

RESEARCH TOPIC

Liminal Space: Transition to Transformation The experience of adult learners in higher education



Researcher Profile

Dr Ciarán Ó Mathúna is the Coordinator of the Professional Diploma in Education (Further Education) at Marino Institute of Education, Dublin, where he also lectures on the BSc in Education Studies along with delivering and coordinating undergraduate research on the Bachelor of Education course. He has a particular interest in adult and further education, narrative research, adult learning, transformative education, and research methodologies. He is a member of the Further Education and Training Forum, representing Marino Institute of Education. He is also a member of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors of Ireland and the British Psychological Society.

Contact details:

ciaran.omathuna@mie.ie
+353 1 805 7782

As a practicing educationalist I have many examples of witnessing adults experiencing personal change as a result of participation in a programme of study. Within an Irish context, the difficulty has been capturing these personal transformations in an empirical, validated, and trustworthy manner rather than as anecdotal stories. Having completed recent research, in a systematic way to capture such changes, it is possible to now document these transformations, which makes the case for a specific educational approach when working with adult learners.

Narrative research was the chosen methodology for this research as it is personal, person-centred, in-depth, and is an accepted form of research within the field of adult education. This methodology was chosen as it allowed the participants to self-reflect on their individual experiences, as, narrative research emphasises the ability of individuals to make meaning from and interpret lived experiences. Josselson and Lieblich (2002) refer to narrative research as “voyage of discovery – a discovery of meaning” (p.260).

The transformational learning theory of Jack Mezirow tells us that engaging in education can have profound personal, social and academic impacts on the participants (Mezirow 1975, 1978, 1991, 1998, 2000). The theory of transformation speaks of ‘trigger events’, ‘frames of reference’, ‘habits of mind’ and ‘meaning schemes’ as aspects of transformation. This paper presents the narrative experience of adult learners who returned to higher education. It explores and relates these experiences to the theory and presents evidence of personal, social and academic transformations.

The finding from this research has implications for education providers in how provision is structured, the content and the teaching methodologies employed. This is a challenge to those responsible for the provision of adult and further education to embrace transformative learning and to employ an andragogical approach in teaching methodologies, student support and ancillary services across all adult and further education provision.





About Marino Institute of Education

Marino Institute of Education (MIE) is a Dublin-based teaching, learning and research community committed to promoting inclusion and excellence in education. It has a long and proud involvement with education, specifically initial teacher education (ITE), dating back over 100 years.

MIE's academic programmes are validated, quality assured and accredited by Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin. MIE is an Associated College of Trinity, and this relationship has deepened through the development of a joint academic strategy to promote closer and more extensive collaborations in teaching and research, including joint activities between the two institutes. Through the implementation of this joint academic strategy the strengths of Trinity will be leveraged with those of MIE, to enhance existing relationships and promote new synergies.

In the last decade, the academic mission and scope of MIE's activity has been re-envisioned to encompass a deeper understanding of education in and beyond the classroom, to incorporate the continuum of teacher education and the education of specialist education practitioners at early years, primary and further education levels. This is allied with a commitment to education studies encompassing non-traditional education settings and the wider education environment in a pluralist context.

MIE's Mission

MIE is a teaching, learning and research community committed to promoting inclusion and excellence in education. The dignity and potential of each person are central to our life, work and service.

MIE's Vision

MIE will be a centre of global consequence, in teaching and research in the field of education. Through collaboration and technology, it will extend its geographic boundaries and create momentum for the delivery of new, high quality, innovative programmes in education. MIE will build critical mass for world class research in partnership with others, and will foster university-school-community links that contribute to sustainable improvement and renewal across the entire education system.

MIE will extend its commitment and expertise in the area of inclusion by continuing to conduct research and providing education programmes to empower the socially disadvantaged. MIE will lead national and international dialogue regarding the opportunities and challenges pertaining to pluralism and diversity in education settings.