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**Lifelong learning:
Bringing the family perspective to
the education field**

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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

SOLAS
learning works

AONTAS
The Voice of
Adult Learning



About AONTAS

- Membership based organisation.
- Advocacy, research, communications, and capacity building.
- **Our mission** is to advocate for empowering adult learning that drives social equality, justice, and collective action across the island of Ireland.
- Key focus on learner voice and community education



Why adult and community education?

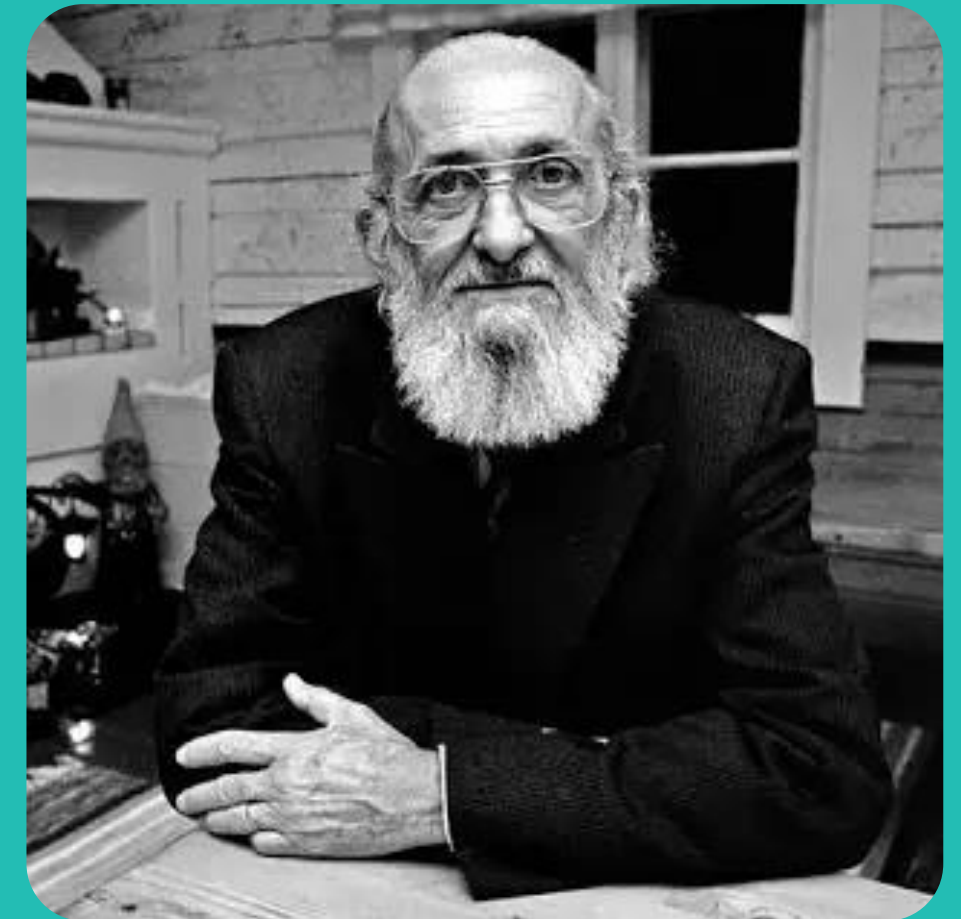


Emancipatory Education

Paulo Freire

‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’

- Social justice and liberation
- Grassroots
- Strengthens democracy and social cohesion
- Challenge oppressive structures
- Trauma informed provision
- A place of healing



“The educator has the duty of not being neutral.”

Community Education

“Community education is adult learning that takes place in local communities across Ireland. It is person-centred and responds to what people need. It is particularly important for people who have had negative experiences of education and who have suffered the impact of poverty, addiction, and social inequality. Its supportive environment is proven to help people come back to and stay in adult learning”

(AONTAS)





White Paper 'Learning for Life' (2000) on Community Education

- its non-statutory nature;
- its rootedness in the community, not just in terms of physical location, but also in that its activists have lived and worked for many years within the community, have a deep knowledge and respect for its values, culture, and circumstances, and an understanding of community needs and capacity;
- its problem-solving flexible focus based on trust;
- its process rather than syllabus focus - participants are engaged from the outset as equal partners in identifying needs, designing and implementing programmes, and adapting them on an ongoing basis;
- its respect for participants and its reflection of their lived experience



Who is it for?

Why does it exist?

What is it?

How is it delivered?

Community Education

**What is the impact of
this model?**



Examples

→ Longford Women's Link



→ The Lantern Project



→ One Family

Example wrap-around support services

- Education programmes
- Counselling
- Childcare
- Domestic violence services
- Social enterprise
- Community employment
- Trauma-informed support

Access to trauma-informed therapeutic support

“Meeting people outside of the community and getting education, joining groups, doing short courses... because everybody in Direct Provision is traumatised... you need something else outside of that space.”

- Focus Group Participant

(Source: AONTAS Lifelong Learning Participation in Ireland, 2023)

Inclusive and Accessible Approaches

Working in Groups

“ In groups, collaboration is facilitated through discussion and dialogue; input, particularly on wider social structures and trends; thinking out loud, reflecting, arguing, challenging our assumptions, learning new knowledge and creating new knowledge.”

(Connolly 2024)





Horton, 2017:

1. Providing a safe place to encourage discourse and reflection.
2. Assuming adults bring with them a wealth of prior knowledge and experience.
3. Helping people to discover they are not alone; others share similar problems.
4. Facilitating independent, critical thinking and planning for the future.
5. Helping people (especially the disempowered) to develop their voice and confidence to act.
6. Solving problems and answering questions through synergy.
7. Encouraging lifelong and diverse learning as means for change.
8. Promoting the idea that everyone is an important member of a community and can work within it to make changes.
9. Implementing continuous improvement and effective organisational principles.

Supporting Families



Lone-Parents in Community Education

Growth in self-confidence

Sense of belonging and connection

Feelings of safety and belonging

Personal development and Intercultural connections

Friendships

Gateway to new experiences

Eustace, A., Bailey, I., and Tubridy, A. (2023). Community Education as a Support for Lone Parents: Thematic Analysis of Eight Case Studies. Dublin: The Centre for Effective Services.



Education

From single parent to stockbroker: the power of community education

Avril Hannifin is one of thousands exiting poverty
thanks to make-or-break supports



Avril Hannifin, a graduate of An Cosán, at Goodbody Stockbroker's office in Ballsbridge, where she's doing a paid apprenticeship. Photograph: Cyril Byrne

The importance of voice in adult learning



Learner Voice

Learner Voice is at the heart of AONTAS' work. It is a concept in education that means that learners should have a say in decisions about their own education. It means that those who learn, not just those who teach, should influence the educational experience.



Conclusion

- Adult education has the potential to improve social cohesion, promote social integration and support a more equal and equitable society.
- Lone parents find a place of belonging and friendships in community education. It offers new opportunities and self-confidence.
- Lifelong learning supports families and can help them to connect with their community.



Thank you!

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