

**LEARNING TO CARE:
ADULT EDUCATION AND GENDERED OCCUPATIONS**

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the MA in Adult and
Community Education

Department of Adult and Community Education
National University of Ireland Maynooth

2006

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped with this study, in particular the women of North Clondalkin from whom I have learned so much over the years.

Special thanks to all the women who took part in my research for their time and their willingness to share their stories with me. My special thanks to my colleague Margaret for all her encouragement.

I want to thank all the men in my life. William, for his ongoing encouragement and pride in my work. Colm, for his love, support and sheer hard work in facilitating this work. To my two beautiful boys Cathal and Turlough for never letting me lose sight of my priorities.

I owe a special thanks to my supervisor Anne Ryan for all her helpful advice and encouragement.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Shelia Kenny who once told me that you can never be educated enough to rear children.

ABSTRACT

This study concerns second chance education initiatives and gendered employment. The focus of the research is on women re-engaging in adult education who chose professional childcare as a vocational option. Childcare as a gendered, low pay, low status occupation yields poor rewards for women who have invested in a childcare qualification. Educating women for low paid work risks reproducing existing social hierarchies.

Policy and provision in second chance adult education are examined in light of their broader economic and social objectives. The study concludes that although economic objectives inform service provision adult education has not lost sight of its social goals. However, adult education providers do not consider the service has a responsibility in relation to links with gendered low pay employment.

The study establishes that the childcare industry is a gendered low pay occupational sector. Government policy views childcare as a labour market activation strategy contributing to its poor status.

Women chose childcare because it offers part-time flexible employment which fits in with caring responsibilities, while reflecting caring aspects of their identities.

Social and cultural capital is identified as important factors in influencing the women's ability to use childcare as a stepping stone to more equitable employment.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction:

Adult education is seen as a means of addressing some of the economic and social inequalities in our society. Access to information, employment and financial stability secures individuals' positions in becoming active citizens and also helps ensure the progress of future generations.

Second chance education through the VTOS, BTEI and BTEA initiatives is aimed at providing opportunities for specific groups of adults to engage with education with the aim of increasing their life chances. The EU strategy for a knowledge-based society informs much of the policy around the provision of second chance education but also stresses the need to equip people with the education and skills necessary to meet the labour market demand for highly skilled workers. In this sense, much of the provision through adult second chance education appears to be focused on building these skills. Critics of adult education policy informed by the aims of the knowledge-based society suggest that the policy is driven by economic rather than social aspirations.

As a tutor to adults engaged in second chance education initiatives, I have a concern about my role in relation to working with adults who are re-engaging in education through courses which are linked to gendered low pay work. One such area is professional childcare, an occupation that now requires a high level of qualification yet rewards workers with low pay and poor status.

Over the past number of years anecdotal information would seem to suggest that there is an increasing number of adults expressing an interest in returning to education to pursue a qualification in childcare. As a gendered occupation childcare risks rewarding its workers poorly and offers little by way of a career structure. Previously the sector was unregulated but recent legislation aims to increase the requirements for childcare workers to be qualified at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework.

A level 5 qualification requires a high level of work and commitment from a learner who may not have completed upper secondary level education. In this research I aim to

enquire into the reasons why women returning to education through second chance education initiatives chose to study for a qualification in childcare.

There are a number of aspects to this question. The nature and complexities of the childcare profession and the rewards it offers workers must be established. Learners as individuals make decisions about what course they wish to engage with, and the factors influencing these decision must be examined. Childcare education may produce conflict between the broader social and economic objectives of adult education. These questions relating to childcare, the learners and adult education that underpin this thesis, are as follows:

Childcare profession

- Is the childcare profession gendered and classed?
- Are economic and policy issues contributing to the gendered and classed nature of childcare?

The learners

- Is there a link between the construction of identity and the choice of childcare as an occupation?
- Are there economic and social factors that influence the decision to study childcare?
- How does social and cultural capital influence outcomes for learners?

Adult education

- Adult education policy incorporates economic and social objectives, how are these objectives met in childcare education?
- Does educating adults for entry into gendered occupations risk reproducing existing social hierarchies?
- Adult education strives to emancipate learners and increase their life chances. Do childcare courses achieve this aim?

1.2. Structure of the Thesis:

The thesis is structured around three key areas outlined above.

Chapter Two will examine literature on gender issues in the work place in Ireland and issues relating to the childcare industry. Policy issues in adult education and vocational education and training are explored in relation to their economic and social agenda. Issues relating to the learners including literature on women's experience of returning to education and employment in Ireland is examined. The concept of cultural capital and the construction of identity are explored as factors influencing the women's choice of course and career.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in the research, details background information about the centre where the courses take place and profiles the women in the study.

Chapter Four presents and analyses the research findings structured around themes emerging from the research.

Chapter Five structures conclusions from the findings and analysis under the key areas outlined above and proposes recommendations for addressing some of the issues that arise.

This study concerns women on second chance education initiatives. There are a number of different initiatives which people dependent on social welfare or with poor levels of basic educational skills can avail of. The following paragraphs outline the different initiatives and the groups they target.

1.3. Second Chance Education Initiatives:

In 2004, 29,318 adults were involved in second chance education initiatives throughout the country.

There are a number of initiatives run by the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Department of Education aimed at encouraging social welfare recipient to engage in adult education. These initiatives include:

- The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)
- The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)
- The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA):

The BTEA is an initiative funded by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. It is a scheme for unemployed people, lone parents and people with disabilities who are getting certain payments from the Department. Through the scheme people can opt to study full time while retaining their social welfare benefit. Learners on BTEA can study at second or third level, the courses must be full-time and lead to a recognised certificate. The second level options include Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses (usually accredited by FETAC), City and Guilds or National Diploma (BETEC). Participants are free to apply for the course of their choice in the location of their choice.

The most recent statistics available show that 5,247 people availed of BTEA in 2004 (DSFA 2004).

The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS):

The VTOS initiative is funded by the Department of Education and Science, it provides second chance education opportunities for people on social welfare.

The Vocational Training Opportunities (VTOS) provides courses of up to two years duration for unemployed people over 21 years of age and who are at least six months unemployed. The courses are education led, vocationally-oriented and progression focused and they concentrate on the development of employment related skills. Including technological and business skills as well as key personal and social transferable skills (Extract from EU progress report 2001 p1).

VTOS courses are run in dedicated VTOS centres or community colleges, comprehensives and further education colleges. The range of provision includes basic education, Junior/ Leaving Certificate, FETAC vocational options, enterprise and Fast Track to Information Technology (FIT). Core VTOS groups are on courses specifically designed for VTOS participants and dispersed VTOS allows learners to enrol on courses provided as part of the institutions normal provision such as PLC courses. In 2005, 5,538 adults engaged in second chance education through VTOS.

Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)

The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) is put forward as a more flexible opportunity for learners to access adult education. It has as its overall objective to:

Increase the participation of young people and adults with less than upper secondary education in a range of flexible learning opportunities (DES 2002).

The BTEI specifically targets the most marginalised and excluded members of Irish society including long-term unemployed, disadvantaged men and women, lone parents, Travellers, homeless people, drug users, ex-offenders, people with disabilities and people for whom English is not the mother tongue. In 2004, 16,155 adults engaged in BTEI through the VECs and 2,277 people participated through the community strand. The overall figure for adults engaging in these second chance initiatives in 2004 was 29,318.

At present there are no centrally available statistics which outline the specific areas of study and the number of learners involved in them so it is difficult to ascertain the popularity of one occupational area over another from available statistics.

Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLC):

Many of the adults on BTEA and dispersed and core VTOS are engaged in courses that qualify as PLCs, 40% of learners taking PLC courses are aged 25 or over and the likelihood is that a substantial number of these learners are on the BTEA scheme.

The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC):

FETAC is the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland. FETAC awards certificates for qualifications at levels 3,4,5, and 6 on the National qualifications Framework (NQF) with levels one and two coming on stream shortly. Level Four is equivalent to Leaving Certificate and Level Five is Post Leaving Certificate on the NQF. In 2004, 1,505 learners were awarded a full Level 5 certificate in Childcare, the highest number of awards made in any specific certificate title from a total of 8,468 certificates awarded (FETAC summary analysis of results 2004). This figure does not include the number of learners who completed one or more childcare modules on a part-time basis.

Mandatory childcare qualifications:

At present a childcare qualification is not necessary to work in the sector. The childcare (pre-school services) regulations (1996) recommend “appropriate experience in caring for children and /or an appropriate qualification in childcare” for those working in the sector. Many workers in the childcare sector do not hold any qualification. However, the National Childcare Strategy (2002) recommends that childcare workers have a qualification at Level 5 or equivalent. Some of the increase in the numbers of people taking courses in childcare is therefore due to people who have been working in the area for many years without qualifications and are now seeking to gain the qualification in order to keep their jobs.

1.4. Policy Issues in Adult Education:

The European perspective and knowledge-based society;

Increasing the education and employment skills of the population is consistent with the EU strategy. The European Commission Communication *Making a European Area of Lifelong learning a Reality* (2001) sets out to identify strategies for fostering lifelong learning for all:

This mandate confirms lifelong learning as a key element of the strategy, devised at Lisbon to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world” (p 3).

The EU is positioning itself for a future ensuring the expansion of economic growth for its member states and a powerful position in global economics and politics. In order to sustain this economic growth, the drive is toward creating and maintaining a sophisticated labour force. This strategy demands the development of the populations as a human resource equipped with the transferable skills and knowledge that ensure mobility and adaptability in meeting the challenges and changing requirements of a dynamic knowledge-based society.

Labour shortages and competency gaps risk limiting the capacity of the European Union for further growth, at any point in the economic cycle. Lifelong learning, therefore, has a key role to play in developing a coordinated strategy for employment and particularly for promoting a skilled and trained workforce (European Commission, 2001 p 6).

The European strategy maintains that adult education in the context of lifelong learning is key to the development of this knowledge-based society, and all member states are obliged to develop educational policies in line with these EU objectives. The prevailing objective is to invest in people's skills to ensure economic growth, "... competitive advantage is increasingly dependant on investment in human capital. Knowledge and competences are, therefore, also a powerful engine for economic growth" (p 6).

The Irish response:

EU strategy for building the knowledge-based society is echoed in the government publication *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* (2000). The paper recognises that:

The adult Education Sector has a major contribution to make to meeting the skills requirements of a rapidly changing workforce, and to the dominant national concerns of social cohesion and equity in the emergence of a broadly inclusive and pro-active civil society (p 26).

One of the central recommendations of the White Paper is for the provision of a comprehensive framework for second chance education for those with less than upper secondary education. The VTOS and BTEI initiatives form the backbone of this provision. The White Paper confirms that:

..the policy objectives for adult education should embrace personal, cultural and social goals as well as economic ones, and be seen as promoting collective as well as personal advancement (2000 p 13).

Adult education policy in Ireland therefore aims to ensure the development of skills required to meet the demands of the labour force, but also to generate a more inclusive society through the provision of community and second chance education.

This research will explore the influence of EU and Government policy on learners engaging in childcare courses through second chance education.

1.5. Adult Education for Emancipation:

The policy objectives of the White Paper on Adult Education suggest that adult education has the capacity to enhance personal and community development and tackle social exclusion. Adult education has the capacity to enhance the individuals' social

and cultural capital and produce positive change in marginalised communities. In the effort to equip people with skills necessary for the work force adult education can lose sight of these broader possibilities, whereas theories of radical adult education place personal transformation and social change at the centre of the education process:

“Radical adult education is underpinned by the idea that change is possible. Critically thinking people are agents of change” (Ryan 2001 p 22).

Radical adult education has been influenced by critical theory from the Frankfurt school and the work of Paulo Friere. Critical theory encompasses many different ways of viewing the structures that govern our social world. Rooted in Marxist philosophy, critical theory is concerned with the inequalities perpetuated by capitalism and seeks to critique the “the ways in which people accept as normal a world characterized by massive inequalities and the systemic exploitation of the many by the few” (Brookfield 2005 p 2). Critical theory in adult education suggests ways “that adult education can contribute to building a society organized according to democratic values of fairness, justice and compassion” (*ibid* p7-8).

1.6. Gender and Employment:

According to Tovey and Share (2000) female participation in the labour force in Ireland although rising, is still not on a par with European averages and women’s earning power is less than that of men: “women’s hourly earnings across all types of industry are still only four fifths of men’s” (Tovey and Share 2000 p 253). Occupational segregation is a feature of the Irish labour market particularly in areas such as childcare where over 98 per cent of the workers are women. According to Parr (2000):

In societies where the dominant ideology is patriarchal and the argument that gender differences exist ‘naturally’ are influential, women’s happiness and fulfilment is seen by both man and women, to be located in the caring for others (p 29).

Patriarchal discourses influence the positioning of women both in the private sphere of the home and the public world of work: “with women taking the primary responsibility for domestic and caring roles within the home and also being primarily located within the service and caring industries in the world of paid work” (p 29).

Patriarchal discourse ensures the subordination of women in our society. Adult education has the capacity to enable women to recognise and challenge traditional cultural expectations around the role of women in the home and in the labour force. Conversely adult education initiatives aimed at training women for traditional feminised occupations such as childcare risk reinforcing traditional gender inequalities.

1.7. Summary:

This chapter outlined the aims of the research and introduced the key themes of the research including; policy issues in adult education, the capacity of adult education for emancipation and gender issues in employment. Key terms and provision in second chance education were also explained.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Childcare Profession:

Occupational segregation and the gender pay gap:

Women of all ages and educational backgrounds are still discriminated against in the work place. This is to a large extent reinforced through gendered occupational segregation. Occupational segregation along the lines of gender and the associated gender wage gap is a worldwide phenomenon.

Despite European Union Equality directives occupational segregation and the associated gender wage gap remains high in Ireland and other EU countries indicating that policy issues have failed to have any significant impact. According to the ERSI report *Impact Evaluation of the European Employment Strategy in Ireland*:

Overall, the very small decline in the gender pay gap from 1997 to 2000, suggests the employment strategy and EAP's have had little impact on this important area of gender inequality (2004 p 6).

The ERSI report (2004) examined data from the Living in Ireland Surveys, 1994, 1997 and 2000. During this period of time female participation in the labour force increased from 37 per cent of women in 1996 to 54 per cent in 2001. The report found that there is an overall decline in the gender wage gap during this period. However there are different gaps for different groupings.

The gender wage gap in Ireland in 2000 was 14.7 per cent. When other variables such as age, occupation, education and work experience were controlled for the report found that women get paid 12 per cent less than men. The male /female wage gap widens with age, it is narrowest for those with degrees and wider for those with only second level qualifications. Women are over represented in some of the lowest paying occupations:

There is also a high concentration of women in clerical occupations, which have below average pay levels and in sales/service occupations, which have the lowest levels of pay and a wide male/female wage gap (p 71).

Although the report does not isolate childcare as an occupational category, in the services and sales sector women earned 64 per cent the hourly rate for men.

New equality legislation has a limited effect on the gender pay gap particularly in gender segregated occupations:

Neither the original anti-discrimination legislation nor the new Employment Equality Act refer to a job classification or evaluation system, which limits the extent to which different jobs can be compared on the basis of 'equal value' (p 77).

Pay and conditions for childcare workers cannot be compared with that of other occupations where men are employed and therefore equality legislation cannot address the pay issues in gendered occupations.

According to the report:

..two thirds of female employment remained concentrated in the same small number of immediate occupational groups in 1991, 1996 and 2001: clerical and office jobs, sales, health, personal services, and teaching (p 7).

It goes on to say that:

In 2001 there were more than four times as many male-dominated as female-dominated occupations. This means that the majority of men in Ireland do not face much competition for jobs from women and it has the advantage for men that female dominated occupations tend to have lower pay, lower status, and less opportunities for advancement than male dominated occupations (p 7).

This discourse of men's favourable position is spread throughout the labour force:

The Irish labour market is highly segregated by sex both horizontally, in that men and women tend to be concentrated in different occupations, and vertically in the sense that within occupations women tend to cluster at lower levels of the occupational hierarchy (p 69).

The situation is a global one. Although Ireland, as a developed economy, offers opportunity to women across all occupational sectors we have seen that women have not been able to access an equal platform with men. According to Bierema (2001) on a world wide scale: "Low paid women are clustered into service sector jobs which pay lower wages. Women receive less pay and experience greater rates of unemployment than men do worldwide" (p 54). The ERSI (2004) report concluded that:

The increased participation of women in the Irish Labour force in recent years appears to be associated with some reduction in the sex stereotyping of occupations, but occupational segregation has proved remarkably persistent despite the existence of anti-discrimination, equal pay, and equal employment

opportunities policies designed to eliminate sex segregation in employment” (p 92).

Sixty eight per cent of VTOS participants are women. Choices of courses in the clerical and services sectors account for 75 per cent of FETAC qualifications awarded in 2004. These sectors employ more women than men and have a wider gender pay gap.

Childcare as “Women’s work”:

It is difficult to isolate childcare as an occupation in the ESRI (2004) report as it is placed in the category “Personal services and childcare workers”. In 2001, 14 per cent of women in the labour force were employed in this sector – the third biggest grouping after clerical and office workers (19.4 per cent) and sales occupations (15.6 per cent). In 2001, 66.1 per cent of workers in this sector were women, during the period 1996 – 2001 male participation in this sector grew by 22 per cent and women’s by 52 per cent. This may be due to the rise in employment in the childcare sector and women moving into “personal services” areas previously associated with men. Whatever the reason for the influx of women into this area it is obviously a growth area and it is being increasingly feminised.

Childcare as gendered and classed:

According to the *National Childcare Census Report Baseline Data 1999 – 2000* only 1.3 per cent of those employed in the sector were male. This overwhelmingly supports the notion that childcare is a gendered occupation. The report also states that just 20 per cent of those employed in the sector are full-time child carers. Six years ago just over half of childcare workers earned between €18,000 and €24,000, a third earned less than €18,000 and only four per cent earned between €30,000 and €40,000. According to the census 17.2 per cent of childcare staff were on Community Employment (CE) schemes or Job Initiative (JI) schemes while 53.9 per cent of staff work part-time. Childcare in Ireland is a growth area and there is a constant demand for qualified workers. However a look at the childcare positions advertised on the current FAS (2nd April 2006) website show a selection of positions for qualified childcare assistants (FETAC Level 5) with starting salaries of between €7.65 and €9.00 per hour. The demand for childcare workers has not led to an increase in pay levels.

The fact that childcare work commands such low pay supports the notion that occupations with a predominantly female workforce attract lower pay and lower status. If working in childcare commands lower earnings than a grade 3 clerical assistant (Childcare Census Report 2000) and an hourly rate that is close to the minimum wage and yet requires increasing levels of education and responsibility, why do so many women returning to education choose to enrol in childcare courses?

Although there are no figures which reflect the socio-economic background or social class of childcare workers. Osgood (2005) argues that “the classed nature of the profession provides an equally convincing explanation for the low status and poor working conditions educators experience” (p 290) . Osgood undertook a critical discourse analysis of the British Governments recruitment drive for occupations in the childcare – or what she terms “educare” sector. Osgood argues that the rhetoric around the recruitment campaign gives the impression:

..that childcare careers are trivialized and positioned as ‘default’ careers that are available to anyone who has some spare time on their hands and unlikely to have the education and social capital needed to gain ‘real’ employment (2005 p 291).

The numbers of workers on CE and JI schemes and part-time and unqualified workers in childcare seems to reflect Osgood’s analysis that childcare is not considered as a real career.

Concerns about women in the labour market have brought urgency to the expansion of the childcare sector in Ireland as reflected in the National Childcare Strategy, recommendations for the sector include the necessity of providing a ‘quality’ service to children in full-time day care. There is also a concern about the level of pre-school education in Ireland compared to our European counterparts. The emphasis is now on staff training and quality control.

According to the OECD *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Ireland* (2004) “Improving training, professional development and career prospects in the childcare sector must be seen as a key issue in the future” (p 60). This elevated professional status, however, is still not reflected in rates of pay or status echoing what Osgood (2005) argues as:

Childcare is beginning to feel more like a ‘real’ job in terms of the pressure and expectation to perform beyond the biological predisposition to simply care for

young children – whilst at the same time still retaining inadequate pay and poor status (p 291).

The need for a Level 5 qualification for future work in childcare places huge demands on unqualified childcare workers. It also diminishes the value of the skills and experience that these women have acquired through their work.

Government policy on childcare:

According to Coakley (2005) in the government's Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP): "childcare is framed as a labour market equality strategy" (p 20). Childcare is seen as a significant barrier to women becoming active in the labour market. Funding measures put in place for childcare provision are seen as a way of achieving gender equality in the labour force. Irish government policy is at odds with other European countries where the emphasis is on the child's right to care. Coakley gives the example of Finland, where "The policy has the dual aim of supporting parents in their caring responsibilities and promoting the development of children" (p 26). In Ireland at present there is minimal state provision for the education and development of children under school-going age. Pre-school services are provided on a private or voluntary basis, with some funding for services in disadvantaged communities. It is perhaps problematic that what could be termed as early childhood education provision – such as that available in pre-schools and play groups has been lumped in with childcare, which is necessary as a support to working parents. Most of the recent childcare funding has been in the form of capital grants to increase the supply of childcare in the private sector. Accordingly, Coakley adds that: "Childcare is constructed unproblematically as any other market-based service, thus fracturing the link between care and family and its importance and place in peoples lives" (2005 p 21).

Childcare provision in disadvantaged areas, which is part funded by the state is further undermined by the use of CE and JI workers as staff. A report by the NESF (2005) recommended that CE workers in early childhood care and education settings should be replaced by a social economy type model that support essential services in the community.

The childcare debate continues to be a contentious issue for women and the state. The women involved in the study are in a unique position in that they are part of the problem: issues around the care of their children cause dilemmas and barriers to their

participation in education and employment. They are also perceived as the solution in their capacity to provide affordable childcare for other women.

2.2. Adult Education:

Lifelong learning:

The communication from the European Commission *Making a European Area of Life*

Long Learning a Reality defines life long learning as:

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective (2001 p 14).

The document confirms lifelong learning as a “key element of the strategy, devised at Lisbon to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world” (p 9). The definition of lifelong learning offered here is broad and covers all aspects of learning including learning for work and learning for living. Adult education is just one aspect of life long learning yet much of the debate around lifelong learning has focused on adult education and training. Critics of lifelong learning policy maintain that the real focus is on serving the needs of the state and economy. According to Murphy(2000):

Lifelong learning is rather a manifestation of the industrialisation of education, a provider of a supply-side education in a speededup capitalist political economy. National and institutional policies of lifelong learning offer up a flexible citizenry and workforce in the pursuit of selective interests under the guise of an empowering and progressive education for all (p 172).

Jackson (2003) suggests that:

The contexts for lifelong learning are set by the state, by employers, by powerful institutions, and life long learning can be a mechanism for social control and continued exclusion, establishing existing inequalities even more firmly (p 366).

Second chance education, although voluntary, targets specific individuals. Education is seen as the means of restoring these people to active positions within the economy. For the most part, the role of providing second chance education is attributed to institutions such as VECs as an extension of their role in mainstream education. From this point of view, second chance education is embedded in the practices of powerful structures and institutions.

Jackson (2003) argues that where working class women are concerned: "...structural and material differences have become lost in a discourse of individualism that pervades the lifelong learning debate"(p 365). However, second chance education provision does aim to address some of these barriers in the provision of funded educational opportunities for groups with differential access to resources, in the interest of social inclusion.

Human Capital and Vocational Education and Training;

According to Coakley: "the European perspective is one in which paid work is seen as the key to participation and social inclusion"(2005 p 6). As our labour market demands workers with increasingly complex skills providing opportunities for people to acquire marketable skills is crucial for the economy.

Many courses provided through VTOS and BTEI in the formal education sector can be classified as Vocational Education and Training (VET) and sit happily on the lifelong learning continuum.

VET involves learning which is directly associated with work, and would seem to be the most desirable component of the knowledge-based economy According to Anderson, Brown and Rushbrook (2004) VET is a contested topic:

The vocational education dimension is emphasised by those who contend that VET is or should be about the holistic and integrated development of underpinning knowledge and broad-based, transferable work and life skills. The training dimension tends to be emphasised by those who believe that VET should address itself exclusively to the acquisition of a relatively narrow band of employment-related or job-specific skills and competencies (p 234).

The former position leaves room for critical reflection and echoes some of the broader priority areas of the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) including consciousness raising, citizenship, cohesion, competitiveness, cultural development and community building. The FETAC driven accreditation system which requires specific learning outcomes related to vocationally led skills, risks lending itself to the latter position. According to Anderson et al (2004) vocational training has become a priority for governments, especially in the case of developing economies like Ireland. Our expanding economy is dependent on highly skilled workers and as a result of globalization and outsourcing, our economy is dependant on the production of 'human capital':

Hence 'Skills formation' becomes central to economic policy. The subordination of VET to 'human capital theory' and the redefinition of VET learners as 'human resources', or units of production to which VET adds value, has in turn displaced the social and educational roles of VET (p 237).

Thus the discourse on job-skills and mobility has entrapped learners and providers in many adult education services. Outcome based curricula put pressure on learners to demonstrate skills and knowledge in a prescribed setting and time span: learners may have unrealistic expectations and are often hindered by a poor general literacy, language or numeracy skills base. The felt need to acquire specific skills can lead to a state of anxiety, where the more desirable skills are unobtainable to many, since a quick fix for quality basic skills is unrealistic. Learners are often reluctant to start with a Level 4 qualification when they know that the industry requires a Level 5 qualification. Anderson et al comment that: "VET has also been implicated in the production of skills hierarchies that systematically marginalise women, people with disabilities, and racial and ethnic minorities" (2004 p 235).

Adults engaging in further education training are increasing their general skills base but the focus on specific vocational skills - which in many areas still only grants them access to occupational sectors at the lowest entry point - means that their career options are limited and they may find themselves trapped in poorly paid job sectors. However, if the childcare education is delivered in a style that encourages critical thinking then the learning that takes place can help learners to become more agentic in shaping their lives. Fenwick (2004) in a discussion on gendered work and learning recommends that:

Emancipatory vocational education is vital, beginning with critical analysis of the effects of neo-liberal ideology and gendered structures on the work place, examining patterns creating increased insecurity and workloads, then helping people take action to resist and transform it (p182).

Adult Education and transformation:

The Critical theory of the Frankfurt school has influenced the work of Jack Mezirow (1991) who put forward his theory of transformation as means of defining the ways in which adults can learn to critique their learning and to transform their way of knowing. Mezirow's Transformation Theory draws on various theories of human development - in particular cognitive development - to highlight the notion that the learners pre-conceived assumptions or frame of references influence the way new learning is

assimilated by the learner. According to Mezirow our experiences from the time we are born lead us to develop:

meaning Perspectives....structures of epistemic, cultural and psychic assumptions within which our past experiences assimilates and transforms new experience. In addition to providing a framework for classifying experience they are informed by a horizon of possibility that is being anticipated and that represents value assumptions regarding ends norms and activate judgement (1991 p 62).

Meaning perspectives and meaning schemes are based on our values beliefs and assumptions about ourselves and our world, they inform how we 'name' our reality and how we relate to and act upon this reality. When we are presented with new information we try to assimilate or fit it into our existing meaning scheme – this can often lead to distorted perception of reality or reinforcement of personal or culturally held norms. For real or transformative learning to take place individuals need to question and re-evaluate and modify the assumptions on which their beliefs are based.

Because meaning perspectives are structures of largely preoperational, unarticulated presuppositions, they often result in distorted views of reality. Negation or transformation of inadequate, false, distorted or limited meaning perspectives or schemes is central to adult learning... Meaning perspectives and schemes can be transformed through a reflective assessment and critique of the presuppositions upon which they are based (Mezirow 1991 p 62).

Adult education can enable learners to bring about change in their circumstances by becoming aware of the assumptions on which their understanding of discourse and structures are based and by using new knowledge to change aspects of their belief systems and behaviour.

Cultural Capital and Class:

Rapid social and economic change in Ireland over the past few decades has blurred the boundaries between the different social groupings as often defined by education, occupation, lifestyle, status, income and power. Inequality tends to be understood in Irish society as “gross differentiation between the majority – the ‘more or less middle classes’ and an ‘underclass’ made up of the poor, the long-term unemployed, substance abusers and marginalised groups such as Travellers” (Tovey and Share 2000 p 160). Irish people view themselves as equal in the sense that opportunity for upward mobility is open to everyone who tries hard enough and that only a residual group of people are socially excluded: “public discussion of class inequality in Ireland tends to be framed

overwhelmingly in terms of the 'social problems' of poverty and social exclusion"(Tovey and Share 2000 p 160). However, despite appearances, levels of mobility in Ireland remain low in comparison to other western European countries. Tovey and Share suggest that "the 'classlessness' of Irish society is, in this respect anyway something of a myth" (p 164). Class and gender produce different outcomes for men and women according to Breen and Whelan (1996) cited in Tovey and Share: "Irish women experience more mobility than men and in particular are more likely to experience downward mobility" (2000 p 165). Education is seen as a marker of class and indeed education enables upward mobility.

The definition and analysis of class is a contentious issue within sociology. Pierre Bourdieu used an economic model to frame his theory of cultural reproduction. Social structures are produced according to the capital accumulated by individuals. There are four different types of capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic. Economic capital refers to wealth. Cultural capital refers to: "the existence of dominant and socially legitimated ideas about what is culturally valued and desirable in our society" (Tovey and Share 2000 p 176). Cultural capital is maintained through educational attainment, occupational status and engagement with culturally valued activities such as having the right kind of taste in art, music and literature. Social capital concerns our social relations, connections and group membership. Symbolic capital refers to the form the different types of capital take once they have been legitimised: "Legitimation is the key mechanism in the conversion to power. Cultural capital has to be legitimated before it can have symbolic power" (Skeggs 1997 p 8). Power is associated with both capital volume and capital mix. Possession of wealth alone does not guarantee a powerful position in the hierarchy of social structures.

Bourdieu uses the notion of the 'habitus' to define social groupings and social classes.

People occupying similar positions in social structures will share the same habitus:

One of the functions of the notion of habitus is to account for the unity of style, which unites the practices and goods of a single agent or class of agents... The habitus is this generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle, that is a unitary set of choices of persons, goods, practices (Bourdieu 2002 p 272).

The habitus forms and informs the way we understand the world and our social relations, it helps us to distinguish between self and others. The taken-for-granted

notions of the habitus are transmitted through family and social structures to which we belong.

Cultural reproduction and education:

The possession of cultural capital varies with social class or habitus, and education is a means of generating cultural capital. However: “the education system assumes the possession of cultural capital. This makes it very difficult for lower-class pupils to succeed in the education system” (Sullivan 2001 p 893).

By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the education system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture. (Bourdieu 1977 cited in Sullivan 2001 p 894).

The education system often fails working class students because the curriculum is designed in a way that makes it more accessible to middle class children who have accumulated cultural capital in the home. Second chance adult education is aimed at people who did not do well in the primary and secondary school systems. Adult education therefore needs to address the issue of differential cultural capital and its implications for course delivery and curriculum.

Social relations and adult education:

In a study of adult returners in further education in Scotland, Gallacher, Crossan, Field, and Merrill (2002) used the concept of social milieu to inquire into the socio-economic position of the learners and the broad systems of values that influenced their lifestyle decisions and how this relates to participation in adult education. The authors used the notion of the ‘learning career’ to explore the process through which people engage with education. A key idea within learning careers according to the authors is the idea of ‘status passages’ through which people make the transition from one social role to another. The authors found that:

If these status passages are to lead people to develop their learning careers, then it seems that one key factor is whether they have social relations that are supportive of learning. These relations may be with partners or other family members, friends or a peer group of fellow students. (Gallacher et al 2002 p 502).

The authors identified two broad types of factors that influence the development of learning careers: those associated with the learners personal lives and social relations and those associated with the institutions where the service is provided. The relationship between the learners and the institution were important in shaping learning careers. This often also depended on communications in relation to the institution that came from sources within the community or existing social milieu as opposed to the institution itself. The authors concluded that personal factors and social relationships play a significant role and also that:

The ways that learning organization respond to the complex needs of adults is also of importance. Being aware of structural factors, such as gender and poverty, as well as low confidence in abilities makes for successful learning experiences (p 307-308).

2.3. The Learners:

Women Returning to Education, Training and Employment:

This study aims to enquire into the role of adult education in the provision of childcare courses and in particular to examine the experience of the women who make the decision to return to education and chose childcare as a career pathway.

The decision to return to education is not an isolated or spontaneous decision. Russell, Smith, Lyons and O'Connell (2002) place women's involvement in the labour market along a continuum. Accordingly the return by womwn to education and /or employment is part of a process that can span a number of years or months.

Russell, et al (2002) classify 'Returns' as women who have spent a period of time outside the labour force in full time caring – including those who have never worked – and who enter education/training or employment.

Their report found that between six and 12 per cent of women exit home duties to employment each year. A number of barriers to progression were identified including the availability of affordable childcare and lack of educational qualifications. Women with third level qualifications found it easier to get work while women with leaving certificate level were more likely to enter temporary employment schemes or employment. Women with low levels of education appeared to face the toughest barriers in accessing education or training programmes. These barriers include lack of access to or availability of suitable educational options, childcare provision and

financial difficulties. Second chance education initiatives particularly VTOS and BTEI that include a contribution toward childcare costs endeavour to address these barriers. The decision to return to education with a view to increasing access to paid employment is a personal decision for women. However, prevailing discourse around individualisation contribute to push factors:

Within the EU policy framework, individualisation is cast in terms of self sufficiency and independence, and coupled to the market activation of all individuals. Women's labour market activity is centre stage in this policy discourse (Coakley 2005 p 6).

Second chance education initiatives target lone parents and women or dependent spouses of men in receipt of social welfare benefits. According to Coakley "the Irish government is committed to achieving the EU target of a 60 per cent female employment rate by 2010" (2005 p 7).

In arriving at the decision to re-engage in education, women are restricted in their choice of course by external forces such as what options are available to them, financial considerations and family and caring responsibilities. The choice of course must also be guided by internal factors – such as how the available options fit in with the individuals concept of self or identity.

Work, career choice and identity:

In trying to understand why women engaging in second chance education chose childcare as a vocational option it is useful to examine how women position themselves in relation to the role of childcare worker. Identity and work are closely related. Parr (2000) maintains that identity encompasses a multiplicity of elements which derive from biological and social influences, "identity could be defined as the characteristics by which individuals and groups recognise themselves and are recognised by others" (p26).

Identity and subjectivity are socially produced:

'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 relations to the world. (Weedon 1997: 32 as cited in Ryan 2001 p 6).

Subjectivity is produced through social discourse. According to Ryan "Discourse is a term used to refer to the conceptual repertoires through which we interpret and filter our experiences" (2001 p 5). Individual reality and identity is therefore shaped by the

discourses that dominate our worlds at a macro and micro level. “The discourse available at any particular period affect the ways that we can think and talk about a phenomenon, or the ways that we can respond to it” (Ryan 2001 p 5).

Although in families communities and cultures we are subjected to the same discourses we experience them in a different way, we accept dominant (veridical) discourses as representing the truth while at a micro level we select and reject discourses within the framework of what we accept as our values and ideals, thus adopting specific subject positions.

In this sense identity and subjectivity although socially constructed are uniquely individual; what individuals experience is quite person dependent within the perimeters of our social world. According to Billett and Somerville (2004) “These identities and subjectivities are therefore seen as being a product of the social world but appropriated by individuals in particular ways and for particular purposes” (p 311).

In the construction of identity we locate ourselves within the dominant discourses. For example discourses around mothering may imply among other things an instinctive or innate emotional bond between mother and child. These ideas about motherhood are then adopted as a ‘subject position’ and become part our values and belief systems around motherhood and of our identity as mothers.

Through these dominant discourses “We are located and positioned in many different ways, through our economic social and cultural relations, through gender, race, class, sexuality, age etc.” (Skeggs 1997 p 18). Within traditional patriarchal discourse women’s identity is often constructed in domestic and caring roles.

The decision to re-engage in education is, to a large extent, informed by individual identity and subjectivity, and the choice of course and plans for the future are related to various subject positions. As subject positions are produced through available or accessible discourse, they are constrained by the social world we inhabit. Lack of social and cultural capital can limit the choices available to individuals. Women who are constrained by structural and material circumstances with low levels of cultural capital are restricted in their access to discourses around education and vocational pathways. Because their “ways of knowing” are limited by experience, the decision to enrol on a childcare course is possibly a way of engaging with something new within a framework of what is known or familiar. “The decision to go on a caring course is not so much a

positive decision, as an attempt to find something within constricting cultural and financial limits which they will be able to do and be good at” (Skeggs 1997 p 58).

The construction of the caring self:

Skeggs (1997) carried out extensive research on a group of working class women in education over a twelve year period. The women initially engaged with education through a range of ‘caring’ courses. Skeggs tracks the production of the ‘caring self’ in the way that “The caring subject is constructed by the conflation of caring *for* with caring *about*, in which the practices of caring become inseparable from the personal dispositions” (1997 p 56). Caring as a discourse is valued in our society and often considered as a ‘vocation’ or calling. With little other cultural capital, being constructed as caring brings respectability and responsibility:

For those who had already experienced the negative allocative function of the education system by the age of 16, whose employment prospects are bleak and cultural capital limited, caring (whether paid or unpaid) offers the means to value, trade and invest in themselves, an opportunity to ‘make something of themselves’ (Skeggs 1997 p 56).

Skeggs suggests that a caring identity although centred around the care of others fulfils the women’s own desire to feel valuable. The women are aware of their own position within the social hierarchy of knowledge; by positioning themselves as morally superior caring subjects they produce themselves as ethical beings.

One of Skeggs’ central themes is that achieving respectability is a primary focus for working class women. Respectability as a subject position produces a sense of equilibrium in the women’s identity, although poorly rewarded in economic terms moral value associated with caring work affords status within dominant social discourse. “Occupational caring becomes the means of finding meaning and dignity assuming responsibility and respectability” (p 63).

The women involved in Skeggs study had very limited options open to them. A place on a caring course was allocated to any one who applied regardless of prior educational attainment. Access to other types of course was at that time restricted to those with some educational qualification. The respectability and moral value associated with a caring role is an important concept in considering women’s choices around childcare as a vocational option. This study aims to inquire into the notion of the caring self and the

construction of identity in relation to childcare as a career pathway. It will also examine the role of adult education in reinforcing discourses around childcare and the oppression of women in the work place.

2.4. Summary:

This chapter draws together aspects of education, employment and personal identity that impinge on adult education and how it relates to women choosing to engage in childcare courses. Occupational segregation and the gender pay gap are features of the Irish labour market that discriminate against women. Childcare is overwhelmingly gendered and poorly paid. EU and Government policy on lifelong learning and adult education strive to meet labour market demands while addressing social concerns. The emphasis on skills for the knowledge-based society risks losing sight of the broader social objectives. Where the learners are concerned choices around caring work and childcare work are linked to women's identity as mothers and patriarchal discourse that positions women as carers in the public and private spheres.. The concept of social and cultural capital is used to frame women's access to education and employment.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction:

This study concerns the relationship between second chance education initiatives and gendered low pay employment. The research will focus on the experiences of women engaged in childcare courses and the provision of childcare education through government funded second chance education initiatives in a centre in West Dublin.

3.2. Locating myself in the research:

The research questions have been generated from my concerns around my role as tutor and support worker to adults and the role of the centre in the provision of education services. I believe that adult education has the capacity to build a more just, fair and democratic society through the empowerment of learners and communities. My positioning in relation to the context of the research is influenced by my personal experiences as a woman, a mother, my family background and many years spent working with families and learners in a disadvantaged community.

Epistemological Position:

I believe that the individual is active in the environment and cognitive development takes place through the manipulation of objects and experience within frameworks established through prior learning. All our learning is shaped through the context in which objects and experiences are presented or exposed to us, and this context is socially constructed.

Each individual has a unique way of construing their world. However, because our construction of knowing takes place in a social framework we have limited scope for accessing knowledge which is beyond the perimeters of our social and cognitive horizons.

Our learning is framed in social discourse. According to Ryan (2001) “The discourses in circulation determine how we are able to talk or think about, or respond to or act on various events and issues” (p 32).

Individual reality and identity are shaped by the discourses that dominate our worlds at a macro and micro level. Dominant discourses are politically produced and insure the survival of structures and institutions such as the state, economy and educational

institutions. Structures and institutions produce inequality and oppression. Our world is structured in a way that perpetuates inequality whereby economic and social hierarchies are maintained to benefit those at the top at the expense of those at the bottom.

The human subject is agentic. Agency, however, is constrained and hemmed in on all sides by the prevailing discourses and social structures... Adult education has the power to harness human agency and challenge these discourses.

3.3. Broad Research Area:

EU policy for the knowledge-based society informs adult education provision in the context of lifelong learning. My concern is that the policy aims primarily to serve the economy at the expense of social cohesion. Policy objectives influence adult education provision aimed at the most marginalised in our society. At the very site wherein adult education has the opportunity to produce critically reflective people it risks repositioning participants in oppressive systems or institutions.

Second chance education initiatives aim to address educational disadvantage and exclusion in our society by providing opportunities for learners to enhance their educational and cultural capital and thereby access a more equitable social position. The large majority of participants on these initiatives are women. The most popular choice of course seems to centre on the clerical and service sectors – historically gender segregated occupations commanding poor pay, conditions and status. In particular this study concerns the childcare profession.

Educating women for entry into a poorly paid employment sector which requires a high level of non-transferable vocation-specific skills may in effect serve to further oppress women who are actively trying to pursue a more equitable and financially viable position in society for themselves.

These issues pose questions for adult education policy and provision which will be explored in this study.

The primary focus of this study concerns how agentic individuals, who are seeking to improve or change their circumstances, chose a course of action that may serve to

position them in a gendered and classed occupation. This will be explored in the context of the identity, social and cultural capital of the learners and issues of policy and provision in adult education.

The research questions are presented in chapter one and are structured in three areas of inquiry.

- *Childcare profession*
- *The learners*
- *Adult education*

3.5. Methods:

Qualitative research:

This study aims to use qualitative research methods to enquire into the lived experience of the learners:

Most qualitative research operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual, and therefore the job of the interview is to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced. (Mason 2002 p 64).

The qualitative research methods will generate contextual knowledge from the biographies and narratives of the learners recorded in individual and group interviews. I hope that the knowledge produced will help me to understand the discourse and structures that frame the process involved in the decision to return to education and the choice of childcare as an occupation. The methods I chose were a focus group with a group of learners followed by two semi-structured interviews with women who have completed their course. I also interviewed two key people involved in the provision of adult education services.

Focus Group:

I used a focus group method with a group of twelve learners from one class group at the centre. The aim of the focus group was to explore a range of issues with the learners. By encouraging group discussion and interaction I hoped to uncover information that might not emerge in a one-to-one interview. Group interaction allows group members

to challenge each others thinking or find areas of agreement. This generates knowledge of the context in which the issues are conceptualised, worked out and negotiated. The focus group was semi structured. A short list of topics for discussion was drawn up prior to the group meeting. (Appendix i).

Semi-structured interviews:

Qualitative interviewing techniques were used to generate contextual knowledge around the social realities of the women and their experience of second chance education and the childcare industry. Themes for the interviews were generated from issues that arose in the focus group and issues that the focus group did not address sufficiently. The aim of the interviews was to generate a more in-depth understanding of the life histories of the women and how their experiences influence their analysis and interpretation of their decisions and choices around adult education. A short list of themes for the interview were prepared in advance. (Appendix ii).

Key people interviews:

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with two key people with responsibility for structuring the provision and delivery of second chance education in the centre. The aim of the interviews was to generate data around policy and provision from the perspective of 'experts' in the field. The aim was also to triangulate the research and insure that a balance was achieved between my personal position in relation to the learners and my position as researcher. A short list of questions was drawn up in advance of the interviews. (Appendix iii).

Analysis of the data:

The focus group and interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were coded for themes. The data is presented in the findings according to the themes. A substantial number of extracts from the narratives have been reproduced in the text. I felt that the power of the narratives and the insight they offer would be lost if the data was over interpreted.

3.6. The role of the researcher:

As a researcher I am aware that I can not remain outside the group and interview process and that my own subject positioning on many of the issues raised could influence the outcomes. However as the issues are of concern to me in relation to my work and my personal convictions, my relationship with the women can contribute to the research process. Through the use of qualitative methods “data and knowledge are constructed through dialogic (and other) interaction during the interview... meaning and understandings are created in the interaction” (Mason 2002). I am familiar with most of the women in the research through my role in the centre. I am not a tutor on the course which the focus group members were involved in. However, I was a tutor to five of the women in their first year of studies and had established a positive relationship with them. Knowing some of the women quite well helped establish trust in the group and led to fluid and frank exchanges and dialogue. I had previously been a tutor to both women interviewed and I felt that my relationship with them would allow me to inquire into more personal aspects of their experience and generate a deeper level of knowledge in relation to their life histories and subjectivity. Through the use of qualitative methods “meaning and understandings are created in the interaction” (Mason 2002).

3.7. Background to the study:

Profile of the centre:

The centre where the courses are located is a VEC community college catering for six hundred second level students. The college is located in an area that is largely composed of local authority housing and two small private housing developments. The area is marked by high levels of long term unemployment, poor educational attainment and a high level of households headed by lone parents.

The adult education programme has been running in the school for the past fifteen years. The 2005/2006 cohort of adult students included 90 full-time students (40 of whom are on VTOS) and 120 part-time learners on BTEI courses. The full-time courses include Hairdressing and Beauty Level 5, PC maintenance (FIT), Childcare Level 4 and 5, Introduction to Health Services Level 4, Community and health Services Level 5 and Computers Office and Business Level 5. Part-time options include basic education, Childcare level 4, 5 and 6, ECDL, ESOL and a range of other options catering for specific groups in the community. The majority of learners come from the

community with a smaller group living in private rented accommodation in the surrounding suburbs.

Statistics from the centre:

Participants on childcare courses in the centre:

| Age group | 18-25 | 26-35 | 36-50 | 50 + | Total |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------------|
| Full-time group | 5 | 7 | 3 | | 15 |
| Part-time group | 1 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 18 |

3.8. Research Participants:

Focus Group:

The focus group is drawn from a class group of 18 adults on the part-time childcare course. This group was selected because I have worked with five of the group members previously and feel that this will help with trust building and the group process. The group was conducted with twelve women who were present at the time. The women are just completing a part-time FETAC level 5 childcare course. The course is run over two years, learners study four FETAC Level 5 modules each year to obtain the eight modules required for a full FETAC Level 5 certificate in childcare. Some participants are in their second year of study and therefore have completed their course and some have only completed four modules and will return next year to do four more. Some participants spent a year studying for four FETAC level 4 modules, which means that they will spend three years in all obtaining their final qualification. The course is funded through the BTEI initiative.

Participants:

There are twelve women in the group, aged between twenty three and fifty two. They are all mothers to children ranging in age from two years to adulthood. Six of the group are lone parents, and the remainder have partners. Eight of the women are employed part-time on CE schemes.

Education and employment:

Five of the women could be classed as early school leavers, two of these left before taking any exam while the remaining three have Group, Intermediate or Junior

Certificate. Seven of the group completed secondary school and sat the Leaving Certificate and one of these was educated in Nigeria. The number of group members with Leaving Certificate is unusual for class groups in the centre. Three of the women with Leaving Certificate, Mandy, Stacey and Kemi are currently on CE schemes. Mandy and Stacey have employment histories of factory and retail work. Melissa and Samantha also have Leaving Certificate and at present don't work outside the home. Nora has a further education qualification and works part-time and May works full-time.

Focus Group Participants:

| Name | age | Age Left school & ed. attainment | No. of children | Parenting status & children | Income & occupation | years on course |
|-------------|------------|---|------------------------|--|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Anette | 33 | 15: Group Cert | 1 aged 11 | Lone parent: | CE. Scheme/ lone parent | 1yr – L4 1yr L5 |
| Jenny | 29 | 15: Inter Cert. | Two, ages 10 & 5 | Partner | CE scheme | 1yr – L4 1yr L5 |
| Rita | 29 | 15: Junior Cert. | two ages 4&6 | Lone parent | CE scheme / lone parent | 1yr L4 1yr L5 |
| Mandy | 39 | 19: Leaving Cert. | two ages 2&6 | Partner | CE Scheme | 1yr L5 |
| Alison | 48 | 15: no qual. | 3 adult children | Lone parent: | CE scheme/ social welfare | 1yr L4 2yrs L5 |
| May | 52 | 18: Leaving Cert. | 3 adult children | Lone parent: | employed | 2 yrs L5 |
| Stacey | 34 | 18: Leaving Cert | one child aged 7 | Lone parent | CE scheme/ lone parent | 1yr L5 |
| Nora | 45 | 16: Leaving Cert | one child aged 9 | Partner | Employed p/t childcare | 2yr L5 |
| Melissa | 23 | 18: Leaving cert | two ages 2&3 | Partner | Family duties | 2yr L5 |
| Samantha | 35 | 18: Leaving Cert | two aged 8 | Partner | Family duties | 2yr L5 |
| Denise | 47 | 14: no qual. | 3 ages 13,18,22 | Lone parent | CE scheme/ lone parent | 1yr L4 2yr L5 |
| Kemi | 35 | 18: Leaving Cert (Nigeria) | two aged 3&6 | Partner | CE scheme/ social welfare | 1yr L4 2yr L5 |

Semi-Structured Interviews:

Selecting interview candidates:

In selecting two women to interview I wanted to choose women whom I knew well, in order to ensure that the level of trust in the interaction would encourage openness. I wanted to choose women who were representative of the core target group of second chance education initiatives – early school leavers and social welfare dependents. I also wanted to balance the inquiry by including someone who had taken the option of returning to learning full-time. This narrowed the pool of women I could draw from. I wanted to be able to draw on women's narratives to reflect what might be a common experience for learners so avoided including other variables that might introduce a host of other issues into the research. Therefore, I chose not to interview women of other nationalities as I feel that there are many other issues involved in their experience that are not addressed in this study. I also avoided choosing women who are experiencing ongoing personal difficulties or trauma in their lives at present. Denise and Jackie came from similar backgrounds and have both done well on their course. Although their current situations are different. I feel that they are representative to a degree of many of the learners situations.

Denise was also part of the focus group and has just finished her qualification after three years of part time study through BTEI while on a CE scheme.

The second interviewee was chosen because she was a full-time student on VTOS.

Jackie completed her qualifications twelve months ago after two years full-time study and currently works as a special needs classroom assistant.

Profile of the women:

Denise:

Denise is 47, she is a lone parent to three children aged 13, 18 and 22. Denise lives in local authority housing and has been on a CE scheme for the past three years. Denise has two brothers. She left school at fifteen with no qualifications. On leaving school Denise worked at a variety of different jobs until she married at twenty five. When her youngest child was three she separated from her husband and was forced to return to work to support herself and her children, she has had a variety of part-time jobs and was working as a childminder before she got a place on a CE scheme. Denise did very well

on the course and received distinctions in most of her modules. She has just finished on the CE scheme and has got a part-time job in a local branch of a major crèche chain.

Jackie:

Jackie is 40, she is married and her husband is employed. She has three children aged 18, 15 and 11. She lives in her own home in West Dublin. Jackie left school three weeks before her fifteenth birthday, she eventually trained in printing as a table hand. Jackie got married at 20, she worked on and off since then until ill health forced her to give up work. Jackie was on the disability allowance when she returned to study childcare three years ago through the VTOS scheme, she studied FETAC level 4 for a year and then progressed on to level 5 the following year, she also took a module in special needs classroom assistant at level 5. Jackie did very well on the course and received distinctions in most of her modules. On receiving her qualification it took her over six months to get a job, after three weeks working in a crèche she was offered a job as a special needs class room assistant in a local school.

Key people interviews:

The key people selected were the Adult education coordinator for the centre and the Education officer in the VEC responsible for the centre. Both interviewees are in senior positions and have a responsibility for the management of service provision and delivery of second chance education initiatives in the centre.

Adult education coordinator:

The Adult Education Coordinator is responsible for the day to day management of the adult education sector of the college. She also has overall responsibility for the management of programme development, course provision, student support services, enrolment, assessment requirements and liaising with related organisations and institutions.

Education Officer:

The centre is a VEC school therefore education policy, service provision, ethos and finance are largely led by the VEC. Education Officer is one of the most senior positions within the VEC. The role of the Education Officer involves responsibility for

policy, provision, funding and resources in relation to education services both community and school based within the VEC area. I chose to interview the Education Officer because of her experience working with adults as a school principal and because of her current role with responsibilities spanning both community based and more formal adult education provision.

CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction:

This chapter presents the findings from the focus group, and the semi-structured interviews with learners and key people. The findings are structured according to themes that emerged from the discussion. In order to truly represent the context of the findings extracts from the recorded dialogue have been used extensively. Themes and issues are analysed as they arise.

4.2. Focus Group:

Reasons for deciding to study childcare:

For many of the women in the group childcare was not a planned career pathway. Only one woman, Melissa claimed to have always wanted to work in childcare. Ironically Melissa was persuaded by her family to take another route after completing her Leaving Certificate. After the birth of her second child Melissa decided to return to her original plan. Eight of the women seemed to drift into childcare through Community Employment (CE) schemes, while three wished to combine an interest in childcare with a part-time flexible occupation to fit with their role as mothers. One woman works full-time and wanted a qualification to enhance her prospects for advancement.

CE Schemes:

Eight of the women on the part-time group are on CE schemes. Through the CE scheme they have been placed in childcare services. The women spoke of approaching FAS or replying to a job advert.

Jenny:

How I came back to education was after having been at home for so long I ended up in FAS one day, they asked me what I would like to do and would I like to get into a community employment scheme, and I said yeah, I'd be interested and he said there was some there for childcare and so I went for that.

Rita:

I went for a job as a cleaner , I was told all that was going was a job in childcare so I seen it going, I says ah yeah...

Denise:

I just sort of stumbled into childcare when I seen an ad in the post office one day for a CE vacancy in Ronanstown and I went for it...

CE schemes are a significant structure in guiding women into childcare. The common theme emerging is that the women were looking for some type of part-time employment, the primary reason for taking up a place on a CE scheme was financial.

Motherhood and interest in childcare:

Three of the women who are not on CE schemes said that they had become interested in childcare after having their own children:

Melissa:

I had two kids and after the second one I decided I wanted to do something to suit me so then I did childcare...

Nora:

When my daughter was born I became interested in childcare, when she started attending play group I was offered a par- time job in the playgroup...

Samantha:

I was at home for a few years, I thought I'd like to do something for myself, the leaflet came in the door and I thought to myself I'd like childcare, when you have your own kids you become more interested...

These women's identity as mothers influenced their interest in childcare coupled with a need to do something other than rearing their children. This corresponds with findings by Parr (2000): "...a central issue is that women are using education as a vehicle to change at least some aspects of their identity" (p 25). Prior to having children Melissa had a qualification and worked in the travel industry, Nora has a qualification and held a managerial position on a stud farm, while Samantha had extensive work experience as a pizza chef. However, the women were not interested in returning to their previous work roles.

Family responsibilities and childcare work:

Care of their own children seems to be an important factor in the decision to do childcare. With the exception of May who works full-time (with some time off to do the

course), all of the women in this group said that they really wanted some part-time flexible arrangement so they could spend time with their children. Childcare work was seen as offering this flexibility and the women had difficulty thinking of other roles – besides shop work or waitressing that could offer this level of flexibility. Anette who was working full-time took a place on a CE scheme because it was part-time:

Anette:

I worked in the RDS full-time it was taking an awful lot of time, again you got home to see the child, then I heard of a job that was going in Aras Rualach Crèche...

There was general agreement among the women that child carework is flexible , part-time work that they can fit in around family responsibilities:

Kemi:

Really I am studying childcare so I have time enough for my kids, at the same time I will be prepared you know for when they grow up.

When asked if they had considered any other type of work the women could not really think of anything else that would offer this level of flexibility except perhaps shop work:

Denise:

I could probably get a job in Dunnes that's better paid but I wouldn't have the job satisfaction

When asked if she had considered other study options Samantha replied that:

I didn't want to get back to work full- time so I thought this will suit me doing something part-time.

Samantha and Melissa are the only two in the group who were not already working in the childcare area before joining the course. When questioned about other course options Samantha said that childcare was the only part-time course on the leaflet.

The women's desire to fit their work in around their role as a mother corresponds with the findings of a study by Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds and Alldred 2003 as cited in Coakley 2005:

All the mothers viewed their employment decisions in relation to their children. They were directed by an ethic of care as much as, or more so than, an ethic of work or self development (p 9).

The women position themselves as the primary carer within the home. Education and work whether for economic gain or self-fulfilment is secondary to domestic and caring responsibilities. This reflects Parr's findings that "Generally speaking the women did not question that they have to work around their domestic commitments...choosing institutions, courses and timetables to fit in..."(2000 p34).

Attaining a qualification:

Attaining the childcare qualification is very important. For the women on the CE scheme the idea of returning to education and training came only after they were encouraged to consider it by their CE supervisor.

Jenny:

Then when I was asked if I wanted to go to college to study and I said yeah, in fact it was something that I would've liked to do.

Others such as Noleen and Mary who were in employment realised that the qualification was necessary if they want to progress or even stay working in the area:

May:

I did go for another job within the health services when I was asked what qualifications I had of course I hadn't any in childcare .. I decided that the next time the job comes up I will have qualifications...

Nora:

I knew that in 2006 you had to have a qualification.

The women all agreed that the qualification itself is very important, they feel it will give them job opportunities:

Denise:

You know on your CE scheme you get three years if you don't have the qualification them three years mean nothing...

Kemi:

I decided to return to education in Ireland because I am a non-national. You know, I had some qualifications back in Nigeria but I just look at it here that they don't honour those qualifications here in Ireland...

Kemi has qualifications and experience in business studies, these qualifications are not recognised here, Kemi said that she chose childcare because she felt that childcare offered her more job flexibility and would fit in with her family duties. For the women

who had left school early the qualification is a form of validation, it increases their cultural capital and increases their confidence.

Learning and adult education:

The women agree that although the qualification is important the content of the course is very useful to them in their work and as parents. They spoke of the effect it had on their own parenting style and on other issues such as health and safety.

May:

I have better insight into where the children are coming from now, I am seeing things in children I never saw before and relating it to what I learned in class...

Jenny:

I started off just wanting the qualification but when you have been in and you realise what you actually do learn and you go home and you put it to practice in your own house and in your work it makes a lot of difference.

Adult education has enabled the women to critically evaluate their childcare practices producing a shift in perspective. According to Mezirow (2000):

Formulating more dependable beliefs about our experience, assessing their contexts, seeking informed agreement on their meaning and justification, and making decisions on the resulting insights are central to the adult learning process (p 4).

New perspectives on childrearing practices will enhance the women's role as mothers and as childcare practitioners within the community. Thus, personal learning has a potential impact on their children and on the wider community.

Childcare as "in you":

Although many of the women had not intentionally set out to do childcare they are all happy that they are working in this area now. We discussed the kind of qualities you need to be a good childcare worker. There was general agreement that there is some innate or intuitive predisposition to care necessary for this type of work:

Anette: *I think it has to be in you, it has to be in your nature*

Nora: *Instinct..*

There was general agreement from the group about this:

Nora: *I think you need a bit more life experience than leaving cert to do it..*

The group felt strongly about caring as a type of personal trait or instinct, they agreed that anyone who was academically good could get the qualification but the work itself requires this special characteristic. The women have adopted an essentialist position on the notion of caring, that somehow the ability to be a childcare worker is innate. In terms of their identity the women now view themselves as having an inner predisposition to care. This corresponds to Skeggs' notion of the caring self:

To speak as a caring person produces an identity of value for the self, which also capitalises on prior female experience. To speak from a caring subject position confers occupational/moral status and authority (1997 p 69).

Caring is also a traditionally female attribute, and part of a wider patriarchal discourse on how women ought to be. The women have combined their role as mothers and their role as carers to construct an identity in which the self is morally and ethically superior.

Gender and childcare:

The question of why more men aren't involved in childcare then arose. Nora suggested that men would not work in childcare because the "pay is not great" There was general agreement around this statement:

Nora:

You would find it very difficult to support a family from what you get for childcare.

However it emerged that many of the women felt that pay was only one barrier when it came to men working in childcare. The women felt that men are not really up to the job in a lot of cases as the following discussion outlines:

Denise: *I don't think they really have the patience.*

Kemi: *Some men have no interest in what children do, they just can't stand it!*

Alison: *The Irish mother syndrome...*

Nora: *They can't multitask...*

Stacey: *They can't mind them for more than an hour...*

The conversation moved from men's perceived inability to mind children to the issue of trust and child protection:

May: *We find it's a protection issue, women don't like it to be quite honest with you, a lot of our families don't like men working with their children.*

When asked if they would have a man work with their own children the women were not in favour of it.

Stacey: *I'd have to be able to check, to walk into the crèche at any time of the day and make sure that things are all right.*

Denise: *You just wouldn't be comfortable*

Anette: *You will also find that men don't like other men working with their children.*

The women have adopted a subject position of carer, this also creates a mechanism for distinguishing between self and others. Patriarchal discourse informs the gendered nature of caring not just as a role for women but also in terms of what men cannot do. This reinforces gender stereotypes and supports dominant discourses. Childcare is clearly considered as 'women's work'. As the women see caring as an innate predisposition which they possess it cements the gendered nature of the work "this emphasis on feelings and natural dispositions makes it difficult for the women to take up positions of resistance, for what comes to be at stake is their sense of self, their feelings" (Skeggs 1997 p 69). By declaring that caring is an innate disposition which is generally only available to women the women are colluding in the exclusion of men from caring responsibilities and from the childcare sector into the future.

The Status of childcare and teaching:

When Jenny raised the issue of men working as teachers the general agreement was that primary school teaching – even at junior and senior infant level is different from childcare work, the women struggled to put words on what this difference is exactly but

they were very clear that there is a significant difference between the two roles as this extract from the discussion outlines;

May: *...that's different, a completely different issue..*

Nora: *It's not as one-to-one, it's different...*

Samantha: *I think childcare is too intimate for men, where as teaching is...*

May: *...different boundaries...*

Stacey: *...the fact that they are actually teaching in school, they're not just .. they're in control of them or something..*

Denise: *There's not that intimacy in the schools it's structured..*

Mandy: *You look after their physical needs rather than their educational needs...*

Part of the distinction between childcare and teaching seems to be around the caring aspects of the role. Childcare is construed as primarily about caring whereas teaching is about education. Although the women did concede that some of their role is about helping children to learn and develop, they agreed that the context of their role in early education is different than that of a teacher. A predisposition to care is not as necessary in education as it is in childcare. The women felt that there was a status difference between being a teacher and being a childcare worker, they also felt despite their discomfort with men working as childcare workers that male teachers were acceptable. There was recognition of the fact that men would be happy with the status attached to teaching but not of that attached to childcare work. By taking this position the women are recognising childcare work as low status work and reproducing it as such.

According to Skeggs:

By considering themselves as practical, caring women, naturally predisposed to care, the women are able to develop for themselves some status, responsibility and moral authority, which ultimately involves them in colluding in the propagation of social and sexual divisions in which they are ultimately subordinate, forever monitoring and evaluating themselves and always guilty (1997 p 71).

Mandy:

Most men would rather say they are a teacher rather than a childcare assistant

The women were asked if they had ever considered teaching, only Samantha was able to come up with thoughts on this issue,

Samantha:

It's a big commitment like to go back to college full-time.

While Stacey had considered how she might *help* with the real job of teaching

Stacey:

I considered special needs assistant to help in a school but not teaching.

Gender roles:

The idea of full-time study to do teaching opened a discussion around equality issues, the women really feel that they have to bear the burden of family responsibility foremost and that anything else they want to do must take second place – a situation that they feel is not the same for men:

Stacey:

You'd find if a fellah went back to education full-time, like his wife would support him and he'd have the time then, he'd just come home and look up the internet or whatever he had to do whereas with women we do have to do everything, the washing...

Anette:

It's like as if childcare was made for women.. because men automatically think women should be at home minding children

Nora:

I think it's a tradition in Ireland as well, that it's the mothers job to do it all...

The women's perception of the division of domestic labour in the home reflects international trends according to Coakley (2005): "for the majority of couples, paid work, household work and childcare continue to be unequally divided" (p 10). The women have a sense of the inequalities between men and women expressed through gender differences in domestic labour, this gender division is conceived as being produced by women such as "the Irish mother" or the wife who panders to the needs of the husband.

When asked if by returning to education they were attempting to change that traditional male/female stereotypes, the women recognised that the role they were training for was within this traditional women's role:

Anette:

Yeah but we are going back into a traditional role working with children

Jenny:

I suppose you always stick with what you know and what you know you are good at.

There was also a recognition of men's traditional role:

Stacey:

They're in the tradition of being the bread winner aren't they

Although the women do have very essentialist views on gender difference and a very patriarchal stance on gender roles there is a certain level of awareness around structural inequalities that affect them in some aspects of their lives. However, there appears to be a powerlessness around these issues and an acceptance of the way things are. Fenwick (2004) citing a study by Erwin and Stewart (1997) on young women's vocational choices found that :

While continuing to believe that equal opportunity existed, they experienced discrimination – and tended to frame these as personal issues rather than linked to shared political issues or structural inequalities (p 180).

Pay and conditions in childcare work:

None of the women had investigated pay and conditions in childcare before they committed themselves to the course. Nora and Samantha are clearly not dependent on income from childcare work. May required the qualification to increase her promotional prospects in her current job in the public service. For the women on CE schemes the benefits including part-time work, child allowances and training were very attractive while taking up a place on a CE scheme was not necessarily part of any long-term plan:

Mandy:

When a friend got a part-time position where we are and she was just saying to me – I didn't realise it, she would actually be down on the money she was earning - money we're earning now, I was thinking oh god..

When questioned about why women put up with doing a job that pays so badly the women went back to the argument of the flexibility of childcare:

Samantha:

Because it's part-time, it's flexible

Nora:

It suits them for rearing their own children

Nora and Samantha seem to have an understanding that there are better paid jobs within their horizons but that childcare work is a compromise for family reasons. This reflects Coakley's assertion that: "The research points to the complexity of mothers' decisions around caring and the prioritising of caring over financial gain in the labour market" (2005 p 3). In their desire to find work which fits in with family responsibilities women are open to exploitation in gendered work such as childcare. The other women did not have a lot to say on the issue of pay, there seem to be a general acceptance or poor expectations around the issue of pay – comparing the pay to shop work and not to other more professional jobs that might require the level of training that they have completed for their childcare qualification. The women on the CE scheme view the pay and conditions favourably, childcare training is part of the scheme, they do not appear to have huge expectations about where the training will take them or expectations about their potential for earning a decent wage. The ERSI (2004) report found that direct employment schemes such as CE schemes show no subsequent link to employment. Poor pay in childcare may make it difficult for some of the women to take up paid work at the risk of losing social welfare benefits.

4.3. Semi-Structured interviews:

Educational Experience:

There are similarities in both women's history of education, they didn't dislike school but yet saw no particular reason to stay on and do their exams:

Denise:

I had a very happy childhood... I left school when I was fifteen, I left when I was old enough to get a job. I went into hairdressing because I thought that was what I wanted to do, I was just fickle and ended up going from one job to another until I eventually got married.

It was not unusual at this time for children to leave school as soon as they were fifteen, it would have been the traditional for working class families. Denise seems to place the responsibility for this decision and her subsequent history of employment on herself.

Jackie on the other hand admits that she was happy enough to leave school but feels that she got very little encouragement from either her family or school:

Jackie:

Nobody ever gave you the smallest bit of encouragement in school or said well done, or said you're good at that. I think if I had of got the smallest bit of encouragement I would have stayed in school... My older sister did her Leaving Cert and went to Ballyfermot senior and all, then she came home with a list of books and was told – we don't have the money for that – which we didn't – and that was it then she had to leave... I saw this then and I knew that there was no point...

Neither Jackie or Denise reported a negative experience of education, however the experience was not rated as significantly positive either. Traditional cultural expectations and material needs were more influential on their decision to leave school as opposed to the school experience itself.

Process of returning to education:

Jackie's return to education began with a series of courses which she started when her eldest child started school, they chose to send him to an Irish school and Jackie took up the offer of an Irish course for parents and subsequently became involved in a women's group where she did a number of courses over the years.

Jackie:

When John started in the Irish school I started a course in Irish through the school, then I went on to do personal development and that led on to all sorts of things like Reiki and Aroma therapy – I suppose you could say that the Irish school was the start of me doing courses.

Denise on the other hand didn't engage in any other type of education before the starting the course after separating from her husband. Denise had a lot of responsibility and had to fit everything in around her children:

Denise:

I had no confidence, I was like a little lamb, whatever I was told to do I would do it and I wouldn't question it.

Denise was aware of courses available in the community:

I never done anything – some people were doing flower arranging and all that but that just doesn't do anything for me I don't think...

Gallacher et al (2002) using the notion of the learning career highlight the fact that “participation in informal learning may also act as a stepping stone for more formalised learning events” (p 507). Jackie recognises the connection between her participation in informal community based learning and her later decision to return to full-time education. Denise on the other hand did not take up learning opportunities within the community.

The different circumstances that both women found themselves in contributed to the different paths that led them into childcare.

Choosing Childcare:

When Jackie’s youngest child started school it emerged that he had a learning difficulty, Jackie’s experience with her two older children led her to believe that her youngest had a problem and she put pressure on the school to have him assessed. Her son was diagnosed with dyslexia:

I had to fight to get him a place in St. Roses in Tallaght, . . . because he has a special need I decided I wanted to find out how to help him so I started the childcare course, my aim was to do special needs so I could help him and understand him better..

Denise on the other hand “stumbled” into childcare when she saw an ad in the post office. At the time she had been minding children in her own home but was looking for a way out, when she applied for the CE scheme initially the supervisor told her he was not sure if there would be any new vacancies as the government were trying to cut back on CE placements:

I got back to him and I said that if you have nothing to offer me I am just going to have to go elsewhere, shop work – back to shop work, well he rang me back and said that he would take me on.

Denise’s take up of a CE scheme and subsequent return to education grew out of financial necessity, at the time she was happy to do any job that came her way as long as it fitted in with her family responsibilities. Jackie’s return to education was also prompted by parental responsibilities in this case by a desire to help her son.

Experience of Returning to Education:

Both Jackie and Denise would maintain that the experience of returning to education has changed them as individuals. Their initial experiences on the course were different with Denise taking longer to find her feet. Jackie was encouraged about her ability to do the work when she realised that she had actually learned quite a lot in school:

When I started on the level 4, I got a computer and I found – cause I did typing in school – I found out hey I can still type, and I know things like where to put full stops and commas and all that, so it was all coming back to me and I thought I must have been doing okay in school..

Denise on the other hand found the whole experience very intimidating, and it was a long time before she felt comfortable:

It was huge, like I didn't know what a module was, they put us sitting there and I had a timetable that I wouldn't know how to make head or tail of. We were down in the room and there was all computers around us and I tipped off a computer and I nearly died, I thought I was after knocking the whole college out, I got such a fright.

The relationship between the individuals and the social institutions that structure and shape the processes of interaction in which they are involved are of crucial importance in the development of a learning career (Gallacher et al 2002) Denise found the initial experience of adult education quite daunting and intimidating.

Both women found the course challenging but worked very hard, they both spoke of staying up until one and two in the morning to complete assignments and the difficulties of having work corrected or of having to re-do parts of assignments. Both women recognised the different challenges experienced by other women on the course:

Jackie:

I was very lucky, I have a husband who is very supportive, I mean he'd come in and take over cooking the dinner, and put the kids to bed, his only worry was for me that I would be sick – because I have an illness – from all the hours of study, other people didn't have that you know some of the girls are on their own with their kids...

Denise:

People in the class have all different abilities one of the girls was in this equestrian science and there was nothing she didn't know and there was nothing she couldn't do on the computer and then you would get someone that would be sitting beside her that left school when they were fourteen or fifteen. I don't

know if the teacher's able for the different abilities and accept people for what they are and what they could be capable of.

Denise continued to be intimidated by the knowledge that other people on the course had and sympathises with other women in a similar position to herself, even on successful completion of the course she can not see herself as on an equal footing with some of her fellow students.

Both women felt very happy about their achievements, however, Denise expressed that the course really changed her as a person claiming that she had no confidence at the beginning of the course and she now feels confident. Jackie on the other hand took her achievements as validation of something she always felt that she could do:

Jackie:

I got all distinctions except for in the art.. I'm delighted with that.. I did one assignment about spina bifida for the special needs module, because at the time I was working with a boy with spina bifida and I was able to get loads of information about it.. the tutor said that it was like work from first year in university, so it's great that I can do that..

Denise:

Coming back to college has changed me as a person. I'm delighted I did, I'm very happy with myself, I'm very proud..

Pay and conditions in childcare work:

Both women said that they had no idea about the pay and conditions in childcare when they started the course:

Denise:

I never researched the pay scales or anything, I was just happy to get the CE scheme at the time and it fitted in with my life so I got the training which was a bonus, so everything else was a bonus really.

Jackie:

I had heard from newspaper reports and that the fact that people were focusing on childcare it had been a thing with the government and I knew that the money wasn't great.. even though the money wouldn't be the most important thing I would have expected like to get a good wage from it.

Jackie was quite angry about the money she discovered that childcare workers were being paid, she said she was interviewed for one organisation and the interviewer was

very impressed with her qualifications and the fact that she was mature and experienced, however when she said that she expected to be paid ten euro per hour she never heard back from the company. Jackie eventually found work for nine euro per hour in a crèche in Meath, she said that this job was actually costing her money. While working in this job Jackie found out that some of her colleagues were earning eight fifty per hour:

Jackie:

I felt sickened I suppose, the parents are handing over good money for childcare and well.. they have to be making a fortune and then you're offered eight or nine euro and with your qualification that you have and your life experience as a parent you know none of that is taken into account...It's a shock because you're given your wage packet at the end of the day and it's like, it's so sad, it's not sad it's annoying and degrading when you're handed two hundred and thirty euros after working a forty hour week.

Denise on the other hand was faced with finishing her CE scheme and looking for part-time work, the crèche where she was on her CE scheme could only offer her relief work at eight euros an hour so she was happy enough to be offered a part-time position at nine euros an hour by a commercial crèche chain.. There were other benefits for her in that the work place is local and that she will work over three days which she feels will suit her:

I'm just delighted to get the job... the only thing I can hope for is that the pay scales will go up.

When asked why they felt the profession was so badly paid Denise pointed to the gendered nature of the work

It's like nurses, sure they were badly paid in the beginning, it's that sector of the work force.

Jackie pointed to worker exploitation she felt that some of the workers were prepared to put up with very poor pay and also that she felt that company owners were making profits:

From my own experience I know a lot of people who actually practice childcare and are running their own crèches without any qualifications and they are making loads of money.

Jackie had decided not to remain in this type of childcare work, she said that if she hadn't got the special needs assistant position that she would not have continued to work in the crèche for very long.

Denise also commented on other peoples view of the profession as work that didn't require a high level of skill:

Some people you'd hear would have these little flippant comments – but sure you're only changing nappies, why do you have to do that (The course), it's only wiping noses...

Both women however mentioned that the money was not the only reason to do childcare work:

Denise:

There are rewards, it's like nursing, it's not all about the money, you have to be devoted to do that...

Jackie:

Even though, like the money is not the most important thing...

So the notion of caring is important to both women, Jackie described her interest in helping members of her family in need of care, and acknowledged that she does like to care for others. As with the focus group members, both women consider caring as part of their identity. Denise uses the construction of her self as caring as compensation for poor pay in childcare, the work is considered as a "vocation" with its own intrinsic rewards. Jackie on the other hand sees caring as central to her identity but is not prepared to have this predisposition to care exploited by the childcare profession.

General outcomes from the experience of education:

As stated previously both women had said that returning to education had a very positive effect on their lives there is a marked difference in how this new level of education has been assimilated into their identity. Jackie who was fairly confident to begin with will not accept the pay and conditions of childcare work and has moved out of it to find better paid work. Jackie has expressed an interest in further education and feels confident about working toward a third level qualification. She has an interest in Nursing and Midwifery and is also interested in studying for a degree in English and History and perhaps becoming a secondary school teacher. The only barrier for her at present is that she needs to continue working for a while and all of these options require a full-time commitment, but she has not ruled it out.

Denise on the other hand although claiming that her confidence has increased feels that she has 'found her level' and is prepared to stay there. When asked if she would consider any other type of career Denise could not think of anything different that she could do:

I don't know, I can't really see, I couldn't see myself in shop working...

Denise's expectations about potential earnings match that of the other CE scheme workers in the focus group, Denise does not expect to be able to convert her educational achievements into increased earning power, her occupational choices are low paid childcare work or low paid shop work.

When asked about continuing on in education and if she would consider doing Childcare Level 6 Denise clearly does not see herself progressing any further:

No, definitely, that's over my head, so I'm happy like if I have the qualification now to be able to go out and get work in Giraffes, and be appreciated for what I am capable of because I know my capabilities now, so I'm happy.

As both Jackie and Denise received high grades on their course they should be ready to take the next step, however Denise still doesn't feel confident enough about her ability to do this. The difference in Jackie and Denise's outlook on further education and work is perhaps reflected in their support systems and social networks. Although both women come from very similar backgrounds and both experienced success in their academic work as adult learners they place themselves in very different positions in relation to their abilities in work and learning. Jackie has a supportive husband and her social network includes professionals such as teachers and business people, she appears to have a level of social and cultural capital that allows her to aspire to higher ambitions. Denise on the other hand has her qualification and extensive work experience behind her, even though she was highly regarded in work and on the course she still lacks confidence in her ability. Denise has been through a difficult marriage break-up and experienced isolation as a lone parent, she does not have access to the same social supports as Jackie and is less likely to experience upward mobility. According to Skeggs: "our social locations influence our movement and relations to other social positions and hence our ability to capitalise further on assets we already have" (1997 p 9). Social and cultural capital therefore are instrumental in shaping the

outcomes for Denise and Jackie in relation to adult education. For Denise participation in adult education increased her employment prospects but not necessarily her financial prospects. Denise also increased her educational attainment level but has not really increased her cultural and social capital. Gallacher et al found that: “ A key idea in the development of learning careers is that people’s self-perception and commitment to the role of learner can and does change over time. This process often involves changes in social identity” (2002 p 505). Jackie has clearly changed her social identity and sees herself as on a par with other professionals, Denise on the other hand has shifted in her identity but is still experiencing what Gallacher et al refer to as a “fragile learning identity”(2002 p 506).

Denise also reported increased self confidence as an outcome of her learning Jackson (2003) argues that:

... Whilst growth in self-confidence’ no doubt makes some difference to individual women it only masks structural and institutional discriminations for working class women (p 374).

Denise’s success in second chance education and subsequent improved employment prospects mask the fact that she has effectively moved sideways within social hierarchies and has been re-positioned in low pay, low status employment.

With the right level of support and encouragement Denise might resume her education or even acknowledge the true extent of her achievements to date, however, employment in the private sector may not facilitate this.

4.4. Key People Interviews:

Aims and objectives of second chance education initiatives:

Both interviewees stressed that the aims of these initiatives are generally around providing people with skills and know how to gain employment:

Adult Ed. Coordinator:

The broad aims of both VTOS and BTEI is to get people who have been unemployed, to get them extra skills to get them into employment. The BTEI is specifically to get people who have a low level of education into the education system so that they can get a qualification...

Education Officer:

To encourage people who haven't been in employment or who may have lost their job for some reason to build up their self esteem and basic education so that they can gain employment.. a pathway to employment...

The Adult Education Coordinator stressed that the aims also depended on the target group and that different services were provided by different centres, with some VTOS centres focusing on basic education such as literacy skills where as other focus on specific skills for specific areas of employment such as the FIT courses. The education officer stressed that the aim of providing a local service is very important:

It is also very important that the courses are located in the community, particularly in areas of disadvantage, people feel better about going to a local college...

This corresponds with the Gallacher et al's (2002) research on learning careers, the authors found that the location of the provision was often crucially important and the use of small informal settings helped some learners make the transition from non – participant to participant. Much of the BTEI provision in the VEC is located in the community, the local Community College is the next step for adults wishing to engage in education at a more formal level, the local Community College although mainly catering for second level students is very connected to the community, the Education Officer felt that local people are very familiar with their college and feel comfortable there.

Policy influence on adult education provision:

Both interviewees recognised the influence of government policy and economic concerns as driving forces behind adult education provision:

Education Officer:

Definitely economic aims, the government want to get people into work...

Adult Ed. Coordinator:

Well I think maybe one of the government objectives would be to get people off the live register... I think government policy would generally focus on increasing the education level of the population for economic as much as, I'd say more so... the primary focus is economic and the social good that comes from it is secondary

Both responses seem to suggest that the government is concerned with general education levels as well as skills that are needed in the labour market however the concern for education and skills is framed by economic concerns:

Education Officer:

It is definitely led by economics there is a large government concern about literacy levels at the moment and the government is urging a response. I suppose from an economic point of view it doesn't look good for the country if literacy levels are poor, there is also a concern about filling jobs, skills shortages, there is a need for people with certain skills...

When asked if the initiatives are driven by government of EU policy it was felt that the initiatives were government led but the role of the EU was acknowledged:

Education Officer:

It's really driven by the Irish government but then I suppose a lot of that is also EU policy...

The Adult Education Coordinator felt that the actual type of course provision available at a local level is driven by learner demand and available resources. The Education Officer on the other hand felt that course provision is driven by economics and government policy,

There is also a concern about filling jobs, skills shortages, there is a need for people with certain skills...

She expressed concern that even in main stream second level education at the moment there is an increasing emphasis on preparing people for the labour market, she felt it was important for educators to be vigilant around this:

It is important not to lose sight of the value in a well rounded education.. There is a responsibility to communities and individuals, the ethos of education is very important, people need to be given choices and encouraged to decide for themselves what they would like to do and not directed into specific job markets.

The interviewees comments emphasise the role of economics and labour market demands on adult education provision, they reflect Coakley's assertion that "The European perspective is that paid work is seen as the key to participation and social inclusion" (2005 p 6). There is no reference to the broader policy aims of the White Paper on Adult Education around citizenship and community development. The

comments underpin what critics of the European lifelong learning policy argue as real focus is on serving the needs of state and economy and not the individual.

Adult education and vocational training:

Although the interviewees considered the policy objectives of second chance education as centred on economic outcomes, in practice they felt very strongly about the value of adult education for personal development. Both interviewees stressed the importance of a broad based education as central to the development of the individual and tended to see training as specifically around skills:

Adult Ed. Coordinator:

Training is about giving people skills, narrow skills often and skills aimed at a particular type of employment. Education on the other hand is broader and the idea would be that it could include the skills but also empower people so they can learn new skills – it maybe teaches people how to learn, so that when skills become obsolete they are in a position to learn new skills...

Both interviewees stressed that although the broad aims VTOS and BTEI include training for specific skills and jobs such as hairdressing, IT, or accounting skills, that the focus is on education. Issues of personal development, self esteem, literacy skills and general education are seen as core outcomes for learners. General education was also highlighted as important in building the capacity of learners to benefit from training:

Education Officer:

The courses are very broad based, most people do communications, they are improving their self esteem, literacy skills... This cannot be achieved in isolation from education, this is education for life, without it people cannot benefit from training...the need is there to look after the whole person, they need to have support in this , this is more a feature of education and training.

Adult Ed. Coordinator:

The educationalist outlook is that not alone do you teach them the skills but you try and draw out the best in them, an ethos that you would not find in a training setting.

The interviewees appear to have a very narrow definition of training but see education as encompassing many aspects of human development and they definitely seem to consider that VTOS and BTEI provision is about education more so than training. This reflects the broader aims of the White Paper on Education and also what Anderson et al (2004) consider as the potential of vocational education and training to develop work

and life skills (p 234). The strong emphasis on the value of a broad based education and the connection between education and self confidence, also probably the fact that both interviewees have many years experience as teachers to adolescents and adults in disadvantaged communities.

In summary although the interviewees consider the policy aims of second chance education as being directed by economic concerns, their aims and objectives as providers of adult education services are framed by a belief in the value of education as a means of empowering individuals and communities and tackling inequality and disadvantage.

Gender and Second Chance Education:

The interviewees felt that men's experience of education had somehow made them reluctant to engage in further education. Certain initiatives such as FIT seem to have a broader appeal to men, this was put down to the way people are recruited for this course (through the local employment service) and by the structure of the courses, which emphasis training and job skills with the promise of an internship on completion of the course:

Adult Ed. Coordinator:

I think maybe the male experience of schooling, I think maybe they don't want to come into a place where they think they are going to be ordered around, I really don't know what the answer to that is... I think maybe it has something to do with the way they experienced the education system...

Education Officer:

Women are more inclined to do courses they are less threatened by it than men are, men are afraid of somehow admitting weakness by showing that they need to go back to school, the way they see it...

Women on the other hand were seen as having more complex reasons for engaging in adult education:

Education Officer:

There are far more women at home in Ireland than there are men. As the demands of mothering decrease as children get older women are looking for something to do. It often starts with women getting involved in their children's school. As their self confidence grows they are encouraged to do other things... It's not just about preparing to return to work, women who have been in the home for a long time do need to bolster their self esteem before they are ready to go to work.

There is some reference here to the effects of structural or institutional factors.

According to Gallacher et al:

These processes of peripheral engagement may be significant in enabling individuals to try out a new identity on an experimental basis, allowing them to engage in transition from one social milieu to another while minimizing the risks of doing so (2002 p 499)

The structures in place that encourage people to engage with education at a peripheral level such as schools, and community groups are more successful in attracting women than men, and reflect gender differences in access to discourse around second chance education. It also reflects The work of Russell et al (2002) that places women's return to education and work on a continuum that can span a number of years.

Course provision and learner demand:

The interviewees differed in their outlook on the factors influencing course provision. This may be due to their roles and their proximity to the learners. The education coordinator felt that course provision is largely influenced by learner demand coupled with the resources of the college in terms of skilled personnel and materials. She stressed that the college advertises courses covering a broad range of occupational areas such as science, construction, sport and leisure but has failed to get learners interested in these courses and this has led to the college developing courses in the areas of childcare, office skills, hairdressing and IT, with the recent addition of community and health services:

The main driving force is learner demand, no matter what we think might be a good course if we don't get the learner demand it doesn't happen.....One of the things that informs it (learner demand) is what they feel confident or comfortable to do, I think a lot of them particularly in an area like this feel that some courses would be beyond them...they would feel that it was something beyond where they were able to go.

Learner demand is influenced by habitus and cultural and social capital. Learners from traditionally working class backgrounds are limited in decision making around education. Gallacher et al (2002) found that "often what is important is not just knowing about provision but knowing someone who has experienced learning and experienced it in a positive way" (p 503). This probably reflects why certain courses are popular and strong within a community while other options fail to get off the

ground. With the exception of the IT course all of the courses available in the centre are related to gendered work in clerical and services industries.

Reasons why women choose childcare:

Both interviewees seemed to point to women's life experience as parents and familiarity with the role of carer as influencing the choice of childcare as a course option:

Education Officer:

It's something they are familiar with, it's easy, they are able to do it with their own kids, there are jobs also in it, perhaps jobs in schools...

Adult Ed. Coordinator:

With childcare I think a lot of the women think well I've had kids, I've reared kids, I know how to mind kids and there is work in the area. The fact that it is not that well paid doesn't enter into it.

The interviewees therefore consider that there is a link between women's identity as mothers and carers in the domestic setting and the choice of childcare as a vocational option. In the absence of other life, employment and educational experiences women are seen to draw on the aspect of their identity that is publicly valued and historically and culturally associated with the being a woman.

It was felt that the learners made their own choice about what course to peruse and that they need to have that choice recognised. Guidance prior to entry although valuable must respect the choices of the learner:

Education Officer:

People have to be free to make their own choices. As adults we have to have a level of trust in the information available and to go with that. You can't give people massive guidance...

Learners make their own choices but with limited cultural and social capital they are restricted in the choices available. According to Skeggs (1997): "Knowing is always mediated through the discourses available to us to interpret and understand experience". (p 29). Although the women are freely choosing to engage with childcare courses it is within the framework of what they know and how they know their world.

Learner outcomes:

Both interviewees stressed the value of the individual and social benefits of adult education. Improved confidence and self esteem were considered as very important

outcome for learners over and above the actual skills gained and the increased job prospects. Families and communities are seen to benefit from individual learners achievements in adult education:

Adult Ed. Coordinator:

I think they grow enormously in their own self confidence, there are benefits for their own families because they get an outlook on rearing their own children, their whole understanding of child development and an awareness of it. I think it has benefits for the whole community.. I think it changes the whole attitude to child rearing in the community.

Education Officer:

Educating women in communities does a lot for that community, many of these women will do voluntary work in the community or in their school... these women are role models in their community, people look up to them. they improve their own parenting style... self esteem is the big thing, if these women are more confident the whole community benefits...

Women and in particular working class women are oppressed in our society, radical adult education aims to enable learners to critique the taken-for -granted systems of beliefs that underpin the structures and discourses that produce oppression.

Building self esteem and confidence in individuals and communities is an important stage in this process. By studying childcare in particular, the women come to critique traditional approaches to childcare that are embedded in our culture. Changing childcare practices impacts on the women's children and grand children and on the children that they work with in the community. The interviewees position reflects what the learners themselves reported in relation to their learning around childrearing, and their increased confidence.

Adult education and low paid employment:

Although it was acknowledged that the childcare sector is poorly paid it was not understood as an issue of concern for adult education. A higher level of education, skills, and self esteem gained through the process were of more value to the individual than the job prospects in the particular vocational area. Learners once equipped with the knowledge that they can learn and they can take control over their futures often work their way into occupations that are more equitable:

Education Officer:

Women doing childcare courses may never take up a job in that area at all, they might end up doing something completely different a few years down the line, but the course will have helped them to feel that they are able to do something. You will find that these women are very capable and once they have say, worked in childcare for a little while other opportunities will open for them once they have the confidence and their ability is recognised in the workplace.

The Adult education coordinator felt that there is a much larger issue at work here and that although educators could raise awareness around equality and gendered employment that there is limited scope for improving the situation:

I don't think in the list of priorities it would be the highest, I would have spent years trying to argue that girls should do metal work and boys should do home economics... It seems to me that change is going to take generations.

Adult education provision itself is constricted by patriarchal discourse, the task of producing change is seen as part of a much broader cultural issue.

On the issue of pay and conditions in the childcare sector again the interviewees felt that this was not a concern for adult educators:

Adult Ed. Coordinator:

I think maybe what needs to be tackled here is the poor pay and I think that this is an employment issue.... You see more male nurses now, it's not maybe that they didn't want to do this before, but when the pay improved and the prospects improved you have men in that employment, I think that unless the pay issue is tackled in childcare that nothing else is going to follow.

Education Officer:

Education shows people possibilities, the childcare occupation is not an issue for adult educators...it may only be a stepping stone...

The interviewees were cautious at the prospect of raising awareness around issues of equality within the framework of the courses. The education officer was wary of trying to influence change where peoples circumstances are limited and spoke of how in her experience awareness raising around gender often led to relationship break down. The adult education coordinator felt that perhaps building awareness around the function of trade unions may help learners to become active in the future, but didn't feel optimistic about the readiness of the women to engage in this level of activity:

Maybe encourage people to join trade unions and maybe agitate from there and that's hard but for a lot of these people would not be politicised in the sense of knowing how to go about that. I certainly think that there is a role for us around raising awareness, I don't know how we go about it.

The interviewees were aware of issues concerning low paid, gendered work, however expressed a level of powerlessness around the function of adult education in tackling these issues. The low level of politicisation among the women is linked to their lack of social and cultural capital and their inability to have the capital they possess legitimised. Increasing confidence and educational skills is not sufficient to achieve what Gallacher et al (2002) refer to as “status passage” unless newly acquired skills and abilities are socially validated and legitimised. Women who use childcare as a stepping stone can achieve status passage, however those who do not have sufficient social capital to may continue to remain under valued and under rewarded in the work place.

4.5. Summary:

The interviews generated a wealth of knowledge. Emerging themes include the importance of part-time flexible educational and employment options for women. The link between the womens' identity as carers and the feminisation of the childcare industry. The effect of social and cultural capital on learner outcomes. Also, the view that adult education does not have a role in addressing the link between childcare education and gendered low pay employment. These issues are explored further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction:

This chapter aims to draw together the findings from the literature and the knowledge generated through the group and individual interviews. Chapter one outlined the focus of the study and a set of questions which the research aimed to address. In the following pages the findings and conclusions are structured to address these questions. Recommendations for addressing some of the issues that arise are also formulated.

5.2. The Childcare Profession:

Is the childcare profession agendered and classed?

Statistics available through the literature confirm that childcare is an almost exclusively female occupation. The construction of childcare as “women’s work” by the women themselves ensures that it will remain gendered for the foreseeable future. The literature and the women’s own experience confirm that rates of pay in childcare are low. Establishing the classed nature of childcare is problematic. Although Osgood (2005) would contend that childcare is classed, and Skeggs(1997) maintains that working class women find value and respectability in caring work, there is no statistical evidence which supports the classed nature of childcare. Not all of the women in the study could be classified as working class, and I would contend that finding moral value and respectability in caring work is not exclusive to working class women.

Most of the women in the research appear to choose childcare because it offers part-time work which is compatible with their role as mothers. As Coakley (2005) points out women will prioritise caring responsibilities over financial gain when it comes to employment (p 3). However, interviews with Jackie and Denise point to a possibility that the women who remain in childcare are the women who have lower levels of cultural and social capital, or who experience structural and material barriers to accessing education or employment in other occupations. Women with more economic and cultural capital (like Jackie) may remain in childcare while it is necessitated by their domestic and caring responsibilities or until they gain the confidence to move on. This may lead to a situation whereby long term employees in the childcare sector are positioned in a similar “habitus”, with little access to discourse around challenging

structural inequalities. This is perhaps reflected in the interview with the adult education organiser, who felt that the women are not sufficiently politicised to bring about change from within gendered and classed occupations.

Are economic and policy issues contributing to the gendered and classed nature of childcare?

As the women themselves pointed out men will not work for the low pay associated with childcare. Childcare raises also contentious issues for the government at present because the shortage of childcare places and the high cost associated with childcare is seen as a barrier to female labour market participation. Coakley (2005) maintains that:

A review of the current Government's Equal Opportunities childcare Programme (EOPC) leaves no doubt as to why people feel their values are being undermined and superseded by the needs of the economy. Under the EOPC, childcare is framed as a labour market equality strategy (p 20).

The governments priority is to provide affordable childcare. This is reflected in the allocation of capital funding to the private sector to increase capacity, and the absence of any real attempt to address the cost to parents and the rates of pay for childcare workers. It is also reflected in the practice of staffing community based childcare services with CE and JI workers. It is in the interest of the state and economy to keep childcare costs low. Maintaining the sector as gendered and classed assures this, as Jackson points out:

That men and middle-class women have been able to participate publicly as citizens has been in large part due to the servicing of their needs that has been done by working-class women both in the public and private sphere (2003 p 370).

5.3. The Learners:

Is there a link between the construction of Identity and the choice of childcare as an occupation?

Interviews with the Education Officer and the Adult Education coordinator indicated that women chose childcare courses because they feel familiar and comfortable with the role – it fits in with their identity. Discussion in the focus group appears to confirm this. As previously stated, the women have adopted an essentialist view on the role of women as carers. According to Parr (2000):

The traditional essentialist approach rooted in biology that men and women are basically different, in physical, emotional and psychological make-up is still dominant in our society. Despite considerable moves toward gender equality, this approach still influences the socialisation of men and women...(p 30).

Parr goes on to say that socialisation mechanisms are “instrumental in not only shaping individual identities, but also perceptions of how other should behave” (2000 p 30).

The women consider that the ability to work in childcare is dependent on an innate predisposition; this disposition is only available to women. By adopting this position the women are ensuring the feminisation of childcare into the future.

The identities of the women in the study centre around their role as mothers. Work in childcare while offering the flexibility to fit in around their caring and domestic roles also suits their positioning as carers. By constructing themselves as carers the women have found a way of achieving respectability and moral value.

Not all of the women became involved in the course because of an interest in childcare, some of them took up CE schemes because they wanted part-time work. However, on completion of the course and work experience they too consider themselves as having a predisposition to care:

Occupational caring becomes the means of finding meaning and dignity, assuming responsibility and respectability. The women find their own worth embedded, reflected and enhanced in the quality of their caring performance. (Skeggs 1997 p 63).

Despite the poor pay and low status childcare offers its own rewards and fulfilment. By capitalising on their predisposition to care, childcare becomes what Osgood refers to as: “a symbolically valuable vocation” (2005 p 297). For the women involved the occupation bears rewards that extend beyond the poor pay and status of the work. However, the women directed into childcare through CE schemes did not actively choose childcare as a career pathway and perhaps may have followed a different vocational route if more options were made available to them.

Are there economic and social factors that influence the decision to study childcare?

The study is limited in addressing this issue as only part-time learners participated in the focus group, full-time learners may be influenced by different factors.

The women in the focus; group expressed that one of their primary reasons for choosing childcare was because they felt that childcare work offered them flexible, locally

available work that would fit into their role as mothers. The availability of flexible part-time work outweighs the drawback of poor pay and status. This is consistent with findings by Coakley and is reflected in Russell and O'Connell's finding that "...women's returns to employment were frequently contingent upon the availability of part-time hours, which would allow them to combine caring and paid work" (2004 p 16).

CE schemes were instrumental in directing many of the women into childcare. CE schemes are seen as a very favourable type of employment by the women. When taking up CE schemes the women had no long-term plans about childcare work but were very positive about a future in childcare work. Some of the women in the group came from a more economically stable background and their families were not dependent on income from childcare. Some of the women were long-term social welfare recipients, particularly the lone parents- prior to taking up CE schemes. One of the drawbacks of CE schemes according to Coakley (2005) is the low progression rate into employment. Lone parents are permitted to work part-time and still retain their benefit, therefore part-time childcare work will benefit them in the short term but will not allow them out of the poverty trap. Osgood notes:

For some, the primary motivation for entering childcare was presented as the convenience it offered and the opportunity it presented to earn 'pin money', and for other it was seen to represent an escape from long-term unemployment and single-parenthood (2005 p 295).

Childcare may be put forward as an occupation that is attractive to women because it suits their caring nature and experience as mothers. However, earnings from childcare do not reward the level of education and experience required and will not allow women to move from welfare dependency to full-time employment.

How does social and cultural capital influence outcomes for learners?

Classifying the women in terms of social class is problematic, class indicators were not recorded in the study. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is more useful in framing the social positioning of the women. As referred to earlier some of the women may use childcare work as a stepping stone to a different occupation that will reward them more equitably. Some of them may never work in childcare once they have completed their CE scheme. The interviews with Jackie and Denise give some insight into how different levels of social networks and support can lead to very different outcomes for

learners. Both Jackie and Denise came from very similar backgrounds, yet their journeys from the time they left school and got married were quite different. Jackie accumulated cultural and social capital along the way and appears to have achieved what Gallacher et al refer to as status passage:

These status passage are also often associated with changing self-perceptions and self-definitions leading to changes in social identity in which the role of learner becomes open to them (2002 p 502).

Jackie has decided not to pursue a career in childcare because of the poor pay and conditions and has her sights set on further study. Denise claims to have benefited enormously from the course and is happy to work in childcare accepting the poor rates of pay. Denise feels she has “reached her level”, and cannot envisage herself progressing in education. The women’s narratives although individual to them could act as an indicator of how some women will indeed use childcare as a stepping stone and how others will become trapped in low paid work. As Osgood concludes: “in summary, it can be argued that childcare remains the domain of working class women precisely because nobody else wants to do it” (2005 p 296).

5.4. Adult Education:

Adult education policy incorporates economic and social objectives. How are these objectives met in childcare education?

Adult education policy aims to increase employment skills and foster social cohesion. Critics of government and EU policy maintain that it is economically led and that it recreates or maintains existing social hierarchies (Jackson 2003: Murphy 2000).

Interviews with the Adult Education Coordinator and the Education Officer support the notion that policy is driven by economic objectives. However, from their responses it is evident that their vision of second chance adult education provision is about education as a mechanism for the development of individuals and communities, through increasing peoples confidence and capacity to bring about change. The interviewees’ vision for their practice supports the objectives in the White Paper on Adult Education, including: citizenship, cohesion, and community building (2000 p 28).

The women themselves are very positive about their experience of adult education, with reported improvements in self confidence and a changed outlook on childcare which benefits their own children as well as the children in their care. Many of the women had no initial plan to re-engage with education until they took up places on a CE scheme. Looking at Rita's experience emphasises how CE schemes in combination with adult education can have a very positive outcome. Rita approached FAS looking for a job as a cleaner. Three years down the line Rita is a qualified childcare professional. Although Rita is probably no better off financially the change in her identity, self confidence and skills are significant and the benefit to her own children can not be underestimated. The aggregate effect of a group of women from a community experiencing success in education has to have a positive impact. The education service is funded, local and includes childcare support. Therefore, it addresses some of the barriers reported by Russell et al (2002) that hinder women's return to education and employment. To this extent adult education policy does have an impact on tackling educational disadvantage and social exclusion.

Preparing women for work in low paid industries does not address poverty or welfare dependency, as according to ERSI research cited in Coakley (2005) "...nearly 17 per cent of households living in poverty are headed by employees while the incidence of poverty has doubled among those at work since 1994" (p 14). Educating women for work in childcare fulfils the economic aims of EU and Government adult education policy by producing skilled workers. However, in the case of childcare the workers are not adequately rewarded and the gendered nature of the occupational sector perpetuates patriarchal discourse that serves to oppress them.

Does educating adults for entry into gendered occupations risk reproducing existing social hierarchies?

The Adult Education Coordinator and the Education Officer consider second chance education as primarily about building the learners' confidence while improving levels of education and vocational skills. Choice of course or career pathway is not seen as a concern for educators, the contention being that once the learner has increased confidence and capacity for learning, more options will become available to them in the future. . Jackson would contend that:

...improving skills and confidence does not necessarily increase opportunities. A growth in individualism and a change in attitudes and beliefs about gender roles in British society has deflated attention from the persistent gender inequalities which underlie current divisions of labour and organisation of work (2003 p 374).

Most people involved in second chance education initiatives are women. In the centre where the women are located all of the course provision with the exception of the FIT course, are courses that are linked to gendered occupations in the caring and services sectors. As we have seen, the childcare industry is 98.7 per cent female and has low pay and status for workers. Drawing on her research with childcare workers or “educarers” Osgood states:

I would argue that engagement in further and higher courses of study offers no guarantee of heightened professionalism, status, pay and conditions or indeed a ‘new improved identity’ in public discourse (2005 p 300).

From the interviews with the women it is obvious that for some women childcare is a ‘stepping stone’, while for others it constitutes a long term goal. As we have seen, the different outcomes could be explained in terms of cultural and social capital and the ability for some women to achieve “status passage”. Some learners have social networks that allow them to legitimise social and cultural capital while some are more isolated. Without access to symbolic capital women risk remaining on the bottom rung in employment and skills hierarchies.

Adult educators need to recognise the dilemma inherent in educating people for a role which is open to exploitation and to formulate a response to it. Adult educators must also develop strategies aimed at supporting learners to build social and cultural capital.

Adult Education strives to emancipate learners and increase their life chances. Do childcare courses achieve this aim?

The childcare industry is gendered and classed. Women employed in this sector are subject to low pay and poor status. However, childcare courses are a mechanism for attracting women into second chance adult education offering potential for change. The women came to enrol on childcare courses for a number of different reasons. However, their role as mothers and identity around caring for children are central to this decision. On completion of the course the women have a sense of gender inequalities in our

society, yet have an essentialist view of gender difference particularly in relation to caring and domestic roles and job status. The experience of adult education has not given them an opportunity to critically reflect on these issues and they continue to construct their identity around traditional feminised roles. This is evident in their acceptance of childcare as essentially 'women's work', and their willingness to accept the pay and conditions, and poor status of the profession. The potential for adult education to: "contribute to building a society organised according to democratic values of fairness, justice and compassion" (Brookfield 2005 p 2) has not been realised in the experience of these women.

On the other hand, learning in relation to child development has been a transforming experience for the women. Through the curriculum, the learners have critically evaluated social and cultural values and practices around childrearing and have changed their thinking and behaviour in their role as mothers and childcare professionals. This produces a positive and long term impact on families and communities. Sullivan (2001 p 910) found that parents' cultural capital has a significant impact on children's educational achievements. As families are the primary site for the generation of cultural capital the emancipatory effect of adult education might be manifested in the next generation.

5.6. Recommendations:

Adult education policy, economic policy and labour market activation are all entwined in the childcare debate. Osgood refers to a 'gender loop' whereby:

...the welfare to work agenda encourages mothers to exchange unpaid childcare work for low-paid work in order to employ another woman on low wages, to provide childcare (2005 p 295).

If adult education is to achieve its aims for democracy, fairness, justice and compassion (Brookfield 2005), or citizenship, cohesion and community building (*White Paper on Adult Education* 2001) then there are some issues to be addressed within second chance education provision. Adult educators have a responsibility to insure that learners maximise their opportunities within the education environment. Gallacher et al's (2002) analysis of the influence of personal factors and social relationships, and institutional factors, on the development of learning careers is useful in framing the following recommendations.

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Appendix i

Focus Group Questions:

- 1. Firstly I want each person to introduce themselves and say why they chose childcare as a career:**
- 2. What do you like about the course?**
- 3. How important is the childcare qualification to you?**
- 4. In our society who minds the children?**
- 5. What are the qualities of a good childcare worker?**
- 6. Does childcare work pay well?**
- 7. Were you aware of the rates of pay before you started on the course?**
- 8. Did you ever consider any other type of work?**

Appendix ii

Semi Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me a bit about yourself – where you grew up , your family..
2. How did you get on in school?
3. When did you leave school and why?
4. What did you do after you left school?
5. Before you started the course did you do any other courses?
6. How did you become interested in childcare?
7. How did you feel about starting the course?
8. How do you feel now having completed the course?
9. What do you think of the pay and prospects in childcare work?
10. Where you aware of the pay scales before you started?
11. What do you think needs to happen in the childcare industry?

Appendix iii

Key people Interview Questions

- What would you consider as the broad aims and objectives of the VTOS and BTEI initiatives?
- Do these aims and objectives concern broader social, civic and economic concerns?
- Education and training are features of VTOS and BTEI initiatives, how do you differentiate between the two?
- Is there a need to strike a balance between the educational and training aspects?
- Education policy, learner demand and economic concerns are all factors governing program provision, how important are each of these factors in influencing course provision?
- Why do you think that VTOS and BTEI courses attract more women than men?
- Some courses such as childcare may lead into occupations that are poorly paid, or with limited prospects for advancement. Should this be a concern for adult educators?
- Do Adult education providers have a role in trying to address issues concerning gendered occupations?
- Why do you think that women returning to education chose to study childcare?
- Besides the qualification achieved from the course are there further benefits to the learners and their communities?