

Education is the key to our success and freedom

[Psychology](#), [Success](#)



In this essay, I aim to discuss the phrase “ Education is the key to our success and freedom” in relation to both the historical developments of further education and training in Ireland while also drawing on philosophical perspectives that influenced these developments. I will also make references’ to my own teaching practice throughout this essay as well. Looking first at the historical developments and training of further education (henceforth known as FE) in Ireland we can trace its origins’ back to as early as the inception of the Technical Instruction Act which established the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in 1889 before it later transformed again into the Department of Education in 1924. Before this Act was established different Commissioners’ of Education, i. e. Primary and Secondary education etc., would act independently of each other while under this new Act all of these once separate departments now fall under the remit of the Minister for Education. In 1924 there were 65 technical schools providing full-time pre-employment courses.

The courses offered through these schools were mainly agriculture-related subjects for men and domestic skills courses for women with many of these courses being commencing during the evenings to accommodate those who were already in employment. A Commission on Technical Education report in 1927 highlighted the need for change to these structures; this would lead to the 1930 Vocational Education Act. This established 38 Vocational Education Committees (VEC) in 26 counties with the funds of these to be provided by the State and by the local rating authority in each Committee’s area’ (). The amount of which the State and the local authority would contribute varied from ‘ 1: 1 in most counties to 2: 1 in Dublin city and 4: 1 in Cork and smaller

towns.' (p47 T. 6 RAIFEARTAIGH) Of the total funds, the State contributes about two thirds. These VEC run schools would now also provided two-year full-time courses, designed to prepare young people, aged 14 - 16, for employment in the workforce, along with evening courses or 'technical education'. These particular courses were designed to improve the skills of the employed and included subjects such as Math, English and Irish but would also focus on the areas of sciences, commercial and rural skills. The curriculum and examination structure in these schools differed from that of Voluntary secondary schools as they did not provide the more academic and recognized Intermediate and Leaving Certificate courses. As a result, the VEC run schools were deemed to be of lower status and tended to have student intake from lower socio-economic demographics. Students of these schools often didn't progress to higher education and the staff was viewed as being less qualified to teach than those who taught at the technical schools. In 1973 the Irish Government made its first attempt to understand the needs of Adult Education with the Murphy Report. Up until this time Ireland still lacked a national strategy on adult education. The Murphy Report highlighted serious literacy problem in Ireland however little action was taken on the recommendations of this commission. When presented with the report the Commission at the time remarked: 'that the needs of those who are prevented by circumstances from attending courses of higher education at the usual age should receive special consideration in their later years when these circumstances might no longer be an obstacle' (p. 95). While evening classes were the norm for VEC schools the 80's and 90's saw the

growth of daytime courses. In 1979 each VEC was assigned their own personal Education Officer.

These Officers would be responsible for providing advice and information to those attending the colleges along with organizing learning programs. These programs also started to evolve following on from the Murphy Report to better meet the needs of their own local community and to help support those who may have once faced barriers to education. Courses such as personal development, adult literacy, second chance education began to take place in these schools. A clear objective is to increase qualifications and skills among particular groups within communities in certain subject domains i. e. Junior or Leaving Certificate and qualifications in areas of critical skills shortages such as childcare or Information Technology. The development of skills and qualifications at one level allows the learner to progress to the next level, leading eventually to a qualification that has a value in the workplace. Many educators hold the view that acquiring basic skills and qualifications is the first step toward an individual becoming more actively involved in the community which can also lead to economic growth in the area as more people gain successful employment having gained their new qualifications. Prior to the Murphy Report, a number of different organizations were established in an effort to help better coordinate and train adults. In 1963 the Council Council for Education, Training, and Recruitment for the Hospitality sector (CERT) was formed with An Chomhairle Oilúna (AnCo) established shortly after the report. The main aim of AnCo was to provide an adequate number of workers to meet employer demands and to allow workers to improve their job skills and job satisfaction. AnCo would later be

dissolved and rebranded into FÁS in 1988, but following 30 years of service FÁS itself would also be dissolved in 2013 to become SOLAS who would take over as the main provider for FE and training in Ireland. Another organization of note which was established in 1980 is the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

It was set up to coordinate literacy activity at a national level. While its main aim is to provide support to those running literacy and numeracy programs including materials and staff development initiatives, NALA also has a role in developing nations in regards to campaigning and lobbying on adult literacy and numeracy issues. The Murphy Report would be followed by the Report of the Kenny Commission on Adult Education, “ Lifelong Learning” (Kenny, 1984). This report would look further into the needs of adult education and the potential of the various agencies involved. Like the Murphy Report, which came before it, the Kenny Report highlighted the need for coordination, however, it suggested a different model. The Kenny Report instead suggested that it place Adult Education Officers at a local level, Adult Education Boards with a separate budget at a county level and National Council. “ a structure at national and local level is required so that the economic and social benefits for all people can be availed of to the fullest extent and the available resources can be used efficiently and effectively within a democratic framework” (Kenny, p. 120). Key elements of the Kenny Report highlighted the need to address the requirements of Adult Education and the need to develop administrative structures to help cope and manage with these needs. It also identified resources available to the sector and assessed the current status and potential of the various agencies involved,

and reviewed the current state of provision, levels of participation and the educational backgrounds, interests, and needs of those who avail of the courses. While the National Council failed to come to fruition a number of other important outcomes emerged from these reports. An Adult Education Section was established in the Department of Education in 1980 and Adult Education Boards were set up by VECs in 1984.

These changes allowed for a stronger base for the expansion and development of adult education during the 1980s and 1990s. In November of 1998, the Green Paper was issued. It proposed a multi-faceted National Adult Literacy programme. It helped to establish the Back to Education Initiative. It incorporated a more diverse and part-time access to facilities such as Youthreach and Traveller programmes, PLCs and VTOS. The Green Paper was seen as a commitment to upskilling the workforce by helping to close the divide between work and education through paid educational leave. It outlined the need for certification of education and training with progression between them and recognition of qualifications. It would be a system of adults leading adults with the overall aim to be as inclusive as possible while also addressing the skill needs of adults in a range of disciplines, in particular, literacy, communications and Information Technology. These weren't the only aims of the Green Paper, it also aimed to support local communities by providing a second chance for education to adults who may have faced barriers in the past and supporting community advancement, it would place the learner rather than the provider is at the center of the process. In 1999 the Qualifications (Education and Training) Bill was published in the Oireachtas. The aim of this Bill was to be more learner-

centered. The core four principal aims of the bill were, to establish and develop standards of knowledge, to promote the quality of further education and training and higher education and training, to provide a system for coordinating and comparing education and training awards and, to maintain procedures for access, transfer, and progression. Following on from this and just two years after the Green Paper the White Paper was published in July 2000. “ This White Paper aims to provide a template for the development of the Adult Education sector as part of an overall Government commitment to establishing a comprehensive system of lifelong learning for all.” (p. 26) The above quote from the White Paper summarizes the overall aim of this Paper with “ lifelong learning” a key phrase that is mentioned throughout. Other aims of the paper included Work-based learning where the students could learn their skills or trade on-site. This also fed into one of their other aims, which was to accommodate different learning styles i. e. to physically do what they are learning rather than just reading about it. This is something I personally had seen a lot of during my own placement, for example for one of my classes I had three groups of students whom each had to source a band or musician to record a demo song. Each group of students would bring their band or musician, who would also act as their client – same as in a real-world environment, into the studio to record a demo song, mix it, send it to their client for them to approve or incorporate changes as per the clients instructions or needs before making a final cut to send back to their client and for me to grade. The White Paper also pushed for Work-based learning to be accredited as a formal qualification or credit to not only help streamline the learners experience but to also allow the learner to gain valuable

experience which they can bring with them going forward or to use as part of a portfolio when applying for work or a Higher Education course.

Also to come from the White Paper was Local Adult Learning Boards (LALBs). Thirty-three Boards were set up to replace existing VEC Adult Education Boards. A wide range of representatives now sits on the Boards which are made up of representatives from each second level school sector in the area. The aim of LALBS is to make sure that courses that are delivered are of quality and allow for progression all the while being learner-centered, a form of Andragogy. Andragogy, according to Knowles, focuses on the adult and is based on six assumptions: 1. The learners need to know why they need to learn something. 2. The learner's self-concept. 3. The learner's prior experiences. 4. The learner's readiness to learn. 5. The learner's orientation to learning. 6. The learner's motivation. These assumptions when applied to adult learners become " a sound foundation for planning adult learning experiences" (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 157). Adult Educators who understand and apply Knowles' assumptions outlined in andragogy tend to have a better likelihood of meeting the needs of an adult learner. Throughout my placement, I also made regular use of a website called Mentimeter. This allowed me to engage with the students in a more relaxed way and allowed me to, in a sense speak their language, by actively having them use their phones to take part in the lesson. It also allowed for me to lessen the divide between Teacher and Students and create a fun way to recap on previous lessons and keep the learner engaged, eager to learn and better themselves in time for the next class when they could compete against each other in class via Mentimeter. When an andragogical model is used when designing a

class, the Adult Educator can engage the adults as a facilitator rather than using a teacher-centered approach. In particular with number three of Knowles assumptions, we can see clearly ties into the White Paper with the Government wanting work placed learning to be taken into account.

Having used this model in my own classes during my placement I found that students were more engaged with the lesson and it allowed for them to critically think about the subject. However, I have also found that sometimes it can lead to students breaking into tangents or others take it as an opportunity to talk amongst themselves when trying to have a class discussion on different topics. Continuing on with teaching philosophies, some of the most important philosophers come from ancient Greece, with Socrates being one of them. He emphasized the importance of values and urged people to question what they were being told. This something that has lived on to today and something that is actively encouraged in further education and is the basis of all philosophy. It is possible to see that both the White and to the Green Paper have been influenced by both and Paulo Freire and Jack Mezirow, who in turn was probably influenced by Socrates, and their ideas about Transformative Learning. Freire recognizes the importance of meaning in society. He highlights that peoples' understanding of fundamental issues can be changed and how this change can be combined with action to change the reality in which one lives (1973). This aligns with the aim of the Green Paper in which its aim was to raise awareness of Adult Education in meeting the challenges that confronted society at the time. Freire was an advocate of problem-solving education, one in which has the Adult Educator/Facilitator ask questions of their students that relate to their

world and demands their input thus making it relatable to them. Freire believes that students need to become critical thinkers in dialogue with the Facilitator and that this can only happen in situations where everyone, Facilitator, and student, has equal say in the classroom. While Freire has more of a pedagogical viewpoint this can also relate back to andragogy and how we as Facilitators' can make the classroom a student-centered one, by encouraging critical thinking and discussions', something which is also echoed by the White paper. The main message and central philosophy of Freire's teachings are that the educational process must be a liberating one, that it must provide some kind of freedom. Mezirow argues that the aim of adult education as one of fostering behavior change requires " fundamental revision" (1978, p. 107). This involves fostering critical reflection on social conditions, practices, institutions, and systems and helping adult learners who have already become aware of the need for collective action to learn what they need to know to act effectively. According to Mezirow, the connection between individual transformation and social action is that learners can be helped to analyze common problems through active research and encouraging them to build solidarity with each other in order to take action. This can be seen through group projects or assignments in FE. By having students actively work on a problem or project together they build their critical thinking and analyzing skills in order to solve the problem together. In summary, transformative learning is a process of becoming aware through critical reflection of the state of mind in which we think, act and feel. It involves becoming aware of where you started from and the

search for a new, and hopefully more developed state of mind that will result in action on the basis of the new frame of mind.