

Cinderella or Princess?

History and other narratives of adult education in a university¹

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Introduction

The Cinderella Story is sometimes used to describe adult education as a neglected part of the education system. But few who tell the story go on to imagine what it was like after she married the Prince! Do you believe in the ‘happy ever after’ version? Princes are notoriously difficult to live with! Too many have been distant, arrogant and there is often a sense of it all ending in tears rather than the ‘happy ever after’. Few know that Cinderella is Irish! And as soon as the prince came knocking at her door it was not the ugly sisters who complained loudest, it was the neighbours! Some were heard to murmur ‘who on earth does she think she is...’ And in this way we can imagine some of the challenges facing an adult education that came from being a Cinderella and into the mainstream both in public policy and in the university.

This is a welcome opportunity to remember and acknowledge the work of Fr. Liam Carey who was the first member of staff at the Centre for Adult and Community Education at Maynooth. He was the Director until he retired in 1993. I welcome this invitation from Age Action and your European colleagues and it is particularly appropriate that this recognition of his work is at conference on older people. Liam, though well known in Ireland, was even better known abroad, and this was always a surprise to us younger adult educators who found that whenever we ventured abroad Liam was already well known and respected. But more about that later.

Let me at this stage preface my remarks by three comments. 1) The first is a caveat or warning to the listener that in recognising his work I am compromised and subjective. In 1980 he asked me to teach a course on the postgraduate diploma in Maynooth and I have been in Maynooth in one way or another since. But my first meeting with Liam was a series of conversations I had with him in 1975 and 1976 when I first began to think of studying Adult Education. He suggested that I contact Alan Thomas at OISE and Jack Mezirow at Teachers College. Both offered me a place and my best decision was to choose the programme offered at Columbia. My own indebtedness is matched, I know, by that of many more in this country. He was experienced by all who came looking for advice as generous and supportive. 2) However, I would like to offer some comments on adult education in Maynooth and Ireland in a more critical way. 3) We are in Renehan Hall. This is the meeting room for the Irish Bishops when they meet as a body. The

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images here are important reminders of an Irish spirituality and church power that is part of our history and which to a great extent has lost its power.

I want to do three things in this paper:

1. Outline briefly the historical and social background in which Liam Carey worked;
2. Describe briefly some of his achievements and give a sense of the models of adult education that took hold in the 30 year history of adult education at Maynooth;
3. Mention some challenges that face adult education in a university to-day.

Historical and Social Background (1930-1980)

Liam Carey was born towards the end of the 1920s in an Ireland that had already in the 20th century seen a World War, the Irish War of Independence, the Civil War and in the following decade Ireland was engaged in an Economic War with our nearest neighbour. It is an interesting aside to recall that the Economic War of the 1930s was prompted by de Valera and Irish tenant farmers refusing to pay back loans they had received from Britain before independence. The British response was to place a 20 per cent import duty on Irish goods (Ferriter, 2004, p. 368). Burning bondholders? It has been done. In this same period de Valera put in place an Irish Constitution (Bunreacht, 1937); 'bought back' the ports and copper fastened the role of the Catholic Church as the dominant social and political authority in Ireland. In support of that dominance there was a Vatican *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (1559- 1966) and the first Irish Censorship Act was enacted in 1929. As a personal aside, I remember having an account with Blackwell's of Oxford in order to get Edna O'Brien early novels and there is a loose floor board in No 18 Rhetoric for the purpose of hiding same. This then is the inward looking fearful Ireland that also had a tradition of adult education courses made to match the dominant set of ideas.

Adult education courses were to a great extent delivered under the heading of Catholic Sociology. Sociology in the both UCD and Maynooth (UCC did not have to call it Catholic as it had the famous O'Rahilly taking care of the vested interests) was called Catholic Sociology with a Professor of Catholic Sociology in Maynooth until 1970. The Church was afraid of sex and communism and both were seen as dangerous and subversive. Sex was controlled through the confessional and the fight against communism was fought mostly through adult education. Catholic Sociology had a curriculum in which official church social teaching was handed down to the masses and the main texts were the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). These made the case for private property, the illusion of socialism and communism. They supported the concept of a just wage, and outlawed child labour. Classes emphasised the importance of Catholic social teaching and McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin,

supported the idea that the church should be the dominant partner in Church State relations and that only 'the right people' should teach Catholic Philosophy, Catholic Sociology and Catholic Adult Education. It was to be a Catholic State for a Catholic people with its corollary in Northern Ireland, thus contributing to fixing divisions on this island for a considerable time.

A number of educational institutions assisted in this project. Firstly there was the Catholic Worker's College founded by the Jesuits that later became the National College of Industrial Relations (Sandford) and more recently it became the National College of Ireland. If its roots were clearly in Catholic Sociology the current Chairperson of the governing body is Denis O'Brien. Its first non-Jesuit President was Joyce O'Connor. These are not insignificant facts. The second important institute of adult education was the Extra-Mural provision of UCD known previously as the Catholic University of Ireland. And the third adult education institution was the Dublin Diocesan Study Centre that became the Institute of Catholic Sociology at Mountjoy Square. Liam Carey became the Director of this in the early 1960s and shortly after arriving back from a study tour of the US he changed the name to Dublin Institute of Adult Education. It is known today as Dublin Adult Learning Centre. Other adult education institutions had a different take on education and the People's College in Parnell Square, sponsored by the Trades Unions and run by Sheila Conroy for many years, modelled itself on the Workers Education Association (WEA) of Britain and offered itself as an alternative to the UCD Extra Mural provision. Adult education was a fiercely contested space where the contest was for the right to hand on through adult education core values and culture. This is a good time to state that many of the current staff and Directors of these institutions.

1960s

The Church feared the WEA as Marxist and one of the achievements of Liam Carey in the 1960s was that he entered this world of Catholic Sociology and Catholic Adult Education and at a moment in which the world was changing fast he navigated the change to a more secular adult education in Irish higher education. The Patrick Hillary sponsored OECD Report *Investment in Education* was published in 1962, the Vatican Council ended in 1965 and by the end of that decade (1970) the Institutes of Technology were founded. All this marked the beginning of the end of clerical domination of education and adult education. It could be argued that this may have been the beginning of the rise of an economic agenda becoming the new dominant driver of education and adult education.

The argument I am making may not be accepted by all and the way in which the economy is run may well not be in accord with the Ten Commandments. But maybe we could do with an economy that is guided by some moral and ethical compass. But the reason I am spending this time on the background of the educational world into which Liam Carey stepped is because at least a significant part of his achievement is that he bridged these worlds, survived shifting plates of social change and was able to work effectively in the multiple worlds of adult education, the church and the university.

To my mind, a number of factors led to his success in this changing of models. Firstly, The 1960s were important moments in many places and Ireland was changing anyway. Secondly, and I think this is important in my own understanding of what happened, Liam studied abroad. The first three PhDs in adult education in Ireland (not including NI) were all clergy and all were educated abroad – Manchester University, OISE at Toronto University and TC at Columbia. This is in complete contrast to the proceeding generation who were educated in sociology (and other disciplines) at predominantly Catholic institutes of learning at Rome, Louvain, Fordham, Boston College, Strawberry Hill, etc. Without escaping the church emphasis - his PhD was on Adult religious education in the RC Church in Ireland (Carey, 1974) - Liam brought back a rationale and vision of a discipline of adult education with a body of theory and practice; and research and scholarship; and that adult education is a well recognised university discipline in UK, US and in many other countries. Adult Education had its own research approaches, philosophies, teaching methodologies, policies, priorities and organizational structures. He brought a new agenda into public discourse concentrating on poverty, drugs, older people, etc. Thirdly, he made excellent contact with people and organisations abroad, Alan Knox and Gary Darkenwald at TC, the Wisconsin University Extension programme, WEA, European Bureau of Adult Education and at home with PJ Carroll, Aer Lingus and many more. Later, on his retirement as a mark of recognition, he was awarded an honorary doctoral degree at the Open University.

1970s

In the 1970s Liam played a key role in a number of events. The setting up of the Centre for Adult Education at Maynooth, The Government study of Adult Education (The Murphy Report). In the report and knowing some of the other participants it is clear that the input of Liam Carey was extensive. Here he outlined the syllabus for his postgraduate diploma in adult education at Maynooth as a model for the training of adult educators as well as the identification of a number of areas in society which ought to be of concern for educators – disadvantage, drugs in society, functional literacy, older adults, travellers, prisoners, youth and community development. The third intervention was the setting up of Aontas (Carey, 1979) the Irish National Adult Education Association with its own Journal (*Aontas Review*) and probably the first adult education research project which was undertaken by Maria Slowey on the participation of women in adult education.

1980s

If one were to look at the 1980s and rely on John Coolahan's history of Irish education (1981) one would think that, at best, adult education has succeeded only in keeping under the radar of other educators because it only merits a passing and brief reference with almost no understanding of its role, function and achievement. By the way, the Government *Programme for Action on Education 1984-1987* (Government of Ireland, 1984) has no section on adult education and in this Gemma Hussey report the words adult education are not mentioned at all (Inglis, 1989).

Liam was again involved in the Adult Education Commission on Lifelong Learning (1983) also known as the Kenny Report. Here a number of women took part on the Commission and in

particular Maeve Conway-Piskorski (RTE), Sheila Conroy (People's College) and Camilla Hannon (ICA).

In addition, the Extra Mural tradition in adult education was continued when Maynooth joined the list of providers. Initially it was much like an outreach programme for traditional groups of people such as religious education teachers in secondary school around the country with staff from Maynooth delivering occasional lectures as an outreach provision. This was not the only model and as other staff joined a more secular and what others would call a regular adult education extra mural provision was launched. There were often up to 2,000 students enrolled in these fee paying courses each year. One department or even a very few staff succeed for many years enrolling more students each September than were in all the other departments of the university combined. This was attractive for the university in that it gave high visibility to the Maynooth and its ways of working with adult students, created a valuable income stream but it laboured under the inflexibility, not just of Maynooth, but of the entire higher education system that did not want to recognise adult extra mural students as part of the accredited learning of the university. However, it was from this bank of experience that this university was able to carve out a successful track record of working with adults and build on the expertise of staff that has made Maynooth the university of choice for adults (RANLHE, 2010). As modularisation, semesterisation, access courses, working with non-traditional students (women, working class adults and their children, travellers, etc), accreditation of prior learning all become institutional imperatives it was the experience of staff of the department that was the foundation. I can say this because of these works I had no involvement.

1990s and beyond

The 1990s saw further developments and attention was drawn to literacy problems in the country in ways that could not be ignored. The OECD and ESRI led to quantify the levels of literacy that surprised many and led immediately to higher levels of funding for Literacy and Community Education. O'Sullivan's (2005) study of Irish education allocates a significant amount of space to interacting with the publications of the Department which even if he sometimes disagrees with the output at least they are not ignored any more. A Masters degree and Doctoral programme were also introduced as part of the expansion of the training of educators model.

Only in this century, arriving a little late and a bit breathless the university has acknowledged officially that adult education was a legitimate discipline (and just before you could get a degree in hairdressing in the IT sector) the university offered adult education recognition as an academic department.

Models of Adult Education

If we were to summarise the models of provision in place through these decades they might like this:

Church based Catholic Sociology and Catholic Teaching

Extra-Mural

- a) Traditional catholic topics
- b) Secular (or normal) adult education provision

Training of Adult Educators at postgraduate level – initially at Diploma, and gradually (and all too slowly) to Masters (in 1990s) and Doctorate (EdD in 2000s).

Research and publications

Social and policy consultation

Social Entrepreneur model –

Involvement in Higher Education/education in general

training, research, scholarship and publications

Access provision for mature and non-traditional students

What ideas inform practice? And other Questions

In all of the models outlined the department and staff were informed by their own set of ideas built on those of Paulo Freire, Jane Thompson, Jürgen Habermas and Jack Mezirow. This means that the set of ideas that informs all the actions of the department include the task of changing the frames of reference within which adults make meaning, act, think and feel so that adults will act out of more inclusive, more flexible, more open and above all more democratic frames of reference. It emphasises democratic engagements in which every participant is free to take part, ask any questions of any other, provide reasons for what one says and in which the only power being exercised is the power for the better argument. Not only is this participatory and democratic discourse necessary for learning and adult education but it is proposed as the best discourse for university conversations both academic and management and beyond that for all of society.

These sets of ideas have been systematically worked out in courses, research and in publications of the department. But as we approach a new era, as every generation is a new era adult education in the university and the university itself faces challenges.

Is there a new dominating influence on adult education (and on education in general)? I think there is and the Theo-centric model has been replaced by another. And I hope you agree that the economic imperatives of the market generally known as the neo-liberal agenda have become the new 'centric' influencing or dominating education. But at this pivotal point in our national history we know that the economic system is a failed entity. If you do not agree that it is a failed entity you might want to consider it as having, at least, a bi-polar disorder, a complete manic depressive at a system level swinging from excess and mania to depression. It has succeeded in bringing about the collapse of construction industry, the banks and in its place the burden falls on

the poor and disadvantaged to pay off the debts of others. What do we teach now? How do we teach about such things?

How can ordinary people understand the scandals, corruptions and gambings of financial institutions? How can anyone even contemplate a way forward? What do we need to know in order to raise our children well and in order to also contribute to the economic survival of this country? How can we learn such thing? Who will teach? Is there a task for an educational system here? Is the educational system also implicated? How can it not be? Who should be teaching about such things? And how? Who would prefer if we did not come to any understanding of these matters? Who will benefit from us not knowing? It raises questions both about who we were, who we are and who we would like to be for the future (Fleming, 2009, p. 8).

These events raise significant questions for adult educators and for our understanding of lifelong learning. So much learning is called for, so much to understand, so much to change.

The economy will not solve all our problems and having (since Thatcher and Regan) heard so often that the state needs to get smaller and let business regulate itself, now we ironically have business demanding that it be included, consulted in education that it may want to regulate the curriculum and just as it about to succeed, we suddenly realise that it was entirely wrong all along and that it cannot even keep the banks afloat without the state. And if business and industry continue to insist on their needs being met, on continuing to demand state subsidised training, continue to wage a relentless campaign against even a minimal public sector and shrinking social welfare provision then we may have to continue to teach that to a large extent it is the Irish economy that has failed to meet the learning needs of workers. In the context of OECD reports Irish business and commerce has one of the lowest rates of expenditure on training in the world. This is the same economy that has failed to deliver jobs, failed by losing all in a gambling binge. The price will be paid by parents and their families as forced emigration returns. So much to learn. So much to teach.

If all learning is not to be economic then what other learning needs do we want to promote. Adults have many other roles that lead them to have learning needs, family roles, roles in community and the many learning needs they have as citizens. Universities and adult education are also responsible for teaching people to be citizens. They will not just produce workers, but critical, caring, just, thoughtful, attentive and creative adults. The aim of adult education is to respond to the entire range of adults learning needs and argue, struggle, fight, protest and engage in policy formulation, research, teaching so as to bring about this. We are not neutral players on an educational stage but advocates for a critical lifelong learning can we make progress.

Challenges for A Future?

This is not intended to be a comprehensive statement of the challenges facing adult education in a university – even one that is hugely supportive of the adult education agenda. Rarely do old

structures, organisations and systems meet new demands and as we move towards a learning future we need to invent new structures for adult education and even for the university. We could do with working on these:

- Finding evidence based arguments (Research) for the efficacy of adult and community education. What works? Why does it work?
- Work against the enemy of the neo-liberal and its managerialism in education.
- Continue to work for the training of all staff in higher education so that they are not only well qualified in their own discipline (not our responsibility) but also well trained in the competencies of teaching adults.
- To address the increasingly strong demand for men's education and older people. A good example is the welcome development of Men's Shed. I am involved in their research projects and I consider this a significant challenge for an adult education profession that has become, like most of the education system feminised and this poses a particular challenge for men's groups.
- To continue to hold out to adults the possibility of exploring complex ideas and difficult questions. No question should be un-asked, no subject should be unexplored, no topic should be removed from public discourse. To continue to challenge all dominant beliefs.
- Not to be content with a service model where we provide a service to clients but to examine critically what it might mean to be part of the adult educating of the university.
- To look at the possibility of a new national association of adult education that will be (not mostly for students – as is rightly the role of Aontas now) a forum and support for all adult education professionals whether teachers, facilitators, researchers or policy workers in all sectors of state, economy and community.
- Maintain the international contacts so necessary in a small island nation.

The challenge for a Cinderella is always to keep alive the resentments at being the underdog and though one's time arrives and the prince casts his seductive glance to never forget that supporting adults learning is not just a career choice or strategic position or good for business but is responding to the moral imperative that is at the heart of the educational project. There is always more.

He knew that the tale he had to tell was not one of final victory. It could be only the record of what had had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never-ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts, despite their personal afflictions, by all who, while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilences,

strive their utmost to be healers.

(Camus, 1960, 251-252)

We need to teach people to feel indignation and to rebel, to protest, to become active citizens excited to be doing politics in a democracy.

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