical pedagogy. For Jack too, writing is how he developed his perspectives, his own particular take on any of the current ideas, and for developing his own thinking, different to Frances' writing.

Mack distributed his articles to students to read, before engaging them in dialogue in the classroom. Mal was very straightforward in his use of writing, in which he sought clarity.

You have to be clear when you are writing. You get to know what you think in the process. And others know too.

Thus, critical educators clarify, uncover and develop their ideas for the content of critical pedagogy, which they use to engage the learners in the actual process in the classroom. Frances remembered when she was training to be a post-primary teacher, and the focus was on the techniques of teaching, with almost no time for ideas. She considered that adult and community education was primarily about ideas, and the process primarily about having the participants engaging with the ideas. This again is a crucial aspect of critical pedagogy in adult and community education, the engagement with ideas, rather than techniques to impart subjects.

Theme Seven: Dialectic discussion and dialogue including:

Discussion of content in the classroom, encouraging the learners to engage with input. Building on discussion, to infuse it with more analysis and complexity, transforming it into input, and material for further learning opportunities  
Providing the opportunities for dialogue, between educators and learners, and learners and texts, and educators and texts.

Each of the interviewees named discussion and dialogue as a crucial aspect of critical adult education. The basis of starting from where the learners were at, with their own stories, automatically entails discussion. The process goes further than superficial discussion, to the deeper, analytical, open to change dialogue. That is, dialogue entailed an encounter with another's views. That means at least two processes. One, that the

educators, in their facilitation of learning, were open to learning from the learners, and secondly, that new knowledge emanated from the exchanges involved in dialogue. Aran considered that the dialectical process in discussion, of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, adapted from the Marxian model, was a process that can engage the students, and keep them connected with the big picture issues, while for Mack, dialogue was the key process.

Dialogue, the over and back of discussion, is vital. It keeps your mind open, and the learners engaged.

This open-mindedness to change and newer perspectives reflected a fluid positioning vis-à-vis learning and teaching. However, it belies a kind of steeliness in the pursuit of social justice, on the part of the interviewees. That is, they are intent on working towards a fixed vision of a better society, but working towards it in a way that enhanced the experience for the learners and themselves.

Theme Seven: Desire to work for social justice including

Activism in the wider community.

Engagement with critical social movements, such as feminism. Working with marginal groups, including educationally disadvantaged and socially excluded people.

The interviewees expressed their desire to work for social justice. Kim said with some level of acceptance, that it may not always be possible to do critical education in the most effective and efficient way, but that the goal remains the same.

I always try to be the critical educator. It's always a disappointment, not being able to create the perfect conditions, and knowing when the moments occur, but it's worth the struggle. I want to change the world.

Frances's feminism linked her to social and personal transformation, as a feminist activist educator. All of the women declared their gender consciousness, acknowledging the part that feminism played in the personal lives, as well as their work. Kerry, Terry, Jamie, Pat, Kim and Frances and Petra worked in organisations with explicit feminist agendas. Val and Jill work mainly through an equality agenda, in that Val worked in community development, tackling class inequality, primarily, and Jill worked with young people in a very disadvantaged suburban community, with a community development framework, parallel But they include their feminist analyses with their class and equality agendas. As Jill said, she brings a gender analysis into her work constantly.

The men primarily work out of a Marxist analysis. Mack, Aran and Jack, while their social status now have middle-class indicators, such as home ownership, professional careers, and higher than average incomes, came from working class backgrounds. Thus, in spite of their professional status, they remained committed to the work of bringing about a better world for everyone.

Mal's work with unemployed men, Mack's work with marginalised groups, including unemployed people, new Irish and young people, and Nick's work with marginalised men, all contribute to their critical consciousness. That is, their critical consciousness permeates their praxis.

This praxis reframes critical pedagogy. The activism in praxis is that which works upon society, having the social justice dimension that lifts it out of community activity or active citizenship, positioned within neo-liberal discourses. The interviewees' critical pedagogy acts on the world. They reflect on their subjects through writing, learning and thinking, and they carry these reflections into the learning groups, setting the agenda, engaging in group processes, dialogue, discussion and creative activities with learners. Simultaneously, by encompassing these processes in addition to the critical subjects and reflections, critical pedagogy becomes more than 'banking education' albeit critical education. It becomes a series of participative learning and teaching encounters.

Their desire for engagement ensures that this is deliberate activism, rather than a tangential outcome. This illuminated the gap that I puzzled over when I looked at critical pedagogy, in mainstream education, and the gap that I equally puzzled over in adult and community education. That is, in mainstream critical pedagogy, whether at secondary or tertiary levels, the critical consciousness of the teachers is distinguished from that of the students. In other words, it is something that teachers do, acting upon the students. On the other side, in adult and community education, the learner-centeredness ensured that it is a participative learning and teaching process: however, learner-centred processes did not carry the imperative of acting upon the world.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter on the elements of critical pedagogy summarised the respondents' views on the subject, in terms of their work with adult learning groups, and their own experience as

adult learners. They reflected on their meanings, connecting with a longer discussion on the appropriation of words in fluid uses of language.

They looked at their beliefs about how they facilitate adult education, most especially within groups, using processes that enable them to listen to and engage with the learners, to manage the emotions of critical consciousness. They reviewed their own knowledge bases, as the content part of critical pedagogy. They identified that their own development entailed constant renewal, especially through writing and dialogue. Finally, they linked their work in adult and community education with their social activism, in their involvement in their work, community groups, ethical living and environmental groups, social groups and such like. This served to forge the connections between their practice in the learning environment and the wider concerns of social justice. The next chapter will look at the reflections on these analyses, and seek to contextualise them in terms of the gaps that this research aimed to address.



## Chapter Eight

### Discussion of the findings

#### *Introduction*

Torres (1998: vii) says that the Latin adage, *ad fontes*, tells us that we shall always come back to the sources of our passion and inspiration. In this research, I asked the interviewees to go back to the sources of their own formations, and the data shows that these sources provide not just inspiration and passion for social justice, but also a determination to work for change. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of the data, and relate the data to the literature review. I will examine the findings with reference to critical pedagogy parameters, exploring the implications for the development of a praxis of critical pedagogy for adult education. The research aims to create the foundation on which to build the theory of the critical practice of adult and community education, enabling the interviewees to establish their rationale for credible and expert comment on praxis in critical pedagogy and their reflections on their life experiences describe the development of critical consciousness, which underpins their work. The analysis of the interviews develops the meanings in the interviews and to draw out implications applicable to the field of critical adult and community education. The research had two focuses, which I will draw together in this discussion: firstly, that of the formative influences of the interviewees, which, as Torres (1998:10) reiterated, the feminist axiom that the personal *is* political, and, secondly, their informed, considered views of the configuration of critical pedagogy. My objective in interweaving these focuses was to go beyond a purely technical, superficial or cognitive approaches to critical pedagogy, but, rather, to underpin it with the experiential formation and reflexivity of the informants.

Freire, interviewed by Torres (1990), said that his books are as if they were theoretical reports of his practice and his reflections on his work, which enabled him to arrive at a more radical understanding of his own work. The data showed that interviewees similarly reflect on their work, and the findings revolved around their perspectives on critical practice. However, Freire acknowledged that he witnessed, but did not necessarily experience first hand, hardship and struggle, but this shaped his approach to work, and underpinned his values. Among the interviewees in this research, some, like Freire, did not experience hardship directly, but were deeply affected by witnessing the hardship endured by others. Other interviewees experienced hardship directly in their lives, from poverty to religious and gender oppression, and these experiences created the catalysts for their work for social change. As informants for this research, their stories and their insights into critical adult and community education have strongly valid and valuable perspectives which this research engages with.

This research had four key findings that apply to praxis in adult and community education. Firstly, adult education workers had a dimension in their work roles, which was that of community activists for social change. This connects particularly with the literature review on social movements, and the part that critical citizenship plays in addressing issues of social justice (Mayo, 2000). Secondly, they draw on a critical knowledge base, related to Thompson's 'Really Useful Knowledge' (1996). Thirdly, they adopt the approach to learners which subverts the conventional power dynamics between educators and learners, thus disrupting the conventional pedagogy and creating implications for overall pedagogical practice. Finally, they re-position groupwork, drawing on critical practice from other disciplines, deriving a critical theoretical

framework from the practice. The next section will look at these four findings in more detail.

### ***Community activism embedded in social movements***

In the literature review, I explored the argument by Giroux (2000: 7) that the struggles over culture are not a weak substitute for 'real' politics, but rather central to any discussion of power, theory and practice as well as pedagogy and social change. Further, as Mayo argues, (2000) these struggles encompass a range of issues, including anti-capitalist globalisation, anti-war, anti-debt, anti-racism, pro-feminism, and civil and human rights, for example. The formative experiences in the lives of the interviewees connect with these struggles, either directly or indirectly. Indeed, they drew strong connections between their experiences and their attitudes and values that still underpin their work. All of the interviewees came to adult and community education as second or third phases in their working and/or campaigning lives. Once in the field, the interviewees saw it as a means of furthering their social activism. Further, in addition to their experience as adult learners, the data showed that the interviewees found that adult and community education facilitated consciousness raising and reflexivity, not just for the participants in the learning groups, but also for themselves.

The literature review considered critical pedagogy situated in mainstream education, in second and third levels (Apple, 1986, Giroux, 1988, McLaren, 1998). Critical educators, according to these writers, were intellectual activists, and their work was to bring intellectual polemic into the classroom. This is not necessarily the case for adult educators.

These findings locate critical pedagogy as a site of activism in the community, as well as a way of working in the classroom. That is, critical pedagogy in adult and community education included the interrogations of power and control, of authoritarianism, *per se*, as well as the medium for offering learners the opportunity to engage with alternative knowledge, attitudes and values.

The data showed that the interviewees work in community, as the site for struggle against inequality. In Ireland, adult educators did not have the public *intellectual* role that many other critical educators have, for example, Lynch, (1999, 1989) who researches inequalities in education and society and was a frequent commentator in the media. The interviewees in the research were more likely to be non-traditional academics, teachers, or organisers, with much more experience in community work than in the academy or the profession. The data revealed stories which linked the interviewees more definitively with community work, for example, work with homeless men, African and Chinese groups, Latin American women, community development, and unemployed people, rather than college students. Their stories also linked with community activism in policy development. The data shows that this critical role was utilized with national agencies, to which they bring their formative experiences. For example, Terry works in the National Women's Council as a community development policy worker, and she used her experience from women's community education to shape that work. Similarly, Kerry in the national collective, brought her experience as a learner, as well as the knowledge that she gained from what she witnessed and absorbed when she was in South America. This community activism was underpinned by critical thinking, in that they did not resort to simple explanations, or superficial assumptions when faced with difficult social issues. Their responses showed that this was a dividend of adult education, where the process

creates the environment for more complex understandings. The interviewees are positioned to comment like public intellectuals, but their strength is in the analyses of community.

For the interviewees who worked in the classroom, the data showed that these parallel roles in community activism have influenced their practice in the classroom, connecting with the knowledge bases, the critical questions and reflection, that is, praxis, (Freire, 1972). They create the space for social analytical discussions.

The data supported Giroux's (2000) contention that critical education provided space for discussions on power and control. Discussions on power and control, in the context of community activism, raised the issue, that of political activism. In the interviews with those who mentioned political parties in their own lives, they spoke about how powerless *Politics* with a capital *P*, makes them. They saw it as removed from the 'real life' experience of disadvantaged people, and it was alienating for them, even though they saw themselves as empowered and educated. That is, the site for real change was not, for the interviewees, in the political system, but nearer the grassroots.

As a site of community activism, adult education appeared to be a well-kept secret. The data showed that the interviewees came to adult and community education by chance, but once they discovered it, they found it an ideal environment for their activism. They discovered adult education in a variety of ways, from opportunistic meetings with key catalysts to fortuitous exposure at key times in their lives. This was an important opportunity for the field, and served to highlight the obligation on it to maintain and

create critical spaces for the discussions, on politics, activism and even intellectual activism.

Thus, the data showed that adult and community education is one site for community activism, in which adult educators take on the role of community intellectuals along with their own growth and development. They created the spaces where people, as participants, policy workers and colleagues, could tell their stories and develop their role as community activists. This was an alternative space to traditional party politics. Crucially, critical adult and community education created an alternative space to traditional community activism, such as Tidy Towns Associations, which consists of voluntary community groups all around the island of Ireland, who beautify their towns and villages for an annual competition, although these too, have their place in building community.

### ***The 'Really Useful Knowledge' base***

In the literature review I looked at Thompson's 'really useful knowledge' (1996: 20), as a vital element in critical adult and community education. She was referring to knowledge for the politicisation, which could be used to help to understand current conditions of oppression and inequality, to challenge these conditions. The data showed that the interviewees were very clear about the contribution this 'really useful knowledge' makes to the field, and the part they play as a conduit for this knowledge for politicisation to the participants in learning. In the review of Knowles' andragogy (1989), I looked at his rationale and argued that this positioning could downgrade the teaching of adults, by framing all adult learning as self-directed, dispensing with the educator altogether.

However, this research shows that the knowledge base of the adult educators is crucial, not only concerning critical *content*, alone, but also with regards to the posing of critical questions. The knowledge base was not static or passive, and this meant that adult educators have to constantly engage with new knowledge, generating it with others, and reflecting on it themselves. This newly generated knowledge, in the interviewees' worlds, was based on diverse areas, as the interviewee subject areas cover computers, counselling, community drama, and personal development, among others. The interviewees had developed their knowledge base through practice, writing, studying, dialogue and praxis. Each is an authority, rather than authoritarian (Kanpol, 1998) on his/her area. Moreover, adult education challenged authoritarianism, and disrupted the traditional talking teacher and listening student. That is, adult educators continued to develop their knowledge base, but they were open to learning in the classroom, through discussion, dialogue, in the way that subverted the traditional knowledgeable teacher/ignorant learner dualism.

In addition, it showed that the subject area was no prohibition to critical pedagogy, and applied it to personal development, craft classes, and so on. Terry contended that the learning *environment* is crucial, giving the example of her former adult learning centre. This centre was located in a very disadvantaged suburb of Dublin, founded in the mid-1980s, by local women engaged in community education, which mushroomed in many disadvantaged areas, urban, suburban and rural. Terry's introduction to adult education was in this centre, and she went on, eventually, to work as both a paid and unpaid worker. The centre had information on feminist issues, such as domestic violence, rape and sexual violence. It housed a crèche, and provided tea and coffee, and a place to sit and chat with supportive staff and friends. On the walls, there were posters with clear messages about

rights, entitlements, racial equality, and so on. Many of the participants signed up for craft courses, but the learning environment conveyed that 'really useful knowledge' proactively. Thus, the person learning a craft may be embarking on a traditional, conventional route, but the critical educator provided the opportunities for critical consciousness, certainly, but undoubtedly, also by the entire learning environment.

To summarise in relation to the knowledge base of the critical pedagogy and praxis, the respondents maintained that critical adult and community education creates a space for overall growth, study and reflection, through critical questioning, maintaining the critical learning environment. They contributed to a learning space, not only in the classroom, but also in the coffee rooms, children's facilities, and so on. This was the informal learning space, and exemplified the difference between the provision of teaching hours, and a fully developed adult education programme. In addition, they provided the opportunity to engage with 'really useful knowledge', in which neither their subject area nor the level at which it was taught, proved to be inhibiting forces. They perceive that critical pedagogy can apply to all areas, from personal development, to philosophy, to sociology, to community drama. This brings me to the next point, that of the approach to working with people.

### ***The personal approach to working with people subverting the conventional power dynamics between educators and learners***

Critical pedagogy in adult and community education spans the mainstream and the peripheral, drawing on related areas, particularly Women's Studies. Women's Studies, as a distinct area, is particularly illustrative of the way in which engaged pedagogy, (hooks,



2003) avoids the instrumental ‘ten steps to consciousness raising’ approach, which Kanpol (1998: 98) warns us against. However, while I consider this resistance is a vital bulwark against instrumentalism of a purely technical training model, as Freire contends. I also consider that the gap leaves room to perpetuate traditional power relationships between teachers and students, and the traditional canonical knowledge which might preclude ‘really useful knowledge’ (Thompson, 1996:20). This gap was a key motivating factor for me, when I embarked on this research, and one that I wanted to explore in the interviews. The data revealed very meaningful insights on the personal approaches that subverted the traditional power dynamics, not just between educators and learners, but also with wider societal dimensions, around authority and authoritarianism.

None of the interviewees had studied adult education before they started their practice, which enabled them to develop their practice out of their own outlook, rather than according to an *a priori* curriculum. They had different prior education, but even though a number of them were secondary school teachers, they did not connect the mainstream pedagogy with liberation and equality. One had some experience of counselling and one studied psychology but overall, most of the interviewees had not encountered the connections between education and the practice of freedom (Freire, 1998) when they started in adult and community education. But they recognised the ideas that underpins Freire’s work when other people introduced them. For one interviewee, she heard an inspirational speaker at a conference on adult education, after she started working in the field, while another encountered the ideas on a course in literacy tutoring, which was embedded in Freirean thinking. As practitioners, they developed the practice of starting with people’s own experience tied in with approach which they subsequently tied in with

Freirean thought. Thus, while experiential approaches were already in the literature, for example, Knowles, (1989), the connections with critical pedagogy were, at best, tentative.

This research thus brings the familiar methods, used commonly in the adult education learning environment, into the realm of critical education. This develops the case for human-centred or learner-centred methods, as a route to critical consciousness, in spite of the reservations by Kanpol, (1999).

Also significant is the varied working biographies of the interviewees. Among the interviewees were a counsellor, an air stewardess, actor/theatre director, secondary school teachers, psychologists, two scientists, secretary. Some are involved in training adult educators. They present the capacity to impart clear messages about support for the learners, not necessarily in a counselling role, alone, but able to refer people to other agencies, like Women's Aid, or a guidance counsellor. They can make empathetic connections with people's lives, especially if there is a class/ gender/cultural difference.

The data shows that the interviewees do not reduce pedagogy to methods rather they perceive it as an overall dynamic interaction between knowledge, the educators, the learners and the environment. They connect their ways of working with students with their areas of expertise, not just their subject areas, but also the related areas that critical questioning opens up. For example, in discussions, tangential topics arise, and the interviewees bring a critical perspective to the tangential topic. This is clearly illustrated in Jack's example of working with a personal story, and generating a social dimension to the account. Thus, dialogue taps into the knowledge base of the tutors, and the tutors are able to bring their experience and peripheral knowledge to bear on the discussion, such

that the students engage with their contribution to the discussion, and develop their perspectives from the extra contributions from the tutors and fellow students. The discussion, as a method, necessarily entails knowledge and process in dynamic relationship with each other. It enables the students to connect with what the tutors are teaching, and it enables the teachers to interrogate their own subject area with reference to the experience of the students.

Kanpol argues that critical pedagogy resists parameters (1998), eschewing the notion that it can be reduced to a simplistic formula, a series of steps. However, this research argues that adult educators who focus on the process as well as the content are not simply technocrats, relying on technique and teaching methods to convey a curriculum. Similarly, they did not see themselves as facilitators only, that is, fairly neutral discussion moderators. Further, ongoing development is crucial. Even if they are academics in the traditional sense, they continue to develop themselves in the classroom, with learners, that is, dialogue is not just between the group members, but also between the facilitator and group members.

The implications of these findings impact on the training of the adult educators, as the most important bulwark against reductionism of the simplistic view of adult education. Training of adult educators has to keep the multifaceted approach in balance, to ensure that it is not reduced to methods and that they are not reduced to technocrats. Adult educators embody the critical knowledge base, but apply the really useful knowledge to the participants' own experience. The findings reinforced the person-centred approach, where the critical intent overriding the liberal practice. The data shows that they develop the capacity to engender trust, and to be trustworthy. Crucially, critical adult educators

are open to learning from the group and not treating their knowledge base as fixed and static. Most importantly, the data shows that the interviewees to come from all walks of life, with a sort of dual mandate, that of worker in the classroom, in the coffee room, and so on, but also worker in the community, reflecting the multifaceted dimensions of the field.

### ***Critical adult education and critical groupwork***

When I reviewed the literature on learning in groups for example, Jaques, (2000) Rogers, (2001), I argued that it does not address the issue of critical groupwork. There are examples of critical groupwork, for example, Butler and Wintram (1991) but they review therapeutic groups, not specifically at learning groups. Yet, learning groups are the norm, and the data shows that this is the core of the teaching and learning experience of the interviewees. They spoke about the groups, rather than classes, courses, or provision. The data locates critical pedagogy in learning group process in part, a dynamic interrelationship between the group members, and their experience, the educator, critical knowledge, dialogue, some group activities. This also resonates with the contention that learning is a social activity, which I reviewed earlier, (Lave and Wenger, 1991), not an individualistic acquisition of knowledge.

Groups are very important in adult and community education. The data shows that the respondents considered that it was important to understand how groups work.

Competence in groupwork entails a capacity to manage difficulties, such as difficult emotions, conflict, confusion, and so on, normal experiences in the views of the respondents. Boal, (1979), whom Gus in particular draws on, argued that learning from

the experience in role play, simulations, exercises and activities, is a practical application of Freire's work (1972) and the group is central to this perspective. The data shows that critical groupwork, of some shade or variety, is a key way to help people engage with critical knowledge, to speak to their own experience and analyse it in terms of the wider social structure, and to help people to develop their own critical voices. Further, the feminists among the interviewees consider that women's groups have a key role in radicalizing the current practice of adult education.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter looks at four key findings, including that of the role of critical adult educators as community activists, taking up Freire's advocacy to reclaim their public roles as intellectuals rather than as mere technicians. It finds that the knowledge base of critical adult educators is crucial in terms of providing content in their teaching, that is, basing their content on 'really useful knowledge'; in updating their own bases, and in developing the students' capacity for critical questioning. Thirdly, the approach of the critical adult educators is vital in subverting the conventional power dynamics of educators and learners, and critical adult educators can enable vulnerable people to access the world of learning and activism by providing a welcoming presence. Finally, it found that the part of critical groupwork is very important in learning groups, helping learners and students to overcome social and personal barriers, finding their voices in safe environment, and developing their critical consciousness. In the next chapter I want to draw out the implications of this study for the knowledge base of critical pedagogy, and the part that discussion, groupwork and experiential learning can play in the work of critical educators.

## Chapter Nine

### Overall Discussion

#### *Introduction*

When I started as an adult educator, in 1985, my area was Women's Studies. On reflection, this accident of time and opportunity, at the border of feminism and adult and community education, has been deeply influential in everything I undertook afterwards. At that time I knew nothing of Freirean liberatory pedagogy, but I intuitively developed a feminist pedagogy, combining the input from my undergraduate studies on de Beauvoir (1989), related readings and experience of women's groups and feminism, with the process that I felt was the best way of doing things. On reflection, this resonated with Thompson's 'really useful knowledge' (1996), together with ways of working with the learning group that enhanced consciousness raising, 'really useful processes', as it were. When I entered the class room for the first time, as an adult educator, I understood that I had the responsibility to enable meaningful connection between the participants including myself; to ensure fair, respectful and equitable dialogue; to resist unequal, hierarchal power relations; to engage with life experience to facilitate consciousness raising. In other words, a women's group process, which integrated the personal and the political, the micro with the macro. When I studied adult and community education at post-graduate level, I recognised that Freirean pedagogy of the oppressed was close to my feminist practice, and was heartened to see it applied to other analyses of oppression, especially poverty. But I was dismayed to discover a complete absence of a gender analysis in Freirean liberatory pedagogy. Indeed, it was as if feminist pedagogy

disappeared off the horizon. Subsequent to that post graduate Diploma in Adult and Community Education, I commenced a Masters in Equality Studies, which included modules in Women's Studies. This led me to think that the institutional context reinforced hierarchical relations between the lecturer and the students, with long lectures, hardly any opportunity for discussion, with no chance at all to speak about life experience. The knowledge base, though, was strongly critical, unreservedly teaching feminisms in all their facets. As a result of these experiences as a learner as well as an educator, assured of the 'really useful knowledge' base, but not so sure about the processes in university-based Women's Studies, I sought to re-iterate feminist influence in critical pedagogy, on the one hand, and to make a strong case for 'really useful processes' to work dynamically with the 'really useful knowledge' base to re-iterate critical adult and community education. This final chapter will review the overall research experience in the undertaking of this thesis. In it, I will locate the research in the wider context, by revisiting the dimensions of the topics: that of adult and community education in Ireland and critical pedagogy, together with the life experience of the interviewees who co-created the climate in which the personal and the political integrate. I will reflect on the wider contexts of the research, and look at the ways in which my perspectives have been challenged. I will reflect on my positioning as a feminist adult educator, and the influence on the research from this positioning. I will discuss the uncovering of a new theory of critical pedagogy grounded in the data gathered from the research cohort, and I look at what aspects of the topics need further research attentions. Finally, I will summarise the thesis and conclude with a reflection.

## ***Wider Context of this Research***

This section will recall briefly at the story of adult and community education in Ireland and the threads of critical adult education that ran through that history that provided the wider context for this study. Chapter One recalled the part that the Roman Catholic Church played in the formation of the field, not only in the values and ethos (Ó Fathaigh, O'Sullivan, 1999), in all aspects of Irish society, from rural development to worker's education. I outlined the role it played in setting up educational institutions for adults, the first examples in Ireland. The trade union movement, in the provision of workers' education, while linked to the UK, did not succeed in putting its stamp on adult and community education in Ireland, in the way the Catholic Church did. Basset *et al* (1989) concurred that the Church was influential and added that the story of adult and community education was difficult to trace, as written records were not easy to come by, until the foundation of the NALA, the Irish National Adult Literacy Association and AONTAS, the Irish National Association of Adult Education. These two organisations succeeded in holding the story of adult and community education and established the milestone which marked the beginning of the era of adult and community education with Freirean underpinnings (Slowey, 1987).

When I reflect on the contextual background and research findings, the key challenge to my world view was the positive role of the Roman Catholic Church on the liberatory models of adult and community education. I had a negative perspective with regards to the church, as my experience as a woman in the 1970s and 1980s was imbued with the institutional church reasserting its power, especially over women's bodies, but also in



other arena, such as health and education. The historical overview showed that many members of the clergy, priests and nuns, were actively promoting social justice adult education, leading the way in establishing national organisations and programmes aimed at empowering people, particularly disenfranchised people living in poverty. In the research findings, also, some of the respondents spoke of the positive experience with clergy at local level. This was completely new to me and it challenged my assumptions quite deeply.

However, the pivotal role of the ethos of the Catholic Church in adult and community education may have provided a partial explanation for a certain antipathy to feminism. The contextual background showed the vast numbers of women involved in adult and community education, but this feminisation does not lead to feminist perspectives.

Zappone (1991), a key advocate of women's community education and feminist spirituality, notes that participants react negatively to the word *feminism*, due to deeply misleading connotations in public discourses with regards to the movement, in spite of the benefits to women, families, community and society.

The second challenge to my world view relates to the late development of adult and community education in Ireland, and how contingent it was on a small group of people. For example, a small group of people, including a small number of religious clergy, were highly instrumental in setting up the two main national associations, in the mid-1970s. The national associations were significant, in that they endeavoured to confirm the need for adult education; to establish the credentials of adult education as a distinct field in its own right; and to set quite a radical (but not feminist, though) agenda for the next thirty years. This surprised me greatly, as I knew some of the male clergy, and felt they were

very conservative. For example, two or three of them always wore the clerical garb, when the trend was to discard it, in the interest of parity. Notwithstanding, though, it is clear from some interviewees, supporting the literature, that they had an emancipatory vision, and the research findings support their advocacy for very disadvantaged people, especially those with literacy difficulties.

The third main challenge to my prior viewpoint is that of the background to the women's community education phenomenon, which, in spite of some research, lacks an historical context. Prior to this research project, I was not really clear about the foundations that nourished the phenomenon. I started in adult and community education in 1985, and at this time, the women's groups had a firm notion of what they wanted from tutors and facilities, as well as their own loose organisational groupings. Yet this phenomenon was just a few years old, and had a strong ethos already, (Slowey, 1987, p. 135). However, it is clear from the context and from some of the interviews that the wider literacy work was very important, not directly, in many cases, but in the development of a liberatory philosophy, and person-centred methods. Thus, when women started organising classes, they employed tutors who had a template to work from. Of course, the phenomenon was much wider than the tutors, but the tutors, in many ways, conveyed the template from group to group.

With regards to the literature review and the wider research agenda in the Irish Republic, I think that this research responds an important gap in the field. As I related, in the literature review, a lot of research in adult and community education in Ireland is focused on its part in tackling inequality particularly gender and class, (Smyth, 1999, Owens, 2000) following on the radical tradition in the United Kingdom, in the 1970s and 1980s

(Lovett *et al*, 1983, Lovett, 1975, Thompson, 1980, Thompson, 1983, Mayo, Thompson, 1995). As such, it shows the role of adult and community education in combating inequality. As such, it bolsters the case for adult and community education to be promoted as a serious intervention in social disadvantage generally, and promoting democratic participation, particularly in urban disadvantaged areas.

The methods of working with learning groups do address the relationship between the participants and the tutor, in that they focus on the fact that they are all adults. But texts on ways of working with adult learning groups, for example, Jacques, (2000) and Rogers (2001) did not demonstrate a *critical* intent, they did not address the wider, macro issues of the relationship between knowledge and power. On the other hand, materials produced by Prendiville, (2004) and Hope and Timmel (1999) were radical, and combine a radical perspective with ways of working with learners. However, those materials did not provide the conceptual context. The gap in the field centred on the critical 'how', that is, how adult and community education worked towards alleviating or combating inequality. This research addressed this gap by focusing on the two aspects of that gap, that of the critical underpinning, and the actual practice, articulated in the interviews

Thus, this served to locate it firmly in the arena of critical pedagogy, integrating the theory and practice. However, while this was a one aspect of this research I consider worthwhile, I think there was another which was more significant for me, that of the integration of feminist perspectives with critical adult and community education.

## ***Feminist Perspectives on Critical Adult and Community Education***

As I explored in the contextualisation of this research, I was really surprised with the discovery that feminist ways of working did not appear significantly in the literature on critical pedagogy, except obviously in literature dedicated to feminist pedagogy. Torres (1998), for example, talked to critical educators, but he dialogued with three women out of a total of eleven interviewees, in spite of the feminisation of education generally. The might mean that women were not critical in general. However, on reflection, I did think it was due to the masculinist orientation, rather than the lack of critical women. In Darder, *et al*, (2003), the distribution is better, but very few men write about gender, except in the context of sexuality. Within the research, I pointed out that almost all the women spoke about the positive influence of feminism, but none of the men did. However, the findings show how central the feminist oriented processes were, and how transferable to other social analyses of oppression and inequality. That is, just as some texts on processes avoid taking up an ideological positioning, (Jacques, 2000, Rogers, 2001, for example) and thus maintained the *status quo*, (Freire, 1972), the processes developed in women's community education had a distinct and explicit ideology, and this was carried through in adult and community education generally. Without this distinct ideological positioning, while a person-centred process may be employed, it did not connect with the political: the micro is addressed, but the macro, was again avoided. Feminist positioning ensured that the macro and micro are integrated.

When I reflected on this aspect of the research, I consider this was a contribution to the field. It did not get entangled with what Bartolomé (2003) calls the 'methods fetish', that

is, the set of pedagogical of tried and tested methods of teaching specific subjects, regardless of the specific learners' needs. This research demonstrated that the ways of working with learning groups were responsive, varied and flexible, but remained resolutely radical. This section looked at the integration of feminist processes, leading to the next section, which proposes a new theory grounded in the data, of critical pedagogy.

### ***Towards a New Theory of Critical Pedagogy in Adult and Community Education***

This research identified a number of characteristics which delineated my proposal towards a new theory of critical pedagogy in adult and community education. The theoretical construct consisted of the examination of the characteristics which are based on the concepts that provide a 'whole picture' perspective of critical pedagogy, combining theory and practice, personal and political, agency and structure, centred on praxis. Praxis was contingent on the critical perspectives and a social justice agenda. The research showed that many of the interviewees had direct experience of oppression, while others empathised with those who had experienced oppression. This personal quality of empathic identification inclined towards a parity of power, and as such, quite different to the relationship of the powerful group acting upon the subordinate group, or, in the case of education, the authoritarian educator knowing what would be best for the students. Thus, an essential characteristic was that of the personal perspective of the educators, underpinned by direct experience or empathic identification of oppression.

The next concept is that of 'really useful knowledge' (Thompson, 1996). The critical knowledge base was essential in terms of the reflective dimension of praxis. That is,

critical reflection needed to refer to a wider base. Otherwise, reflection remained within a closed circuit, as it were. While critical thinking helped to make the familiar strange, and it was vital to enter into new realms of knowledge too, to supplement the existing knowledge base. Critical knowledge for politicisation connected with the macro, and critical educators, equipped with their perspectives, created the clear connection between personal and political, agency and structure, subjectivity and objectivity, operating at the borderlines, through human-scale, student-centred methods and processes, derived from the template developed in women's studies. This template enabled learners to engage with their own life experience, working through critical knowledge which the educator conveys, leading towards of the outcome of raised consciousness.

Consciousness raising, as an essential outcome of critical pedagogy in adult and community education, resides in the personal, but connects with the political and social. Critical pedagogy, as the literature showed, was very clear about the desired purpose and outcomes of education, but sometimes this was overshadowed in more immediate concerns, such as passing an examination, or acquiring a skill for employment, on the part of the learners. Thus, adult educators have to 'hold' the social justice purpose; that is, they needed integrate it with their whole practice, so that it remained current on the curriculum, until the students were enabled to take it on. This led to the next element, that of the skills that students needed in order to take on the social justice agenda, skills that adult educators must demonstrate necessarily. The most crucial skill is that of critical thinking: that is, the kind of thinking which students learn in order to look at new knowledge in an analytical manner, drawing on social, gender, ethnic and racial perspectives. Critical thinking was developed through discussion, dialogue, creative and group process, and critical thinking underpinned reflexivity, in which students, facilitated

by adult educators, engaged the outcomes of their thinking with their world views. This led to the final element, that of the community of praxis.

When Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the concept of Community of Practice to describe the social aspect of learning, they managed to shift theories of learning from the psychological to the social. However, while this was a welcome move, it did not go far enough for critical pedagogy in adult and community education. On the one part, it acknowledged the community aspect of teaching and learning, challenging the representation of adult educators isolated from their peers, solo with the learning group. Further, it re-enforced the place of dialogue, discussion and groupwork in learning, subverting the representation of the learner as a solo recipient of teaching, in competition with other solo learners. However, I proposed an extended dimension to the social aspect of learning, the *community of praxis*, in which both educators and learners belonged to co-created community of praxis, as activist educators and learners. This community of praxis is constantly reviewed and re-created, with new members taking up their place in widening participation.

Therefore, in this thesis, I proposed a new theory of critical pedagogy in adult and community education. As I said, Ireland has been through tremendous social upheaval in the past thirty years or so, including the war in Northern Ireland, the decline of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, the women's movement, the advent of free education, a set of conditions which marked it as different to other cultures, which has moulded the adult and community education workers who participated in this research. Their reflections ground this research, providing the data that underpins this proposal.

The data uncovered a *praxis pedagogy*, in which adult educators align themselves to ways of working for social justice, through the teaching/learning consciousness raising interaction, hinging on the participants' life experience, and enacted in critical questioning, dialogue, groupwork and other active and creative methods, and underpinned by critical knowledge. This is *similar* to traditional adult and community education, which managed to work with emotions, personal difficulties on the part of students, and presented a friendly non-threatening presence in the classroom. However, this *differs* from the traditional adult and community education in a number of key ways: it is critical, underpinned by the really useful knowledge base, including social and gender analysis, and with an ultimate social purpose, in addition to the more immediate purposes, like qualifications and skills. The meta-skills that were exchanged in the teaching/learning interaction included critical reflection, critical questioning and social learning. Critical adult educators were also framed differently, in that they purposefully identified with oppressed people, either from their own experience or through empathic identification and they purposefully subverted the conventional power dynamics between educators and learners.

This is similar to the more usual critical pedagogy, in that it worked towards the critical analysis of society, the distribution of power, and the inequity and inequality that emanates structurally. However, it also *differs* in that it grounds it in ways of working, really useful processes, using the feminist and women's studies template, as well as methods derived from community studies, like arts and drama. Further, it avoids the 'methods fetish', constantly re-examining and re-evaluating the ways of working, with students, but also through the membership of the community of praxis.



This section proposed a new theory of critical pedagogy in adult and community education, grounded in the data, gathered from adult education workers, moulded by the particular set of conditions that prevailed in Ireland over the past thirty years or so. The next section briefly looked at the implications for future research, identifying a number of areas that need attention.

### ***Future Work***

As I reflected on this research a number of areas that require further research emerged strongly. This section explored these areas, and looks at them with a suggested order or priority. These areas are specific to Ireland, as this country had a specific configuration, which shaped adult and community education, notwithstanding that influence from outside were and remain very significant, for example, the women's movement, the development of the idea of lifelong learning and communitarianism. The key issue that emerged for me from this research is the need to gather data from adult students on critical pedagogy, to analyse it from their perspectives. I considered that the data from the newcomer adult educators brought a fresh perspective on the topic which is so familiar to the longer established educators, and it seemed to me that students would have deeper insights also. Further, it would reinforce the parity of power, to develop theory from learners' perspective. However, other areas also emerged in the conducting of this research, and these include the analytical history of the field, making a case for adult pedagogy as distinct from other pedagogies, research into the role that it could play in civil society and citizenship and finally, research enquiring in what ways participation in adult education enhanced the quality of life for the population at large.

In Ireland, as the contextualising background and literature showed, has focused on the impact of adult education in society, in combating poverty, in including marginalised men, etc. However, data has been gathered from adult learners in the form of course evaluations, and so on, but that data has not been coalesced to create a full picture of the opinions of adult learners. Data selected from critical adult education programmes could provide a rich source of knowledge on the experience of being a learner in the co-creation of critical adult education, in the dynamic interaction between educators and learners, in the community of praxis. I considered that this would be a very valuable adjunct to this research, and help to establish a distinct identity for critical adult and community education, with this fuller account.

The next priority as I see it, is an analytical history of adult and community education, to look at the ideological underpinnings of the different strands, that of university based adult education, workers' education, both Catholic sponsored and trade union sponsored; adult literacy education, the provision through the statutory education committees, provision in social groups, and women's community education, and others provisions. This analytical history would be necessary in order to have a fuller picture of the sources for the field, and to trace the trajectories in which it finds itself now.

The third piece of future research work is into adult pedagogy, as a distinct, but related, field in education. In Ireland, the qualifications for adult educators are under review, at the moment, but the qualification for second level teaching is the preferred qualification. Research into adult pedagogy would strengthen the case for statutory recognition of a distinct approach. This research ought to focus on what adult learners need in adult educators (not pre-empting the conclusions), including the right to be treated as an equal,

the right to hold opinions, the right to engage with their own myriad life experiences in the light of the content of the course. This is not part of the training to be a secondary school teacher. In addition, secondary school teachers are trained to teach a subject, but adult educators are more likely to apply an overall approach to teaching adults, and incorporate the subject into this approach.

Research into critical citizenship required insight into the role that citizenship plays in democracy, especially in a democracy like Ireland which had had practically one-party government for the majority of the time since the foundation of the state, in 1922, alongside heavy influence by the transnational Roman Catholic Church, at least until the mid-1980s, in the case of the Republic; and the domination by Protestantisms in the politics of Northern Ireland. This enquiry hinged on research into critical thinking, to re-situate it in critical theory and the pursuit of social justice. This was to head off the direction in which critical thinking was heading, and continues to be pulled, which reduced critical thinking to a bland debate, of for and against, the logical argument, in contrast to the model proposed in critical adult and community education, the capacity to tap into the macro aspects of society, to think independently and to draw on critical knowledge based. This required reflexivity, in which citizens can explore their own perspectives, why they developed these perspectives and in what way do they orientate their work towards a more just democracy.

Finally, research into quality of life issues is contingent in adult and community education. This occurred to me when I was interviewing the cohort, and they spoke of the rewarding and meaningful aspects of working in this field. The way they spoke about it was so different to the anecdotal accounts of secondary school teachers and academics,

experiencing stress and anxiety as part of their working lives. However, I recognised that I do not have a full picture of the lives of other educators, so this may perception may not be accurate. In addition to this angle, it would also be interesting to look at participants' well being, arising from adult education. This particular angle may be a bit extreme, but I think with the new focus in psychology on wellness and happiness, rather than illness, depression and anxiety, and other psychological conditions, I would be interested in looking at how participants benefit from adult education, not in qualifications, employment or social status, but in developing themselves and in deepening their lives. This would link with the critical citizenship aspect, combining reflexivity and critical thinking to enhance humanity.

These are areas of research I am interested in, arising from my reflections on this research, and which I consider would add to the findings in this project. The next section will conclude the thesis by summarising the document and reflecting finally on the experience.

## ***Conclusion***

Thompson (1982) recalled an incident that happened when she was a young student. She said to one of her teachers that she wanted to help people, and the answer she got was to work on the buses, as a conductress. I don't know what would have happened to adult education if she opted for that career, but it would have been deprived of a great advocate. The work for social justice was complicated, but for me, adult and community education has been deeply meaningful in terms of making a contribution to help people,

in fundamental ways, which ensured that they were included on the journey, and that they developed the wherewithal to do it themselves.

This research aimed to address a gap between theory and practice in adult and community education in Ireland. In the field, the process was as important as the content, yet this was a relatively well-kept secret in the wider education community. On the other hand, thinking from that wider community was not always meaningful to the practitioners in adult and community education. This research took the concept of critical pedagogy from the mainstream education context, and examined it through the lens of critical adult education.

The thesis recalled the story of the Irish version of adult and community education, over the recent past. It reviewed the context of inequalities that Irish citizens experienced, especially in the midst of a certain prosperity, and looked at the ways in which critical adult and community education could address them. To that end, I examined the part that critical pedagogy played in acting upon the world and reviewed praxis and critical consciousness in that context. In order to understand how praxis could work on the world, I investigated the area of macro/micro integration. The conceptual framework encompassed critical pedagogy, praxis, critical consciousness, and the relationships to social change. I drew on new social movements and feminist scholarship to illuminate the ways of acting upon the world.

To collect the data, I asked fifteen people from the field, all of whom had the reputations for critical analyses of society. My positioning as a feminist adult educator heavily influenced the research methodology. The research was designed to elicit and facilitate

the interviewees, and consequently, I opted for a life history approach, with a partial grounded theory element, with feminist undertones. My research questions aimed to uncover how the interviewees became critical, in the first place, and secondly, what they thought critical practice consisted of, in the experience as educators, learners, policy makers and leaders in the field.

I analysed the interviews by developing themes, and sub-sections of themes, and eventually categories which clarified and revealed the findings. These findings included the relationships between the personal and the political, on the part of the interviewees, and their engagement with participative methods and processes in the learning environment.

I saw the community of critical educators as a *community of praxis*, in that the process was communal and it maintained both reflexivity and activism. I found that the practice of critical educators was a counterpart to 'really useful knowledge' and termed it 'really useful process'. Finally, I concluded by identifying the next stage, which included an extended theory of critical pedagogy in adult and community education, deeper analyses of critical thinking and an analytical history of the field.

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