

Chapter-16

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN NEOLIBERAL TIMES

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ABSTRACT

Educational researchers and practitioners frequently draw upon empowerment theory to support marginalised cohorts of learners overcome barriers and feelings of powerlessness, including women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. This chapter aims to shine a spotlight on the role of transformative pedagogies in the field of lifelong learning, focusing on projects designed to empower women achieve their full potential in and through adult education. It highlights an accreditation of prior experiential learning project, and a community-based higher education programme as examples of initiatives that seek to resist the neoliberal tune, which that has come to dominate Irish adult education and lifelong learning over the past 10 years, or more. Given the increasingly complex world in which we live, and the global challenges we face, our need for citizens who possess the resources to respond to current and future neoliberal challenges – and are willing to do so – is of utmost importance in adult education and lifelong learning.

Keywords: Empowerment Theory, Transformative Pedagogy, Lifelong Learning, Women's Education, Neoliberal Adult Education

INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning (LLL), a term carrying a range of meanings, is premised on the idea that everyone can and should continue to learn at any age. Over the past few years, LLL has become not just the overriding principle of many educational policies “but a dominant policy discourse encompassing all learning activities from the ‘cradle to the grave’” (Persico, 2014, p. 32). It encompasses higher education (HE), community education, adult education, vocational education, further education and training, work-based learning, and online and distance learning. Vargas (2017) summarises four main objectives of LLL:

- i. Promoting economic development and employment;
- ii. Social inclusion, cohesion and democratic participation;
- iii. Personal growth and self-fulfilment;
- iv. Cultural development and enrichment.

Promoting economic development and employment falls into the category of neoliberal approaches to higher education (Holborrow, 2012; Au, 2016), while the latter three are recognized as having a social justice remit (Vargas, 2017; Tuckett, 2015). These objectives are valued and assessed in different ways across jurisdictions and governments, which tend to stress or prioritize certain goals over others, depending on their interpretation of societal needs and

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