

Complex Contexts: Women and Community Education in Ireland

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Abstract

Education is not a neutral process, it can be used to establish and maintain conformity or be part of a process of liberation and social change (Freire, 1979; hooks, 1994). The Irish State's failure to acknowledge this lack of neutrality has characterised the formal education system in Ireland since its inception. From the introduction of the National School System of education in 1831 to the present day, the ruling force of the Catholic Church within education is evidenced in the conformist nature of this formal education landscape. Maintained through systems of privilege, it exercises power through exclusion, coercion and control. However, simultaneously individuals and groups of women have challenged this formal, religiously infused conformist education system. Their demands for full and equal access to mainstream education at all levels including within the academy served to challenge this hegemonic force. They also pioneered the development of innovative and radical forms of adult and community education as a means toward individual and community empowerment. This paper seeks to highlight some notable grassroots and community innovations and trends within Ireland through an explicit gendered lens and with a particular focus on higher education.

Key words: community higher education, historical context, gender, access, societal inequality, feminism

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Introduction

Education is not a neutral process, it can be used to establish and maintain conformity or be part of a process of liberation and social change (Freire, 1979; hooks, 1994). The Irish State's failure to acknowledge this lack of neutrality has characterised the formal education system in Ireland since its inception. From the introduction of the National School System of education in 1831 to the present day, the ruling force of the Catholic Church within education is evidenced in the conformist nature of this formal education landscape. Maintained through systems of privilege, it exercises power through exclusion, coercion and control. However, simultaneously individuals and groups of women have challenged this formal, religiously infused conformist education system. Their demands for full and equal access to mainstream education at all levels including within the academy served to challenge this hegemonic force. Focusing instead on its liberatory and transformational potential, their demands provoked

challenges to established knowledge hierarchies, pedagogic processes and power relations. In addition to challenging this formal education system, they also pioneered the development of innovative and radical forms of adult and community education as a means toward individual and community empowerment. Over time this level of provision has developed to include in/non-formal education in addition to accredited learning at further and higher levels, spanning levels one to eight in the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). This paper seeks to highlight some notable grassroots and community innovations and trends within Ireland through an explicit gendered lens and with a particular focus on higher education.

Complex Historical Contexts

The National School System of education was introduced to Ireland in 1831, and although planned to ‘unite in one system children of different creeds’ , it soon took on a denominational character. Under pressure from the various Churches ‘Government concessions ... ensured that by mid-century over ninety per cent of national schools in Ireland were under denominational management’. (INTO, 1991) From the beginning this national system did provide a rudimentary education for girls from a working class or poor background. However, as attendance was not made compulsory until the Irish Education Act of 1892 illiteracy among, girls, most particularly, working class girls continued to be high. Even where they did attend school, the education provided was focused on training them for the type of life they were expected to have. They ‘were unlikely to learn more than the basic arithmetic, they were taught to read and write but since domestic service was the expected fate of most girls, great emphasis was placed on the learning of the domestic arts and sewing’ (Luddy, 1995, p. 89). Middle class philanthropists and educationalists, ideologically driven by both religious and Victorian ideas of the deserving and undeserving poor, believed that training girls in the virtues of domesticity combined with lessons in sobriety, moral restraint, hard work, and thrift were vital in terms of social improvement. A well trained girl would be a moral and pure wife and mother, a credit to her husband and an example to her family and community.

Education, therefore, became a necessity in training a deserving ‘respectable’, ‘moral’ working class. English woman Frances Taylor, travelling through Ireland visiting secular and religious educational establishments, in the mid 1860’s, vividly demonstrates this belief that the education given to the children of the poor should also reflect their class and status in

society. Most in society she felt, saw it as ‘a terrible risk of serious evil’ (Taylor, 1867, p.132) to educate a child above his or her class and expectation. Children of the working class were to be educated for their station in life. In Kenmare, Co Kerry, she approved of the fact that the Poor Clare sisters ‘try to classify the children, giving to each the education most suited to their position, and ...their capabilities’, and middle class girls were given a more literary education ‘there are girls of a superior grade, who are being trained for school mistresses... they receive a solid and excellent education’ (Taylor, p.169). This division by class on the type of education received by girls would continue well into the twentieth century, although for all classes of women education was restricted to reflect the proper place of women in society, which was within the domestic.

For middle class women, and most particularly for middle class feminists, these constraints on female education became more obvious with the opening of secondary education to women. As it was mainly middle class women who accessed secondary education, it is these women who received a more comprehensive vocational education from the 1860’s onwards. This expansion of education for middle class girls was also influenced by both the expanding conventual¹ movement which saw the opening of many convents secondary schools for girls, and by the campaigns of Irish suffrage women in the educational arena in the latter half of the 19th century. Women such as Isabella Tod (founder of the Ladies, Institute, Belfast) and Anne Jellicoe (founder of Alexandra College in Dublin) were vocal advocates of expanding educational for women and were also supporters of the campaigns of the right for women to the vote. Indeed along with the vote, education was the second of four main issues which engaged 19th century female activists, which also included campaigns to secure married women’s property, education, and to repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860’s.

These campaigns were long and hard fought. As Henrietta White, Principal of Alexandra Colle noted ‘cult of ignorance in woman did not lack adherents even in the latter half of the nineteenth-century’ and the campaign to extend and enhance female education was resisted (Ó hÓgartaigh, 2009, p.37). Despite this some breakthroughs were achieved for by Irish suffragists when they succeeded in having the provisions of the 1878 Intermediate Education Act (which opened the Intermediate public examinations to girls as well as boys) and the 1879 University Act extended to girls and women students; because of these breakthroughs by 1908 all universities had opened their degree courses to women. Although illiteracy levels

¹ Through the 19th century the numbers of women joining Orders of Religious Sisters increased, by 1910 census, being a religious sister is one of the main occupations for women outside of the domestic.

among all classes and genders continued to fall towards the end of the 19th century, the successes of feminist activists in the educational area mainly affected the lives of middle class women. Despite this educated women were not necessarily gaining access to the professions, many had no option but to become teachers which Martha Vicinus in her study of educated women in Britain noted was “a narrow staircase leading to more education as an ill-paid—but respected—teacher (Ó hÓgartaigh, 2009, p.37).

Literacy was also rising among working class girls but a gendered curriculum continued to educate these women for service and the domestic. The new generation of more militant, radical feminists, active from 1900, viewed better education as a powerful tool for the transformation of Irish society and culture. The growth in cultural nationalism led to a belief on the importance of education in the creation of an Irish identity, and women were particularly involved in this cultural education. One example was Inghinidhe na hÉireann, a women only militant, separatist and feminist organisation, established by Maud Gonne in 1900. Its stated intent was to be a Society of

Irishwomen pledged to fight for the complete separation of Ireland from England, and the re-establishment of her ancient culture. The means decided upon for the achievement of this object was the formation of evening classes for children, for Irish Language, Irish History...the restoration of Irish customs to every-day life, Irish games, Dancing and Music. (BMH WS 391, Helena Molony)

Its editor, Helena Molony, was concerned that feminists and nationalists should educate the children of Ireland about the language, history and culture of Ireland and inculcate in them a sense of Irish identity. Inghinidhe women recognized the importance of direct action in achieving this and ran classes for poor children in Dublin’s tenement inner city. They would have been aware of the inferior vocational education available to young women, however they were more concerned that all children received a nationalist education. Although radical in their demands for national rights, militancy, the vote and working women’s rights, in the area of education, especially among poor children, it was instilling a sense of Irish identity in Irish children, rather than opposition to a gendered education system, which framed their activism.

For most, the Catholic education system, which was by the early 1900’s firmly established at the main area where poor children were educated, delivered the type of education which was desirable and acceptable. For women religious their approach to education was informed the ideals that ‘children entrusted to our care should be instructed in every branch of secular

education. . . but all this instruction should be founded on religious enlightenment and animated by religious spirit' (Rafferty, p.310). Many of the radical feminists, some of whom had become rebels in 1916, were concerned with the importance of education for girls. Some like Margaret Skinnider were themselves teachers, however, as with the Inghinidhe women, their concern focused mainly giving children a sense of Irishness through education rather than seeing education as space for feminist activism. Post the 1922 establishment of the Irish Free State, in a country where 95% of the population was Catholic, education for girls retained that gendered, Catholic influenced ethos until late into the 20th century. First wave feminist activism had achieved the goal of access to education for girls and women. They had also succeeded in gaining access for women to professional and vocational education, allowing more women to enter the professions. Indeed, women trade unionists campaigned through the early decades of the Irish State for better treatment and pay for women teachers (a profession they had begun to dominate), but transformation of the gendered nature of all educational sectors, especially for working class girls, would have to wait until the later twentieth century.

Complex Social Policy Contexts

Historically, the formal education system formed part of what can be argued was a definite strategy on the part of the Catholic Church to maintain key sites of social control in a rapidly changing socio-political context (Ferriter, 2009, Inglis, 1998, McAuliffe, 2014, Connolly, 2003, Connolly and O'Toole, 2005). A dual strategy was systematically pursued, one of exclusion (of women and those with disabilities) and one of control. Inglis notes:

The Catholic Church's primary vehicle for executing its control was by educating and caring for children, in order to ensure the socialisation of young people. As a result, the Catholic Church fought a long battle to ensure its control of education during the nineteenth century, control it maintains to this day. (Inglis 1998, p 102-103)

Conroy (1975) extends this analysis of Catholic domination into the realm of family welfare. She argues that both welfare and education were dominated by ideologies of family welfare and charity and concepts of rights and justice only entered these discourses to any great degree during the late sixties and seventies in Ireland. However, while enormous changes took place across the welfare system (including the establishment of key welfare payments to 'unmarried' mother, 'deserted' wives, prisoners wives, widows pension) the grip of the Catholic Church over education hardly yielded. And in the sex segregated schooling system harsh ideologies around guilt, shame and sin particularly targeted girls and women, their

sexual identities and reproductive selves. The embedded nature of this particular relationship between the Church and Education in Ireland persists. Currently 96 per cent of primary schools are owned and under the patronage of religious denominations with approximately 90 per cent of these state sanctioned schools owned under the patronage of the Catholic Church.²

Contemporary social policy in Ireland tends to be associated with social protection, poverty and social welfare policies with education seen largely as a separate, although linked system. This is partly due in recent decades to the framing of social policy in an EU context which has its origins in trade agreements and labour market policies, based on the Treaty of Rome 1957 and subsequent Treaties. Social Policy at EU level is focused on non-discrimination, gender equality and social exclusion, in relation to the labour market and has little what is termed ‘competency’ in areas of education, health and housing (Murphy, 2014; Finn Vaughan, 2010; Brown, 2009; Mangan, 1993). So, despite the central role played by formal education policies and practices in shaping systems of inclusion and exclusion, privilege and disadvantage, education is rarely seen as a core part of social policy. In her analysis of educational literacy policy in Ireland, Maggie Feeley (2014) explores the extent to which ‘self-replicating learning inequalities’ persist ‘that cherish the potential of some, whilst wasting that of others’ concluding that ‘we are all diminished by this neglected potential’(2014, p. 8).

Systems of social mobility in Ireland were historically primarily based on the gendered ownership of land and property but recent history has seen education play an increasingly central role in determining levels and rates of social mobility across social class, gender and ethnic groups. In 1967 ‘free’ education was introduced and immediately a class-based system of fee-paying and non-fee-paying schools emerged. These grafted onto an earlier system of inequality in relation to vocational training and academic schooling, the first one linked to craft and trade and the latter to a distinctly privileged third level system. Research has indicated that mainstream education has facilitated the creation and reproduction of class inequalities in Ireland, over many decades (Clancy, 1995, 2001; Whelan and Layte 2007; HEA, 2015).

² <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Diversity-of-Patronage/Diversity-of-Patronage-Survey-of-Parents.html>

Policies that were adopted to respond to this inequity and to develop greater equality of access for example, the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Programme, which located national school first level education centrally as part of an integrated approach to disadvantage linked to local and community planning, was systematically undermined by the fundamental unequal structure underlying formal education in Ireland. As MacRuairc argues:

Nowhere are the manifestations of socio-economic class more evident than in the field of education, where despite a successive range of policies, initiatives and investment, significant inequalities with respect to educational outcomes continue to prevail between socio-economic groups. (2009, p.118)

As the concept of social class extended to encompass socio-economic and cultural capital, this cultural class struggle is played out to a large extent in education. Judith Harford argues that the Catholic Church was ‘one of the most powerful and strident opponents of access to higher education [by women]....resisting the possibility of reform at every turn’ (2009). However, women’s agency and capacity to resist and challenge this regime by forging educational entry points and pathways at second and third level is also highlighted by Harford (2009). She argues that the impact of this increased participation by women in education shifted the gendered balance between private and public domains.

Although only a minority of middle-class women were in the social, cultural and economic position to benefit from early higher educational reform, their participation in higher education had far wider social implications. It helped to move women’s role beyond the private sphere of the home and into the professions and public life. (Harford, 2008, University College Dublin)

As women sought to maximise the opportunities to participate in all areas and levels of education, afforded them through these legal and socio-political developments, their participation rates increased dramatically. Women are much more likely to complete second level education, make up a clear majority of those in the third level system and comprise the vast majority of those in the adult education sector.

Education has become a leveller for women to an important extent. While half of all university undergraduate students are women, fifty-four per cent of postgraduate students are women. The percentage of women aged 15-64 attaining third level educational qualifications in Ireland has increased to a high level reaching forty per cent in 2014, higher than the average rate across the twenty-eight European Union countries (EU-28) which was twenty-six per cent. Among women in the 30-34 age group the percentage is particularly high at

fifty-nine per cent for women, again way above the EU-28 average of forty-two per cent (Barry, 2015). But the material inequalities resulting from a lack of care provision, combined with the penalising of women in paid work for having and rearing children, means that women are constantly fighting for access and equality. Where innovative programmes facilitate such access, the outcomes are dramatic in both educational and social terms. Educational programmes that effectively respond to the ways that women learn and that respond to women's needs (particularly care needs), and social circumstances indicates that 'women learn best in relational and relaxed environments, where the challenge comes from a setting that affirms and honours their experience and nurtures their desire to know and to use that knowledge in a diversity of ways' (NWCI Millennium Project, 2001). Community education has been one of most proactive environments in which women's learner needs and desires have been responded to in particular ways.

Complex Community Adult Education Contexts

Community based adult education has over many decades carved out a centrally important offering on the Irish educational landscape. The growth, significance and innovation of the community education movement were acknowledged almost two decades ago in the White Paper on Adult Education in which it was posited ideologically as a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level (2000, p.111-2). It was also radical and political in intent. This reflected a global backdrop in which New Left Social Movements of the 1970s and 1980s set out to interrogate, destabilise and challenge limiting identity naming categories, and in so doing challenged their inclusions and exclusions, their power bases, their spaces of discrimination. The emergence of community education also reflected a class-based and conservative socio-cultural context and Irish demographic especially in terms of race and sexuality (Smyth, 1992; Ferriter, 2004; Quilty et al., 2015). It is currently defined by Ireland's national adult education agency, AONTAS, as:

...a process of personal and community transformation, empowerment, challenge, social change and collective responsiveness. It is community-led reflecting and valuing the lived experiences of individuals and their community...Community education is grounded on principles of justice, equality and inclusiveness. (<http://www.aontas.com/commed/>)

As it has evolved, community education has spanned a combination of non/in/formal education programmes, both non-accredited and accredited across a range of socio-spatial contexts. The attraction of community education for women located within isolated,

disadvantaged and socio-economically excluded contexts is clear. The development of a particular Women's Community Education movement provided a participatory woman-focused and women-friendly context which attracted low-income working class women, back to education. Research by the National Women's Council of Ireland estimated that 80% of the 14,000 people participating in community-based education in the late 1980s and 1990s were women (Johnston, 1998, in NWCI, 1999). Currently, taking just one example, the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN), represent a total of seventeen Women's Projects countrywide involving thousands of women learners and participants. The vast range of services they provide are based on community development principles and values which have been central to engaging with disadvantaged women to address the structural barriers that impact negatively on their lives (NCCWN, 2016). These community education initiatives have also been key to challenging exclusions of women (Macdona, 2001) and persistently underrepresented groups (HEA, 2015) within the range of Higher Education (HE) institutions.

This persistent under-representation of some social groups in HE can be read as part of the 'powerful cultures of exclusion which operate within contested social spaces as universities' (Puwar, 2004, p.51). Reflecting the Irish HE landscape, Kathleen Lynch makes a strong statement about the spatialised University, one of boundaries and procedures, impacting not only on who enters but on what is valued:

They practised exclusion, not only through their selection procedures for students and staff, but also by maintaining rigorous boundary maintenance procedures within and between disciplines, and between what is defined as legitimate and what is not. (2006, p.73)

The significance of the women's movement in challenging these exclusions can be seen in two ways: first, the development of community-university partnerships and second, the broad-based pedagogic underpinnings of community education in Ireland.

Community-University Education Partnerships

It remains the case that the academy is one of the most valorised and legitimised locations of knowledge generation. Doreen Massey calls us to scrutinise such locations, 'to ponder the elitist, exclusivist, enclosures within so much of the production of what is defined as legitimate knowledge still goes on' (2006, p.75). There is much to guide us in this work. Feminist scholars and activists, who over many decades worked to counter their invisibility and exclusion from masculinist knowledge-making arenas and to articulate their situation in

the world, strove to give women a central place within philosophising and theorising (Massey, 1999, 2004; McDowell, 1997, 1999; Valentine, 2001). They also sought to destabilise the knowledge-making machine (Foucault, 2007) by challenging the spaces of production within the academy. It is significant that the White Paper also highlighted the pivotal role feminist, women's education had, not only in pioneering and driving community education in Ireland, but also in challenging persistent under-representations within Higher Education (HE) through the emergence of a particular form of community higher education.

Strategically, as evidenced from the developmental trajectory of community education, community activists and those involved in community development were also committed to destabilising politics. As part of this they sought to embrace higher education provision, but to do so on their terms. Most typically linked directly to HE institutions through formal University accredited programmes, community sector groups and organisations set about partnership building within the crevices, nooks and crannies of the elitist academy (de Lauretis, 1987) to develop and deliver in innovative ways programmes that mattered, that had relevance (WERRC, 2001, 2004). The emphasis was on principles of partnership, empowerment, participation and capacity building so as to challenge systemic inequity through widening participation (Hart et al., 2013, Scull & Cuthill, 2010).

Community-Higher Education Pedagogy

Feminist scholars since the second wave and critical adult educators including Freire, understood the importance of listening to women's socially situated narratives and of co-constructing knowledges with them as a way to challenge their invisibility not just within academia, but within the processes of the very construction of knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). This methodological process is captured by Barr who, drawing on the seminal work of Haraway (1991), states:

Women's education as it developed in adult education thus challenged, in concrete, practical ways, the notion of disembodied knowledge, recognising that knowledge, is not neutral but always socially situated: there is no 'God's eye view, no 'knowledge from nowhere'. (1999, p.40)

In this sense, knowledge is 'not simply out there waiting to be collected and processed, but rather is made by actors that are situated within particular contexts (Hubbard et al., 2005, p.8). Starting with the reality of the women's own lives, feminist pedagogy acknowledged that such education not only models feminist principles but demonstrates a core principle of all Adult Education activity with marginalised groups. Linda Connelly (1996) sees a clear

link between the women's community education groups and earlier radical feminist groups, particularly as they resemble the small-group, consciousness-raising approach of the radical women's sector which emerged in the 1970s. It would, however, be facile to assume that women's community education is always feminist in outcome (Dolphin and Mulvey, 1997; O'Donovan and Ward, 1996). Adopting an explicit feminist agenda, mirroring radical adult education, involves both a politicisation of consciousness and action for change. These are deliberate acts that get played out in particular ways:

So that has meant working with groups in neighbourhoods, in local communities, to try to develop the kinds of structures that enable them to decide first what it is they want and need to know; why they need to know it; how best they think they can learn it and fourthly what it is they are going to do with that knowledge. (Smyth, 2002: p7)

We could view this pedagogic position as one which challenges the notion that 'ruling groups are able to exercise control over what is taught and how it is taught, maintaining hegemonic control (Jackson, 2011, p.5). This radical re-positioning of knowledge making, ownership and purpose highlights the capacity of critical adult and community education to remake as liberatory the power relations endemic in any educational process.

Complex Future Contexts

There is evidence to suggest that the Irish higher education policy arena is finally beginning to take seriously this relatively small, though politically and strategically significant, community higher educational presence. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (Hunt, 2011) recommends improved levels of engagement between higher education institutions and local communities in which 'higher education institutions need to become more firmly embedded in the social and economic contexts of the communities they live in and serve' (Hunt, 2011, pp.77-78). They advocate for more community-based approaches where the emphasis is on principles of partnership, empowerment, participation and capacity building so as to challenge systemic inequity through widening participation. Importantly, within an Irish context, the communities in which this form of HE provision has greatest impact and demand are those most characterised by systemic, inter-generational disadvantage and social exclusion.

What this highlights is that the vagaries of location have become an important consideration in how educational equity plays out across the island. Kearns, drawing on the seminal work of

Smith (1994,) notes in this regard that ‘spatial justice starts from the recognition that access to foods and social services can depend on where one lives or works, the question of who gets what where’ (Kearns, 2014, p.3). In fact, the demographic disparity in relation to higher education access in Ireland is alarming. In Dublin, the participation rate spans the lowest 15 per cent within Dublin 17 to the highest rate of 99 per cent within Dublin 6 (HEA, 2015). The identified areas of significant and persistent underrepresentation have effectively been described as ‘deep reservoirs of educational disadvantage, mirroring in large part economic disadvantage’ (HEA, 2014, p.3), that continue to be an uncomfortable and sobering part of the Irish HE story.

The literature has comprehensively documented the persistent barriers to educational participation for adults, and particularly women, living within these ‘designated areas of disadvantage’ which include child/elder care, finance, time and transport (WERRC, 2001; OECD, 2014, p.404). Adopting a dynamic, solution-seeking approach to addressing these barriers, AONTAS (2009) identified three significant changes that need to be made to the HE system if adults were to be fully welcomed and included. First, they identified the need for more flexible learning opportunities for adult learners taking into account their work and caring responsibilities. This point was recently reinforced by a governmentally appointed Expert Funding Group who observed that ‘embracing a greater share of mature students entails greater provision of flexible and tailored staff contact times that work around their work, household and other commitments’ (2015, p.39). Second, AONTAS identified the need for a change in the culture and attitude of higher education institutions. As Lynch has argued ‘they come, but they are not fully expected; very often they are not fully accommodated’ (2006, p89). Third, and finally, they identified the need for better financial supports for adult learners in higher education including revising the eligibility for maintenance grants for part time mature students. The literature also reinforces the important link between parental education levels, especially that of the mother’s, and children’s educational achievement (Doyle & Timmins, 2007; Currie & Moretti, 2003).

Evidently, the call by the HEA for increased university-community engagement exists against a backdrop of persistent inequity in HE vis-à-vis the continued exclusion of people from particular geographic communities, including women. Within an Irish context, it is clear that despite the rapid expansion of HE and the removal of ‘formal’ tuition fees the ‘most glaring inequities in access, namely, the under-representation of the lower socio-economic groups

and the small share of mature students' have not been significantly improved (Expert Group HE Funding, 2015, p.22). The persistence of such educational inequity 'highlights what a great deal of work we have to do in terms of exploring and decoding the deep movements and multiple dimensions and spaces of exclusionary forces' (Armstrong, 2010, p.108). This persistent reality also reinforces the importance of acknowledging and recognising those movements, including community higher education, that have succeeded in offering a way forward.

Conclusion

Significant advancements across the educational spectrum have been realised since the 1800s in Ireland, advancements that have been hard fought in relation to women's participation and broader position in society. Developments within the social policy arena have also served to support the emergence of a society less mired in the legacy of our Catholic manacled state, a legacy that placed women in subservient roles and which penalised them at every opportunity. The central role played by women, and by countless communities and development projects, in advancing a more radical, equal, inclusive society, cannot be overstated. In addition to political activism and social revolution, these countless groups and organisations drove a vision for social justice with education drawing on the liberatory, as opposed to conformist, capacity of education. And the gains have been enormous. However, the reality of austerity policies (Barry & Conroy, 2014) coupled with systemic under-representation within HE of certain student cohorts in Irish society (HEA, 2015) poses a serious challenge to the proposed vision for equity of access to higher education as articulated by the HEA. This laudable vision references a 'fully inclusive system' that would enable more citizens irrespective of age, socio-economic background, disability or other factors to access, participate and complete higher education to achieve their full potential (HEA 2015). Nevertheless, the persistence of structural barriers resulting in socio-spatial exclusions of the level experienced in Dublin especially, highlight the urgent need for all educational actors within the university and community to imagine a new educational landscape. Such a landscape should span multiple entrance and progression pathways, inclusive pedagogies and attractive, inclusive physical and social environments.

Women's Community Education has provided a blueprint and rich legacy from which to draw in this regard. It is not time for reinvention, rather perhaps time to recall and recover the

legacy of feminist and women's education to help inform a way forward. An education that attends to these persistent structural barriers, and simultaneously places lived lives and experiences at the centre of the learning process, is surely worthy of even greater acknowledgement and recognition from the HEA and related bodies.

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