THE POWER OF LANGUAGE AND THE LANGUAGE OF POWER: EXPLORING DISCOURSES ON DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN POLICIES UNDERPINNING ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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Abstract: Taking policy as discourse, this article provides a critical discourse analysis of development education in the adult and community education sector. Drawing on key policy documents from Irish Aid, the Department of Education and Skills and SOLAS, I examine how development education for adults is understood, imagined and supported at policy level. Findings show that opportunities for DE with adult learners are severely limited when adult education is viewed primarily through an employability lens and that a more enabling policy environment is needed to ensure effective and high-quality development education opportunities are readily available for adult learners.

Key words: Development Education; Education for Sustainable Development; Adult Education; Community Education; Further Education and Training; Policy; Strategy; Critical Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

This article explores the policy landscape around development education (DE) in relation to the adult and community education (ACE) sector. Drawing on critical discourse analysis as a research methodology, I examine the positioning of the ACE sector within policies supporting DE and how DE is defined, discussed and positioned in policies underpinning adult education and lifelong learning. The focus of this article is on the adult and community education sector that is managed and funded through the twin state structures of SOLAS and Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and I begin with a brief discussion of adult learning spaces and how they have developed in the Republic of Ireland. This section attempts to clarify the range of terms used when describing the various types of provision and programmes in the sector.

Next, I analyse three key policy documents that are particularly influential in adult and community education and/or development education in Ireland:

- Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019 (SOLAS, 2014);
- National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development 2014 – 2020 (DES, 2014);
- Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017 – 2023 (Irish Aid, 2016).

These texts have been identified as relevant and influential as they set out the goals, targets, and priorities for the vast majority of adult learning provision in Ireland today. Taking policy as discourse, I provide a critical analysis of the rhetoric used to define the 'problem space' – i.e. the specific issues the policy aims to address – and the 'solutions' proposed in order to identify how development education for adults is conceptualised and articulated.

I hope this article is a useful and timely contribution to our understanding of the policy landscape. While new and reviewed policies[1] have emerged, or are due to, it is important to see how policies dating back a number of years have shaped opportunities for collaborative practice between the DE and ACE sectors so that we can apply this learning to future policies and their implementation.

There are a broad range of terms used to describe post-compulsory education for adults, each with its own set of pedagogical and ideological tenets. For the purpose of this article, I use the term 'adult' and 'community education' interchangeably with 'adult learning' to describe all education provision for adults that takes place outside primary and post-primary schooling and third-level education. In recent years, the term 'further

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[1] SOLAS launched 'Future FET: Transforming Learning. The National Further Education and Training Strategy' in July 2020. The Department of Education and Skills are due to launch a new Education for Sustainable Development strategy soon, and Irish Aid are currently conducting a mid-term review of their Development Education Strategy.

education and training' (FET) has become popular in policy discourse in Ireland and this will be discussed later in the article. DE will be used throughout this article to describe an educational process that informs and engages people with issues relating to global inequality, international development, interdependence and sustainability. It is closely related, some would say interchangeable, with global citizenship education (GCE) and education for sustainable development (ESD).

Development education, in its broadest form, aims to equip and empower learners with the skills and knowledge needed to meet the challenges of a globalised world (Skinner, Blum and Bourn, 2013). It is often spoken about in transformative terms, in that learners engaging in DE will emerge with transformed perspectives and behaviours, ready and willing to take action to create a more just and sustainable world. It has become a familiar feature of educational policy in the formal education sector and an accepted part of their curricula. However, the presence of DE in adult learning policy and practice is less evident and this inquiry seeks to fill a gap in our understanding of how DE is understood and articulated in the policies and strategies that shape the sector.

Methodology

The research methodology used for this inquiry draws on a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework. At its heart, CDA is concerned with critically investigating social inequality as it is expressed and legitimised through language (Wodak and Meyer, 2015: 12) and, therefore, seeks to lay bare the way language is used as a form of 'social practice' to legitimise and maintain structures of power (Fairclough, 1989: 20). CDA drills down into the linguistic framing of key concepts and processes to understand how dominant explanations and understandings are created and disseminated. As a methodology, it is particularly useful for examining 'elite texts', i.e. texts produced by powerful institutions to shape interpretations of and responses to societal issues (van Dijk, 1993). CDA of policy documents involves excavating meaning from reading, re-reading, interpreting and re-interpreting texts. It is as much concerned with degrees of absence as degrees of presence

and seeks to identify knowledge and understandings that are privileged, endorsed and emphasised and those that are hidden, invisible or de-emphasised (Fairclough, 2003).

As with any research methodology, CDA is not without its limitations. It is sometimes criticised for lacking an objective standpoint and for being overtly political in nature (Breeze, 2011) and my own analysis is certainly informed and shaped by my ideological position and commitment to critical pedagogy and education as the practice of freedom (Freire, 2018). In addition, analysis of the dominant, counter and absent discourses in policy documents does little to tell us of how these policies are interpreted and implemented in practice. Policies can be resisted, ignored, revised and/or re-interpreted in multiple, unexpected ways and further research is necessary to show the complete picture of how DE and ACE have been affected by the policies analysed in this article.

Adult learning spaces

In Ireland, the diversity of adult learning spaces is both a strength and a challenge for policy and practice. Trying to capture the entirety of the sector brings to mind the parable from India where six blind travellers come across an elephant for the first time and, with each traveller touching a different part, argue all night on what it is they have encountered. Similarly, depending on the angle you are coming from, adult learning spaces can differ radically.

It should be noted that much adult education in Ireland evolved informally in local communities, often led by women's groups, trade unions and community development projects in the 1970s and 80s (Connolly, 2010; Fitzsimons, 2017). Self-managed and locally-based, these initiatives provided, and continue to provide, much-needed educational opportunities for their communities. At the same time, Vocational Education Committees (VECs) began broadening their remit, appointing Adult Education Officers in the early 1970s to oversee and support adult education, often providing funding, resources, and/or tuition hours to the local groups as well as developing in-house educational programmes for adults. Over time, the following terms have emerged to describe this provision:

Adult Education – an umbrella term for all education for adults that takes place outside second level or higher education. Also known as post-compulsory education, it takes place in both formal and non-formal settings. In the Irish context, it is often targeted at people who have had limited formal education experience and/or are more likely to experience social exclusion.

Community Education – a particular approach to adult education that is locally-based or within communities of interest. It is seen 'as a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level' and has its own distinct pedagogical practices and principles (Government of Ireland, 2000). Community Education provided and funded through ETBs is generally learner-centred and unaccredited (DES, 2012). A significant amount of DE is carried out in community education spaces and the synergies between both disciplines is discussed later.

Vocational Education and Training – adult education that provides re-skilling and upskilling programmes for employees and those who are unemployed or inactive. It assists individuals to progress into employment or higher education. Most courses are accredited on the National Framework of Qualifications or by relevant professional bodies.

Historically, adult learning provision in Ireland evolved into two distinct but overlapping aspects of post-compulsory education. The training sector provided occupational training, apprenticeships and the upskilling of work-related competencies and came under the remit of FÁS, the former state agency with responsibility for those seeking employment. Vocational education, despite its name, spanned both formal and non-formal spheres and had evolved from its technical roots to provide adult learners with a range of educational programmes, including: 'vocational training', 'adult basic education, 'community education' and 'back to education' initiatives. Managed regionally by 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs) much of the provision, and in particular, community education, espoused a more learner-centred, empowering and transformative agenda than the employment-focused training sector (Bailey, 2009; 2011; Fitzsimons, 2017).

A sweeping reform of adult education policy and practice took place in 2013, a process that ushered in new legislation, dissolved FÁS and the VECs and replaced them with 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) with responsibility for provision in the newly named 'Further Education and Training' (FET) sector. It also established a new state body – SOLAS – to fund, coordinate and monitor the sector. This re-arrangement was met with concern from some quarters who argued that the accompanying legislation, management structures and monitoring and evaluation systems were the culmination of a neoliberal agenda which seeks to tailor public institutions and services to meet ever-changing market imperatives and the needs of the economy (Fleming, 2016). Whilst adult education, and in particular, vocational education, have always been linked with economic concerns, these changes appeared to diminish the idea of education as a public good and a process of conscientization, collective empowerment and social change (see for example: Lynch, Grummell and Devine, 2012; Murray, 2014; Ryan, 2014; Fitzsimons, 2017; O'Grady, 2018; Shannon, 2019).

Synergies between community education and development education

There are clear synergies between community education work and the work of the DE sector. They share core principles, such as equality, justice, empowerment, and active citizenship and they are closely linked in ethos and pedagogy (Bailey, 2009; 2011; IDEA Community Sector Working Group, 2015). Many community education practitioners are influenced by Freirean philosophy and are committed to facilitating adult learners in 'reading the world' as well as reading the word (Freire, 1985). This kind of adult education work supports learners in exploring the social structures that shape their realities and imagine new possibilities (Grummell, 2007; Fitzsimons, 2017).

While not explicitly linked to DE in policy and practice, community education could and did offer plenty of opportunities for DE to engage adults with local-global development challenges (Bailey, 2011). Adult education policy that promotes and supports community education is significant for DE as it protects adult learner spaces that go beyond economic and employment

concerns and allow adults to engage in a critical exploration of social justice issues, imagine new possibilities and take action for transformative change.

Dominant and absent discourses in the FET Strategy 2014 – 2019

Twenty years ago, the White Paper on Adult Education – 'Learning for Life' was launched by the Department of Education and Skills after an extensive consultation process with key stakeholders (Government of Ireland, 2000). A significant milestone in adult education policy in Ireland, the document employs multiple discourses that position adult education as a conduit for a range of purposes, from enhanced employability and economic competitiveness to personal development and social inclusion, all the way across to the more radical aims of conscientisation, transformative action and social justice. As Wodak and Meyer point out, texts are often 'sites of struggle' where differing discourses and ideologies compete against one another for domination (2015: 114) and this is clearly evident in 'Learning for Life' (Shannon, 2019).

Fast forward 14 years to the publication of the FET Strategy 2014 – 2020 and it is clear that there has been a paradigm shift whereby the term 'Adult and Community Education' has been almost entirely replaced with 'Further Education and Training' (FET). ACE is mentioned just twice in the 158-page document – both times listed as a 'strength' of the sector but not referred to again. In contrast, the document is saturated with employability discourse with 572 specific references to work-related terminology. A word count search of the document shows 215 references to un/employment, 134 references to jobs, 115 references to un/employed, 92 references to work and 16 references to employability.

The FET Strategy was launched against a backdrop of high unemployment, a consequence of the fiscal banking crisis in 2008 which plunged Ireland into a deep recession. In 2014, Ireland had weathered five successive austerity budgets which removed billions of euros from the exchequer through spending cuts and tax increases. Unemployment figures remained stubbornly high, with one in eight adults in Ireland unemployed (International Labour Organisation, 2020). Within this context, it is not

surprising that the FET Strategy would prioritise getting people back into employment. However, the resolute determination to view all adult education through an employability lens took many by surprise and ushered in a more challenging environment for adult learning that fell outside labour market priorities (Fitzsimons, 2017; O Grady, 2018). Murray argues that the discursive shift evident in the FET Strategy constitutes an 'astonishing reversal' of the vision and aims of the White Paper and belies a profound ideological swing whereby ACE is redefined and portrayed as an appendage of Further Education, and Further Education is defined in terms of what is 'beneficial to economic activity' (2014: 120).

CDA is as much concerned with absence as presence and it is notable that, in the FET strategy, there is no mention of DE or any of the terms related to it (e.g. education for sustainable development, global citizenship education). This is a striking omission, not least because a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development would follow a mere two months after the FET Strategy was launched. Moreover, the government's Development Education strategy had long identified adult and further education as a 'priority area' targeted for 'future expansion' (Irish Aid, 2007: 11).

Given that the FET Strategy offers no explicit support for DE, it is worth looking at how community education is conceptualised within the document. An enabling policy environment for critical forms of community education would also open up opportunities for DE practice with adults. Disappointingly, the employability rhetoric dominates again when the policy document discusses community education. Take for example, the way in which community education is conceptualised here: 'Community education can provide a vital link for unemployed persons who do not have qualifications on the pathway to future work' (SOLAS, 2014: 96). Or how it is re-configured into an 'access point' for adults, suggesting that it is a means to an end rather than a valuable entity in its own right: 'Community education is a critical access point for many adults who left school early and/or who have personal, familial or communal experience of socio-economic exclusion (Ibid.).

Similarly, when 'empowerment' is referenced in the document, a key tenet of adult education, it is folded into employability discourse:

> "The evidence shows that [adult] literacy and numeracy skills have a significant impact on gaining employment while community education empowers people to grow in confidence in their own employability and engage effectively with the labour market" (SOLAS, 2014: 4).

Even when speaking about 'active inclusion', usually shorthand for holistic and learner-centred approaches that mitigate against the effects of socio-economic disadvantage, the document propounds the same employment-related focus: 'Active inclusion means enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job' (Ibid.: 91). Thus, the 'problem space' of social exclusion is explicitly linked with the absence of a job. To be socially excluded means to be jobless. Of course, unemployment is very much a key driver of social exclusion and that is not disputed here. The point is that the many other drivers of social exclusion, including, *inter alia,* intergenerational poverty, minority status, disability, age, precarious working conditions and low pay, are not singled out for mention or indeed, referred to at all. And it is exactly these social justice issues, linking local and global realities, that DE can support adults to explore, name, identify sustainable solutions and take action.

Discursive framing in the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development 2014 – 2020

The National Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (referred to as the ESD Strategy from here) was published in 2014 by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) after a public consultation process with key stakeholders. It is the first ESD strategy for Ireland and it identifies an overall objective, a set of key principles and eight priority action areas. While the FET Strategy is dominated heavily by an employability discourse, the ESD Strategy adopts a range of discourses to articulate the problem space and the proposed solution(s).

The key principles set out at the beginning of the document on page four convey a much more holistic view of the purpose and goals of ESD. These principles inform the recommendations made in eight priority action areas and commit to focusing on values and active democratic citizenship, empowering the individual and the community, emphasising social justice and equity and balancing environmental, social and economic considerations (DES, 2014: 4). The key principles also explicitly refer to adult learning stating that ESD in Ireland will 'promote lifelong learning' and 'engage all sectors of the education system, as well as the non-formal education sector' (Ibid.).

In a further illustration of the holistic approach taken, the following is an excerpt from Priority Action Area 3 – Curriculum at preschool, primary and post-primary, which is worth quoting in full:

> "A key objective of this strategy is to provide learners with the knowledge, dispositions, skills and values that will motivate and empower them to become active citizens and take measures to live more sustainably. This involves providing ESD related subject matter content (the 'what') but also supporting learners to develop the skills (the 'how') and the values (the 'why') necessary to empower and motivate them to make sustainable choices. It also prepares learners for the fact that they will often have to make difficult choices involving environmental, social and economic issues. It is not always possible to build consensus when challenging trade-offs are required between the various pillars associated with sustainable development" (DES, 2014: 12).

This dovetails neatly with DE work in Ireland, which, at its heart, seeks to show how we in the global North are 'implicated subjects' (Rothberg, 2019; Bryan, 2020) in a wide range of global inequalities, including conflict, resource exploitation, global warming, climate change and environmental degradation, and that solidarity at a local and global level is needed urgently.

Unfortunately, this holistic viewpoint, evident throughout the document in seven of the eight priority action areas, recedes into the

background when it comes to 'Priority Action Area 5 – the Further Education Sector'. In this brief section (half the length of the sections on Formal Education and the Youth Sector), we see a marked return to the economic focus and employability discourse so prominent in the FET Strategy. For example: [The FET] sector has a crucial role to play in developing the green economy which has been prioritised by Government through [policy document] 'Delivering our Green Potential' (DES, 2014: 19). It is also evident in this statement:

> "The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs estimated in 2012 that more than 10,000 additional jobs could be created in six sub-sectors of the green economy by 2015, provided certain conditions are met (Government of Ireland, 2012, 3). One of these conditions is the availability of a workforce with the appropriate skills required to take advantage of future employment opportunities in this area" (Ibid.).

Overall, the two pages devoted to FET in the ESD Strategy show an incomplete understanding of the sector and a lack of knowledge about existing ESD provision in adult learning programmes not directly linked to employability. Tellingly, the section refers to SOLAS as 'formerly FAS' (it is not) and that SOLAS provides training programmes for jobseekers (it does not).

There is a brief sentence on part-time programmes such as adult literacy, the Back to Education Initiative and community education, and a passing reference to the importance of accessing 'back to education' learners in terms of 'complementing the work of the formal education system and reaching out to wider communities of learners' (DES, 2014: 19). Egalitarian adult education is invisible within the policy document. Meanwhile, the role of the FET sector is primarily viewed through its potential to provide a 'green' workforce by upskilling jobseekers and unemployed persons in energy efficiency, renewable energy systems, and the 'green skill' requirements of construction operatives, craftworkers and others (Ibid.).

It is worth noting that recommendation 17 of the ESD Strategy tasks SOLAS with reporting on the extent of current sustainable development

provision in the FET sector – an opportunity to draw attention to ESD provision that falls outside the 'green economy' and 'green skills' agenda. Unfortunately, the report issued to DES focused on full time and part time FET courses that address the green economy, for example citing accredited courses in Eco-Tourism, Conservation and Architectural Design for Green Building (DES, 2018: 21). The recommendations contained in the SOLAS report were targeted at: a) contributing to the advancement of Ireland's commitment to reduce its energy targets by 20 per cent by 2020; and b) maximising employment opportunities by developing a construction workforce ready for the challenge of achieving near zero carbon buildings (Ibid.).

Whilst this work is valuable and important, it is disappointing to see no recognition of the work already being done by DE practitioners in the FET and ACE sectors, or indeed, the many initiatives established by ETB (education and training board) adult education services to engage adults in learning for and about sustainable development. For example, the Changemaker Programme in Donegal ran an accredited level four course in global awareness with local community activists through the Donegal ETB and Inishowen Partnership. One of the participants on that course stated: 'I feel that I have re-found the vigour for global issues that I had in my student days, that somehow got lost to me or I let go to sleep. It all seems relevant and important to my life again and I know how to engage with it and what to do with it' (Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) Community Sector Working Group, 2014: 38).

Further evidence of the extent of existing provision can be seen in the Global Education Network Europe's (GENE) Peer Review on Global Education in Ireland (2015). The review includes a submission by members of Irish Development Education Association (IDEA), a national network for DE in Ireland, setting out significant achievements relating to DE with adult learners:

- *DE is taking place across a wide range of ACE settings,* such as community development projects, community education centres,

further education centres, NGOs, women's groups, family resource centres, community gardens.

- *DE is reaching many target groups,* including second chance learners, unemployed people, disadvantaged young people, adult basic education learners, older people, migrants, Travellers, trade unionists.
- *DE is being integrated into existing ACE programmes,* including literacy, horticulture, cookery, IT, social studies, creative arts, youth and community work training, Back to Education and work-related learning.
- *DE is providing practical support for the adult and community sector,* including accredited (QQI) training, resources, good practice guidelines and on-request workshops.
- (Submission by IDEA Community Sector Working Group, 2015, cited in Global Education Network Europe, 2015: 61).

Alternative discourses in the Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017 – 2023

Two years after the publication of the FET and ESD Strategies, Irish Aid launched its third Development Education Strategy for the period 2017 to 2023 (hereafter referred to as the DE Strategy). Similar to the ESD Strategy, the document sets out an ambitious and comprehensive set of strategic priorities in five areas: policy coherence, capacity building for DE practitioners, formal education (spanning primary, post-primary and higher education), non-formal education (spanning the youth and adult learning sector) and public awareness of Ireland's overseas development programme (Irish Aid, 2016: 22). The policy language used throughout the document is distinctly different from the two other strategies and draws heavily on a performance-based discourse. For example, the DE Strategy uses 'outcomes', 'outputs', 'results' and 'performance measurement' to set out proposed steps. In contrast, the ESD and FET strategies use terms such as 'action areas', 'recommendations', 'progress' and 'evaluation'. The disparity in terminology is not surprising given that two of the policy documents come from state bodies responsible for education while the third comes from an overseas aid and international

development background. However, it is worth considering if the different terminology used in the DE Strategy affects its impact on key stakeholders in the education sector who are more accustomed to the terms used by SOLAS and the Department of Education and Skills (and vice versa).

Moreover, some have argued that the results-based focus of the current Development Education Strategy does not align well with the more informal learner-centred aspects of ACE provision, creating tensions for practitioners who feel uncomfortable with top-down, prescribed assessments of learning. Setting pre-determined learning outcomes and applying standardised measurements to prove incremental improvements in learning, behaviour and attitudes goes against many of the pedagogical and philosophical principles of the adult learning spaces that are most likely to invite DE in (Bracken and Bryan, 2010; IDEA Quality and Impact Working Group, 2015).

Of particular interest to this research is how the adult learning sector itself is viewed in the strategy. The DE Strategy again distinguishes itself from the other two documents by viewing the FET and ACE sectors in their entirety, not primarily through a jobs/employability lens. The DE Strategy briefly mentions adult and further education in outputs relating to the formal education sector (Output 3.14), making an explicit commitment to support the further integration of DE in adult and further education curricula across the network of ETBs. It also commits to supporting community organisations work in partnerships with local ETBs (Irish Aid, 2016: 31). However, a more detailed and comprehensive treatment of educational opportunities for adults is contained in Output 4. Here, there is an acknowledgement of the progress to date and a note on the commonalities between DE and Community Education. Moreover, it positions DE for adults as something that:

> "…supports communities to discuss, critically debate and engage in active citizenship on the global social, economic and political policies which shape the lives and livelihoods of local people here and around the world" (Irish Aid, 2016: 32).

Overall, the DE Strategy shows a much clearer and expansive understanding of the diversity and range of adult learning opportunities available in Ireland. It is fair to point out that this strategy was published at a time of greater economic stability and that DE has, perhaps, a narrower agenda than either the FET or ESD Strategy. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see a policy document speaking about the ACE/FET sector in more holistic terms and without the employability discourse that is dominant elsewhere.

Discussion

Education for adult learners has undergone significant changes since 2008 after the country was severely affected by a crushing recession and successive austerity budgets. Since the 1990s, policies emerging from the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have promoted employability, competitive economies and skilled workforces as the primary goals of lifelong education and learning. In Ireland, this began to trickle down into adult education policy and practice but rapidly accelerated when austerity budgets made drastic funding cuts to educational provision that fell outside labour market activation (Harvey, 2012; Bracken and Magrath, 2019).

Thus, adult learning policy and practice in Ireland, post-2008, show a marked turn towards a functionalist understanding of adult education, whereby the value of any adult education intervention lies in its capacity to enhance the learners' employability skills (Grummell, 2014; Fitzsimons, 2017; Shannon, 2019). Consequently, 'Adult and Community Education' has been reconstituted into 'Further Education and Training', a development that some have argued has muted transformative and egalitarian aims and amplified the needs of employers and the economy (Murray and Grummell, 2014; Fitzsimons, 2017; Shannon, 2019). It has certainly reduced opportunities for collaborative practice between the DE and the ACE sector, given the funding cuts and the prioritisation of labour market needs.

Lerner (1986: 231) states that the process of redefinition has three stages: 1) re-defining; 2) deconstructing existing theories; and 3) constructing a new paradigm. The process of redefinition in adult learning policy confirms

a deeper paradigm shift which reconstitutes adult education, community education, and lifelong learning into a neoliberal, market-driven, strand of the FET sector. This discursive twist has created a less enabling environment for critical and transformative kinds of education, including DE practice. It is clear that the current FET strategy (SOLAS, 2014) struggles to align DE with its vision of adult education and offers scarce ground for the kind of innovation and expansion that has taken place in the formal education sector. Equally, the ESD Strategy only briefly acknowledges the enormous work being done in non-formal learning spaces and focuses heavily on how the FET sector can maximise employment opportunities within a greener economy.

As things currently stand, explicit support for DE in adult education policy is absent or inadequate in two of the three key policy documents shaping the sector. DE is not mentioned once in the 2014 – 2019 FET Strategy and there are also zero references to 'Global Citizenship Education' and 'Education for Sustainable Development'. Meanwhile, the National Strategy for ESD overlooks the existence (and potential) of adult learning provision that does not link directly to employability and job creation. In contrast, the Development Education Strategy sets out clear objectives and aims for the adult and community education sector and acknowledges the innovative and high-quality work already taking place. However, the DE Strategy also overlooks the very areas that are most prominent in the other two documents: adult training and education for employability. There is enormous potential, for example, to integrate DE as optional modules on accredited 'green economy' courses to give learners a broader understanding of the sustainability agenda. In addition, the Strategy's emphasis on results and performance-based measurement is a significant challenge for educational work that, by its nature, tends to have non-linear impacts that are difficult to capture. The language may also work as a deterrent to decision-makers, practitioners and providers in ACE unfamiliar with these terms.

Conclusion

Policy language is of vital importance – selected discourses can be used to deconstruct structures, narrow or broaden opportunities, introduce alternatives and remove or replace possibilities. As Shannon argues, a policy-as–discourse analysis is useful in showing how discourse constructs both the policy problem and the policy solution (2019: 114).

The purpose of this article was to shed light on an under-researched area of DE practice – educational opportunities for adults to engage in DE. When we talk about education for sustainable development or global citizenship, there is a tendency to think only of young people – we speak of 'preparing students for the 21st century' or 'building future global citizens'. There is a sense that this kind of educational work is for 'not yet citizens' – young people who, in many ways, are the furthest removed from positions of influence, power and decision-making. Adults, as a target audience for DE are somewhat overlooked, even though they are the ones who have significantly more autonomy over behaviours, consumption patterns, and sustainable (or unsustainable) lifestyle choices (Bracken, 2020). Although there are plenty of examples of innovative and effective DE initiatives for adults, it is clear that, at a policy level, support is relatively under-developed when compared to the formal education sectors.

CDA is useful in showing how discursive practices have ideological effects which give rise to important issues of power (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258). If government policy views adult education primarily through the prism of employability and upskilling, there will be few, if any enabling spaces for transformative DE. However, if it conceptualises adult education in all its diverse potential, it opens up multiple pathways whereby DE and ESD can contribute to the transition to a green economy *and* the more far-reaching transformative goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, it would support the government in realising its endorsement of the Agenda and in delivering Goal 4.7:

> "Ensure learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education

for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" (United Nations, 2015).

While development education makes a significant contribution in supporting adults (not just young people) in understanding and addressing the global challenges facing us today, a more enabling policy environment is needed to ensure effective and high-quality development education opportunities are readily available for adult learners. The ESD and FET Strategies are both coming to the end of their lifespan with new strategies emerging. Meanwhile, Irish Aid are carrying out a mid-term review of their strategic plan. These are significant opportunities for policy in this area to incorporate a more nuanced and holistic view of adult learning provision. For this to happen, the DE sector must renew its efforts to engage with policy makers and draw attention to the significant benefits of having a thriving DE component integrated into all aspects of provision.

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