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**Participation in popular struggles**  
**towards a**  
**reconceptualisation of the learning iceberg.**

**Ph. D. thesis**  
**James Crowther**  
**2001**

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## **Dedication**

**For Harry Crowther  
31 November 1921 - 26 March 2001**

## **Acknowledgements**

My thanks to Tom Steele for taking on the task of supervising this work, for his unending support, advice and ability to keep me working away and always being able to make helpful suggestions about its development. All of this, of course, was done with a good sense of humour and intellectual stimulation which have made supervision a very pleasurable experience. I would also like to record my thanks to two of my colleagues, Ian Martin and Mae Shaw, who I have worked with closely over the years and both have been a source of support, encouragement and stimulation. Finally, I would like to thank my Head of Department, Lyn Tett, who has helped me resource this study and without her support it would probably not have been started let alone completed.

## **Chapter One**

### **Rationale and outline of study**

#### **Introduction**

Our work is based upon the belief that society and education - including adult education - differentiates and limits who can be a learner and what and how she or he can learn, and that this process prescribes our potential and status in society. Certain individuals and groups are thus constructed as 'other' to the educational norm and, perhaps inevitably, many people internalise this definition, articulating their negative learning experiences and identities through phrases such as 'education is for other people'.

(Stuart and Thomson, 1995: 1)

Something is wrong. Despite years of study and systematic attempts by policy to address the 'problem of participation' the divide between the 'learning rich' and the 'learning poor' is widening and, if anything, this trend

is increasingly exacerbated by a chasm between those with information and communications technology and those without (Sargant, 2000). The ‘usual suspects’ of people in work, managerial, professional, white, middle class and the well educated are the prime beneficiaries. People with the least from initial education are, in absolute terms, worse off as participation from ‘lower’ socio-economic categories is dropping and their motivation, we are told, is low. (Tester, *Guardian* 2000) Those who should benefit most appear uninterested. What are we to make of this? Does it mean people are apathetic, uninterested and unable to act in their own best interests? Is their failure to participate evidence of an unwillingness to learn? Even worse, are they simply non-learners? Or should we be more reflexive in our thinking? Have we been so busy in developing education that we fail to see the learning people are engaged in? There seems to be a remarkable degree of consensus on the need to increase participation, but when this happens is it time to begin asking why? What if the real problem is not out there, as it were, in the stubborn refusal to participate in educational provision? Maybe, we need to look at some of the assumptions that have informed thinking, policy and practice and see if there are alternative ways of addressing the ‘problem of participation’. This is the main theme of the study.

### **Participation in adult education**

As Forrester and Payne point out, ‘the general assumption in the academic literature on adult learning has been that the non-participation in organised

learning activities of a majority of the adult population is a problem' (2000: 100). Consequently, participation is assumed to be unproblematically a good thing which research, policy and practice needs to encourage. It is this understanding of how participation in adult education is framed that is the starting point for this study.

My own interest in 'participation' grew out of teaching adult education on degree and postgraduate courses to students seeking a qualification in community education. It is within this tradition, in a Scottish context, that many subsequent points of reference are made. Teaching participation, a key policy and practice issue for community educators, involved reviewing the literature on why adults return to learning and why they do not. Whilst some of this seemed useful, much was repetitive and 'obvious'. This is not to say the points made are not valuable but that, in a certain respect, a stage of diminishing returns is reached; the more we try to find out the less we seem to know!

In another respect, my motives for this study are 'political' as well as 'professional' and a sub-theme of the text is the nature of the relationship between the two. By professional approach I mean an explicit, rigorous, systematic and skilful way to practice and by political I mean an interest in the role of power in everyday affairs. Ideologically, I am interested in the potential of education as a collective, transformative, project. I use the term

‘professional identity’/ professionalised to refer to the status, concerns and preoccupations of an occupational group which seeks to further its interests.

It seems obvious now that what I was interested in teaching was not simply participation, but the ‘politics of participation’. In broadening the focus, this raises some awkward questions that the literature on participation assumes as given and therefore often fails to address: participation for what? who benefits? who decides? who is excluded? How might ‘participation’ in adult education be reconsidered to assist collectivities to be active agents rather than passive objects of government policy? What can we learn from a historical perspective on radical education? What is more, do contemporary social forces provide opportunities for a critical education which characterised the radical and social purpose traditions?

### **Defining popular struggles**

The popular, as Steele (1999) notes, is the ‘slipperiest of terms and not at all self-evident’. He contrasts ‘popular culture’ with ‘folk culture’, for example, where the latter had connotations of rustic simplicity, rural traditions, blood kinship and race. Historically, on the other hand, popular culture was associated with the modernising moment of the Enlightenment, it was forward looking and referred to ‘the people’ who more often than not lived in cities. Despite this, there is no automatic connection to be made between the popular and politically progressive ideas. Participation in popular

struggles may involve attempts to challenge inequality and oppression or something less high minded such as learning to revile paedophiles (Thompson, 2000a).

Reactionary popularist ideas which have been implicitly nurtured, but lie dormant, can mobilise communities rapidly if they hit the right nerve at the right time and in the right way e.g. the witch hunts against paedophiles is a case in point. 'What the public are interested in' and the 'public interest', as George Orwell understood, are two very different things (Crick, *Guardian*, 2000) In part, the popularity of Thatcherism in the 1980s and 1990s was due to her ability to connect right wing programmes with expectations and values held by a wide section of the population.

The term popular struggles is used interchangeably with that of a social movement. The emphasis on struggle suggests 'visible' political conflict. However, this is not always the case in that popular struggles may be active in the sphere of cultural production rather than overt political action. Moreover, as Diani (1992) points out, action in the public sphere of politics is only one aspect of social movement activity. They can be involved in various activities which give rise to action in the public sphere both before and after more overt conflicts. As collective bodies, movements are distinct from other groups such as corporations, private firms, groups of football supporters and public institutions, all of which have a collective dimension

but do not constitute a movement.

The use of the term 'popular struggle' signifies a more inclusive way of thinking about potential sites of learning that arise from collective action. Developing more democratic forms of knowledge from below, as Wainwright (1994) points out, has been an important aspect of popular struggles. By legitimating knowledge 'from below' movements in struggle have challenged the authority of official knowledge. Instead of privileging one way of 'knowing' they have promoted a more democratic, interactive and provisional process which draws on experience and theory, reason and emotion, and at the same time recognises the fallibility of all claims to true or total knowledge (Paterson, 1999).

### **Civil society and the state**

Popular struggles occur in civil society and connect the issue of participation in action with wider social change. Civil society was originally associated with those organisations that exist between private individuals and the state. With the growth of the latter from the nineteenth century onwards it is difficult to argue civil society exists in some pure form untainted by the state's influence. It is also linked with voluntary activities as opposed to excessive individualism and, in the former Soviet dominated East European states, it is understood in relation to the development of entrepreneurial activity. (Johnston, 2000).

It is in civil society, Gramsci argues, that the 'social glue' of hegemony which binds people to the dominant social order is created and undermined. (Forgacs, 1988) Hegemonic power is produced through a diverse range of institutions and private organisations - the family, the media, voluntary organisations, the church, trade unions and so on which are outwith the direct control of the state. These institutions generate meanings which we use to make sense of experience. When they are internalised as 'natural' and expressed as 'common sense', the process of hegemonic control 'saturates experience' (Williams, 1977). In reality, of course, common sense is inconsistent and incoherent precisely because it reinforces and reflects the wider contradictions of society. Working on these contradictions can provide the basis for arriving at 'good sense', that is, a more critical understanding of society. Civil society, consequently, is the bulwark of the established order and its Achilles' heel in that hegemony is a process which has constantly to be made and remade and is, therefore, always susceptible to challenge.

It is useful to make the distinction between 'civic society' (which refers to the activities of voluntary organisations and institutions outwith direct state control) and 'civil society' (which can be thought of more broadly as including the activities of a wider range of more fluid social movements and popular protests). Civil society is the terrain of social and political life outwith the control of the state where more autonomous movements can

generate alternative and counter-hegemonic forces. It has been the ground on which new rights have emerged and people have struggled to claim, extend and defend their freedoms. The state embodies the organs of government and functions that exist to regulate activity in various spheres e.g. the rule of law in order to reproduce socially valued relationships. As Paterson (2001, forthcoming) points out, civil society also has a normative dimension that refers to an aspiration for the free association between independent citizens, whereas historically the state was the apparatus of coercive control. It was the Leviathan ready to tame the wilder instincts of people's natural condition.

To imply a dichotomy of civil society as 'good' and the state as 'bad' is over simplistic. The state may function to protect dominant interests, but it is not only defined or limited to that function. It is also a product of historical compromises between the interests of alternative forces, not least of which has been the labour movement. It therefore embodies some of the emergent and collective values of these oppositional groups such as a commitment to social welfare. The ambivalent relationship this creates for adult and community workers, amongst others, is reflected in the strategy of 'in and against the state' (LEWG, 1979). That is, while the state may reproduce dominant social relations that should be resisted and challenged we need also to recognise, at the same time, that the state can be an important means for redistributing material resources, achieving social justice

and caring for those in need.

The role of the ideologically committed professional as envisaged in the strategy of 'in and against the state' is by no means easy to achieve. In practice we are often more 'in' than 'against' the state because it is more comfortable, we have various work roles to perform and families and mortgages. Whilst we may seek to support popular struggles, we are often positioned outside of such movements and, indeed, may be seen as best as putative liberals or at worst as the enemy by those in struggle. At the same time, have we something to offer groups in struggle that can make a positive contribution for progressive causes?

### **Hypothesis: the collective learning iceberg**

The hypothesis of this study is that popular struggles offer opportunities for informal learning in a collective and politicised context which may lead to significant changes in understanding or capability. That is to say, struggles may generate an implicit praxis of learning and doing which it may be helpful to think of as a collective learning iceberg. If this is the case, the hypothesis directs us to an *alternative* way of conceptualising why, where and how adult learning may occur and is focused, therefore, on examining and responding to the potentially significant learning processes generated through participation in struggles. This is not to assume if such learning occurs that it is intrinsically better or more progressive than other modes of

learning. If opportunities for learning are created that may not otherwise exist, in what way can they be developed? What are the contradictions, ambivalences, limitations and possibilities for learning in struggle? How might those involved, and adult educators, relate to each other for their mutual benefit? What might get in the way of this? What wider implications are there for adult education?

The metaphor of a 'learning iceberg' is an apt one to link with 'the problem of participation' in adult education. On the one hand, there is a small visible tip of activity and a lot of sustained effort to measure and throw light on it (through research), to encourage it (in terms of policy) and to develop practical strategies for overcoming the problems this presents (such as in the role of the adult educator). On the other hand, what is unseen is the submerged potential of the iceberg whose mass and depth is unknown.

There is nothing particularly new in the idea that adult learning takes place in a variety of organisations whose primary aim is not educational but which are, nevertheless, educative (see Elsdon et al, 1995; Baynes and Marks, 1996; Ross-Gordon and Dowling, 1995). An important difference between these accounts and this study is that the former often focus on learning in voluntary organisations rather than movements in struggle. Whilst there are parallels in terms of informal settings, the more overt political nature of movements in struggle creates a distinctive collective context for examining

learning processes and how adult and community education may relate to them. However, the body of literature on informal learning in voluntary organisations affirms the importance of thinking about the significance of how and where adult learning occurs outside more conventional definitions of participation (see chapter three). As Coffield notes, in summarising the findings of an extensive series of investigations into lifelong learning that:

If all learning were to be represented by an iceberg, then the section above the surface of the water would be sufficient to cover formal learning, but the submerged two thirds of the structure would be needed to convey the much greater importance of informal learning. (2000: 1)

If we extend the iceberg metaphor further, not only is the submerged part more significant but, like all icebergs, its direction depends on the currents in the sea, that is, the forces that move people to act - or not, as the case may be. Popular struggles may constitute a space outside formal learning contexts in which implicit and more deliberative forms of acting and learning take place (see Eraut, 2000 for a discussion of formal, informal and non formal learning and chapter six).

The learning iceberg is also linked with the seminal analysis made by Tough (1983). His concern is with the hidden *individual* learning projects people

systematically undertake in order to learn. For a learning project to qualify it had to involve an arbitrary minimum time period of seven hours. Tough discovered people spend on average 100 hours pursuing learning projects and, he estimates, in all they spend around 700 hours per year on highly deliberate efforts to learn. It is important to underline that the majority of these efforts are self-planned without external support or assistance and are therefore self-directed learning efforts. Adult education policy, however, has been mesmerised by the tip of the iceberg in terms of learning that goes on in classrooms, workshops and courses of study.

In this thesis, there is a similar interest in the unseen learning, the invisible iceberg of deliberate efforts to learn, however, the parallel with Tough ends there. The hypothesis of this study involves a *radicalisation* of Tough's more familiar thesis of the 'learning iceberg'. Self-directed learning has rapidly become the new professional hegemony in adult education and is located primarily within an individualistic framework, whereas this study is looking for the *collective and politicised learning efforts* generated through activities in popular struggles.

The distinction and relationship between *individual learning efforts* and *collective learning efforts* is important. Whilst both are legitimate, the collective focus is largely neglected or, at best, it is equated with the aggregation of individual efforts to learn. For example, the current rhetoric of

widening participation in higher education is still individualistic, even if it is mass individualism (see Stuart, 2000). It is based on a process of differentiating, selecting, categorising and rewarding individuals rather than addressing itself to the concerns of collectivities or communities.

Whilst focusing on popular struggles may help to connect with a more radical tradition of adult education it is important to note that it does not have a monopoly on social purpose. As Fieldhouse (1985) points out, liberal adult education also includes a collective social purpose in that it aims to equip people intellectually with the ability to play an active role in a democratic society. The problem with the liberal tradition, however, is that it has tended to concentrate too much on social purpose as an educational affair and, as Jackson (1980: 11) points out, loses ‘... much of its meaning in material terms for ordinary men and women’. In contrast, this account examines collective movements of people who are stirred to act by their circumstances and take the step of seeking to learn and act on the basis of their experience. In this context, we will need to explore how learning and education relate directly to the goals, interests, needs and concerns of movements and seeks to contribute to them in one way or another. It would be surprising if this did not involve individual development and growth, but it is not its primary motivation.

The focus of the study is, therefore, on collective adult learning efforts that

may occur in popular struggles and the issue it addresses is its implications for participation in adult education and social change. The hypothesis is directed towards the space between, on the one hand, the potentially large area of collective educative experiences of people in communities and, on the other, the failure of much adult and community education policy and practice to engage with this.

### **Epistemology and methodology**

The relationship between epistemology and methodology has long been the focus of debate in the social sciences. The success of the natural science method of experimentation, observation and objectivity and its applicability to understanding human behaviour has been at the centre of the debate. If the success of the scientific approach could be emulated in relation to human behaviour then greater control over social institutions and processes would be the result. The epistemological dominance of this model about how knowledge is possible leads to a privileging of specific methodologies which it is claimed are less value-laden, more objective and therefore less susceptible to researcher bias.

Traditionally, educational research has been concerned with quantitative measures and criteria such as reliability and validity, as a consequence of inheriting a scientific methodology which is assumed to constitute a disinterested technology of social engineering and a benevolent source of

positive social advance. In this approach, research technique is emphasised as a means of producing reliable data. As Griffiths (1998) worryingly notes, the positivist approach is once again gaining ascendancy in educational research. Along with others I am, as it may be guessed, sceptical of this view. In challenging the dominance of the positivist model interpretive and critical social researchers (drawing on anti-sexist and anti-racist research) have argued that the myth of an objective, value-free, knowledge is unsustainable (see Siraj-Blatchford, 1994; Ball, 1992; Griffiths, 1998). People act on the basis of meanings which are not susceptible to experimentation. The idea of reducing the effects of the researchers values on the research process is misplaced in that values and ideologies invariably influence theories and the 'facts' that are selected as relevant and significant. Moreover, it is not always the 'facts' which are so uncertain or contested but our way of valuing them. It is ultimately, therefore, the role of values in research that has to be recognised and made explicit. The view that research should be free of values simply disguises and reinforces their role without making research findings any more neutral or objective.

The assumption that research can be value free involves a further claim that knowledge and power are separate. The tradition of 'really useful knowledge' in adult education (discussed in chapter two), however, suggests that there is a relationship between knowledge and the knower. 'Really useful knowledge' is always dependent on ones' social position and the

power of different groups to define what counts as knowledge is crucial. Moreover, from a postmodern or post-structuralist perspective the traditional understanding of knowledge and power as mutually exclusive is inadequate. Foucault, for example, argues that knowledge/power are two sides of the same coin and are implicated in each other. He suggests that

It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. (Foucault, 1985: 94)

In revealing the power of 'truth' we should not, however, abandon the need to make our attempts to understand and account for the world in the best way possible. On the one hand, to simply assume the facts exist out there will not do. If there is no objective centre from which true knowledge can be derived it is, understandably, also difficult to talk of bias as a slippage from this ideal state. On the other, to simply embrace a relativism of all accounts are equal will not do either. We need some measure of approaching truth even if it is ultimately always entwined with power to some degree. The view taken here is that the ability of a position, or argument, to generate new facts and to make sense of known ones in a convincing way is better than a relativist position which eschews any point of differentiating between

competing accounts.

If we cannot escape values and power in the research process it is, nevertheless, important to make our own interests explicit and to be self-reflexive in terms of how they inform our understanding and taken-for-granted assumptions. Values must be visible both to the researcher and the intended audience for the research. Because values invariably enter the research process this is not an excuse for a lack of rigour, openness to other points of view and the need to develop systematic and convincing arguments which are not simply aimed at the 'converted' or uncritical. Nor is it an excuse for failing to ground arguments in appropriate empirical contexts. Research has to be more than a conduit for a particular set of ideas, values and ideology which are treated unproblematically. Instead it has to invite discussion, disagreement and debate. If research and argument is to be persuasive it must also be open to challenge and aware of its own limitations and the basis on which claims are made. In making a position explicit the reader is invited to assess both the argument made and the way it is arrived at.

In this study, the research problem addressed is grounded in a particular politics of adult education and seeks to develop, in the best traditions of radical adult education, 'knowledge from below' (Barr, 1999). Few adult educators would probably subscribe to the view that education is neutral.

Freire's (1972) claim that education is either about domestication or liberation may have over polarised the debate, however, it does nevertheless contain an important truth that education is a site of struggle. Similarly, in the research process on 'participation' and 'adult education' the conceptualisation of these terms are not theoretically or ideologically neutral. The process of reconceptualising them involves revealing other historical possibilities which have been closed down in the current context. My own interest, for example, in radical adult education as subversive of professional orthodoxies and politically committed to democratic values and social justice, is relevant to the hypothesis of this account which is constructed in a politically self-conscious way.

In the title of this thesis, the *towards a reconceptualisation...* implies that a good deal of research and practice has to be developed before more confident claims can be made about learning and education in popular struggles. It also highlights the exploratory and conceptual terrain which this study is involved in and the need, therefore, to investigate the debates related to rethinking participation in popular struggles as a context for developing adult learning. Whilst this tradition of adult education has a long and rich history it has been marginalised in the dominant policy discourse of today. So the argument has to be made that it still provides us with a relevant and credible view about both the purpose and practice of adult education. Ultimately the judge of whether it is convincing or not is made by the reader. The argument

itself has to be made in a self-reflexive, open and critical way. By necessity, however, the account is weighted towards drawing together an ideologically selective range of source materials, both historically and contemporary, that contribute to the argument of the study. It is also slanted, therefore, towards conceptual and literature research rather than field work. Scholarly activity takes precedence over research techniques.

There is also an empirical dimension to the argument in terms of using case materials as a way of understanding and illuminating the contradictions of learning through struggle. Whilst there is a wealth of literature on learning processes and styles it has mostly come from the discipline of psychology, in that very little has been written about learning in the context of struggles. Four short cases are described and analysed which aim to identify elements of the learning processes which are particularly important and distinctive.

The hypothesis is explored empirically, however, the case studies described in this account are based on secondary evidence rather than direct field work. They provide insights into how the hypothesis extends our understanding of learning processes and, in turn, its implications for adult education theory and practice. Whilst it is important to establish an empirical basis for the argument there is another issue here that also needs recognition. The type of learning processes which struggles generate may be deeply contested ideologically and ethically in relation to educational purpose and process.

What might be framed as a critical learning process from one point of view can be framed as propaganda from another. There is no simple benchmark for ruling one way or another but it is an important issue to address and one that should not be avoided. Ultimately, the knowledge research produces should help to widen our understanding of learning processes - including those which occur in popular struggles - and how they may be enhanced through educational practice (see Ranson, 1996).

Developing the basis of the argument historically, by locating adult education *in* history, is used as a way of deepening and widening our thinking by addressing the connection between 'learning and life' through participation in social struggles. In order to challenge current orthodoxies this ignored strand of history needs to be reclaimed and brought up to date (see Wilson and Melichar, 1995; Fieldhouse, 1996b). The sources used for the historical analysis are largely secondary ones and ideologically skewed towards accounts of popular adult education. It is a selective history rather than a balanced one that is being constructed. However, this does not invalidate it. The question is, does it provide a plausible and justifiable way of understanding aspects of past experience in adult education - even if they have been marginalised in today's professionalised discourse of adult education - which can guide future practice?

If the thesis does help widen our understanding of learning processes and the

potential for educational practice what are its implications in policy terms? Does it provides a focus for a sustained policy critique which is theoretically convincing? Does it help to illuminate the shortcomings of policy and practice? Finally, what are its implications in terms of a critical assessment of the current context, policy discourse and the role of the worker in adult and community education? The argument made is that in order to maximise opportunities workers will have to think critically, creatively and, above all, dialectically in relation to the current context and policy discourse. In making the connection with popular struggles adult educators have to be both 'inside' and 'outside' these movements if they are to play a constructive part in the learning processes involved.

Theoretically there are a range of intellectual resources used in the text. Whilst this may appear eclectic, the argument coheres around an ideological commitment to adult education as first and foremost concerned with social, ethical and political issues. Foucault's (see Rabinow, 1984) insistence on understanding discourse as a knowledge/power formation has been a useful tool of deconstruction, which reveals the elisions and omissions of the dominant discourse. Making explicit the 'regime of truth' in studies of participation draws attention to the politics of the discursive rules and opens up other ways of thinking about participation in adult learning. The text is also imprinted with a Gramscian influence that connects adult education with a project of constructing a new hegemony as a basis for wider

social change. The influence of Raymond Williams (see McIlroy and Westwood, 1993) on ‘cultural politics’, is also strongly evident in terms of rethinking the curriculum of popular education and its connection with social movements. Understanding adult education as cultural work expands the focus for thinking about adult learning and participation.

Overall, the aim of the study is the exploration and development of an argument, or series of arguments, which seek to identify and address questions for thinking about adult education in the context of participation in social struggles. What learning processes, if any, go on in struggle? What are the pedagogical implications? Where does the curriculum come from? What consequences does it have for the nature and purpose of adult education? How might it help in addressing the current policy context? What does it imply for the worker’s role?

## **Findings**

In terms of findings, the extent and nature of adult learning in popular struggles can only be speculated on. There tends to be more questions to ask than answers to give. We have no real knowledge about the depth or breadth of popular struggles or who they engage, for how long, to what effect and with what consequences. Movements rise and fade with the passing of events. However, it can be argued very strongly that they may contribute to adult learning in a way few other situations do and that popular struggles can

be a highly significant process of learning that often goes unrecognised by adult educators.

A key argument, or finding of the study, is that the dominant discourse of participation perpetuates a professional identity and bureaucratic hegemony that sanitises and divorces participation from adult learning in the context of popular struggles. The undoubted potential for systematising and contributing to learning in this context is under realised. Two consequences follow from this: first, it closes down the opportunity for adult education to connect with the experience of people in struggle and the means of aiding them in their efforts; second, it reduces the possibility for the experience, knowledge, problems and concerns of people to feed into the adult education curriculum and to become a resource for it.

Adult education is effectively the non-participant in the collective struggles of people in communities which is another way of putting the 'learning divide'. The outcome is that popular struggles and adult education are both impoverished. To turn this around will involve making the connection between education and politics. Without this key ingredient popular struggles and adult education will, in all likelihood, continue their separate paths rather than mutually enrich one another. In the current context, this separation privileges one version of the relationship between learning and living (that is, to one of learning and earning) and neglects the roots of adult

education as a movement with a social purpose. The dominant way of thinking about participation privileges the individual and then parades itself as ideologically neutral, as if this social construction is somehow above politics, social interests and history.

In the current times, the connection with popular movements for change raises the possibility for adult education to be *in* history, to be part of its making, and to reconnect its broken links with processes of democratic renewal. To make these connections, however, it needs to see itself as having a role in the struggles that motivate people to think and act and it will need the adult educator to take a determined and active role in the process. They will need to harness their professional expertise to an explicitly political process of learning rather than, as so often seems to be the case, to counterpose the two as mutually exclusive. The imperative, therefore, is to reconfigure professional expertise and political solidarity in support of communities of endurance and struggle.

### **The Scottish context**

It is important to note that, whilst the study has a wide point of reference, the main context referred to throughout is Scotland. The history of adult and community education in Scotland has taken a distinctive institutional form. The publication of the Alexander Report (1975) and the parallel process of regionalisation in the 1970s led to the creation of local authority Community

Education Services which amalgamated youth and community work with adult education (see Kirkwood, 1990). In order to widen participation in educational activity, it also recommended that adult education adopt a 'community development approach' which characterised practice in community work. The ambiguities and ambivalence of this way of working were never theorised and its adoption as a strategy to reach a wider section of the community was treated unproblematically (see Kirkwood, 1990; Martin, 1996). Local authorities and voluntary bodies, for example, the Workers Educational Association, were also encouraged to direct their attention to a range of 'disadvantaged groups' in order to develop a more inclusive democracy (see Barr, 1999b).

It could be argued that if adult and community education widened participation in learning, what it also did was to raise questions about the nature of the educational experience involved. Its development raised key debates about its implications for the worker's role (see chapter eight). Furthermore, the Alexander Report's failure to problematise 'community development' overlooked the experience of this approach in the field of community work and its earlier origins as an instrument of control and colonial development. As Cooke and Shaw point out, 'Community work can be seen to be the product of two sets of forces and interests which reflect the changing context of political relations in society. The first is pressure from below, which stems broadly from democratic aspiration, the other from

above, reflecting the changing needs of the state and broader political interests'. (1996:1) Adopting 'community development' for adult education was never, therefore, a straightforward way of linking adult education with the grassroots and their experience and problems. It was inherently ambivalent and a potential vehicle for incorporating communities into processes of consultation and decision-making which they would have little genuine power over. In this context, marginal improvement rather than major structural change was seen as the remedy for improving life in communities.

In the current situation, however, the prospect of democratic renewal in Scotland, raises issues about the relationship between 'civil society' and the 'state' and the role adult education can play in connecting citizenship and democracy (see Crowther, Martin and Shaw, 1999). The cultural politics of communities can open new spaces for active participation in educative processes where opportunities for systematic learning can be developed. But if adult and community education is to connect with these activities, rethinking popular struggles as sites of learning with its implications for 'the professional and the political' is a rubicon that has to be crossed.

### **Content of chapters**

Following this chapter, the aim of the next one, *Adult learning in history, 1800-1930*, is to widen out how we think about participation, purpose, process and pedagogy. The 'in history' of the title implies an emphasis on

adult learning and struggles for change and is not intended to be a comprehensive history of adult education. Instead, it covers the rise of an explicit connection between participation in social action as a resource and stimulus for adult learning in the labour and women's movements and the emergence of a variety of socially purposeful institutions for adult education and independent working class education.

Adult learning in the context of movements for change highlights the importance of socially motivated learning and a broad connection between learning and life. Remaking these broken connections, between democracy, citizenship and struggles for equality, foreground the relevance of reconceptualising adult participation in learning in the current context. Socially purposeful and radical traditions in adult education also raise wider questions about purpose, curriculum and the role of the adult educator, which are relevant today.

In turning to examine the dominant discourse of participation in adult education, a much narrower and politically deodorised understanding of participation emerges. Study after study confirms an 'iron law' dividing those who benefit from those who do not. Chapter three, *Participation in adult and community education: a discourse of diminishing returns*, involves an analysis and critique of the dominant way of thinking about participation. It is deliberately not a review of the literature of participation. Its aim,

instead, is to open up the discourse in order to reveal its limits and limitations. The regularity of findings (even its monotony?) suggest that we need to go beyond the constraints of thinking created by a professionally managed and institutionally controlled definition of what participation means. It is 'as if' we have reached the boundaries about what we can know about participation; a point of diminishing returns has set in.

In contrast to the above, the experience of the radical and social purpose traditions in adult education can help us reconnect participation in struggles for citizenship, democracy and social justice as a resource for adult learning and education. Broadly speaking, these now marginalised traditions sought to reverse the traditional relationship between education and its constituency from one that is largely 'top down', that is, controlled by government policy, educational institutions and the professionals who work in them. Instead, their aim was to build a dialectic between the aspirations, concerns and knowledges of people in communities and more systematic knowledges embodied often, but not entirely, in the academy. By asserting the primacy of social movements in the educational process the curriculum was built 'from below' and the role of education was as a resource for it.

Is the above argument simply nostalgic, wishful, thinking? The decline of socialist ideology and the divisions in the women's movement raises questions about the relevance of the historical analysis presented in chapter

two. Whilst it may be argued radical adult education offered something in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has its time past? In chapter four, *The shift to cultural politics*, developments in rethinking radical education as popular education is the focus. In particular, it documents the rethinking of the old Marxian project of class struggle at the point of production to a wider one based on the role of 'cultural politics' in the struggle for values, beliefs and critical consciousness.

The wider intellectual context of chapter four is modernist and post modernist understandings and the debate between the two. The argument is made for the continued relevance of the analysis made by the first new left in relation to understanding exploitation and oppression, in a framework which recognises diversity and difference. The criticisms of social purpose and radical education, that spring from a postmodernist rejection of modernist projects such as socialism are enjoined. The argument made is that postmodernism overlooks the type of shift made by the first new left and are content to criticise a reductionist Marxism which few would support. We still need modernist thinking to help us make sense of structural causes whereas postmodernist thinking at its best, can make us sensitive to the differential experience of people but at worst, can get in the way and undermine the possibility of education to make a difference where and when it matters to people's lives.

The interest in issues of social structure as well as social interests connects adult education with the project of social change. In chapter five, *Social movements and change*, the argument is made for the continued relevance of both 'old' and 'new' social movements as resources for struggle and as sites of adult learning. Taken together, they extend our understanding of politics and, rather than reducing the prospects for participation in social action as adult learning, the current context reflects a potential for widening opportunities through revitalised public spheres.

The title of chapter six is *Learning through struggle* and is an attempt to highlight the ambiguous, ambivalent and contradictory nature of these sites as opportunities for learning and study. Whilst they may provide significant, politicised and broad learning experiences, seared in experience through the heat of struggle, they can equally generate disempowering consequences, partially realised opportunities and set backs. A number of case studies are introduced in order to highlight the potential and problems of learning in movements. Case studies A and B reflect on learning undertaken in connection with the 1984-85 Miners' Strike and are based on my reflections of work undertaken with communities in struggle (see Barr, 2000). Account C is based on an interview with two activists involved in a tenants dampness campaign and study D is drawn from the reflections of an activist writing about a local anti-poll tax campaign group in the early 1990s.

Out of the above cases, an attempt is made to systematise the type of learning that occurs in movements in contrast to learning that is largely, but not exclusively, based in formal educational contexts. It is argued that we have to rethink our understanding of learning processes, we have to recognise the importance of a pedagogy developed through struggle, the social roots of motivation and the role of movements as spaces for the emergence of new knowledges and voices to be heard. Of course, if collectivities in struggle create these opportunities for learning, the question shifts to how these may be developed and realised in the current context. What are the implications of the analysis for thinking about the policy context and the development of learning through struggle? What are the wider currents shaping the direction of the ‘learning iceberg’? What contradictions arise? Furthermore, what does it mean for the worker’s role in adult and community education?

In chapter seven, the wider context of democratic renewal in terms of the cultural politics of communities and the political culture of the state is examined, with specific reference to the Scottish context. The contradictions presented by the ‘popular’ sets the scene for the current context of popular education. *The dialectics of the policy discourse: ‘the popular’ and citizenship in Scotland today*, examines the trend towards lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship and their contradictions in terms of reconnecting with social purpose and radical education. The argument is made that the policy discourse has to be stretched to accommodate a broader

range of meaning and turned outwards towards communities in struggle. In the current context, a key issue is the ability of worker's to create critical and creative spaces where they can exercise their relative autonomy.

What the above context means for the adult educator committed to socially progressive causes is the focus of chapter eight, *Popular struggles: the worker's role*. The theme of barriers to popular educational practice is returned to and six principles which can be drawn from the previous argument, relevant to the worker's role, are outlined. These include principles of *position, making the educational political, making the political educational, building the curriculum from lived experience, making connections between old and new movements and developing the unintended outcomes of policy*. In seeking to elucidate these principles, their consequences for the worker's role are developed by contrasting it with the role of the community-based adult educator. The two have close affinities but differ in respect to the emphasis they put on a professional identity as distinct from a political one. The argument is made that, contrary to the current emphasis on a reduced role for the adult educator, the urgent task is to revitalise and reinvigorate it.

Finally, chapter nine, *The collective learning iceberg: resources for a journey of hope*, summarises the argument and some of the key issues it raises and what they imply for adult education as well as areas for future

research. In addition, by situating the dominant discourse of participation in a wider crisis of adult education it argues the need to invert the learning iceberg, to engage pro actively with popular struggles and, once again, for adult education to reoccupy its role as a progressive force for social change.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Adult learning *in* history: 1800-1930s**

The growth of movements which have as their aim the creation of a better social order is not less important than the process of education itself. In some ways, it is more important, for such movements create the background of aspiration and endeavour which is the foundation of more directly educational work, and suggest the questions for which men and women seek in study to find an answer. (Ministry of Reconstruction (1919) Final Report of the Adult Education Committee, reprinted in Waller, 1956: 69)

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the historical argument for the relationship between participation in popular struggles and adult learning. It follows Jackson's (1980) advice that we need accounts of adult education in history as well as histories of adult education. The chapter draws, therefore, on an ideologically selective range of secondary source materials which have been interested in this activity. 'Instead of forgetting the past as selective traditions

force us to do', as Wilson and Melicher (1995) suggest, 'we seek to remember the past in order to critique the present so that we can attain the not yet in the future'. (1995: 432) This does not assume that there will be any easy answers or formula to follow for maximising participation, even if that was the intention. We cannot hope - even if it was thought desirable - to reinvent the past in the present. As Steele argues, 'instead of uncritically attempting to reproduce old models we need to understand their strengths and weaknesses and how they might apply in the new formations and to grasp reflexively what our point of leverage is within the dominant system'. (1987: 124)

It is important to state that this chapter does not claim to be a history of radical adult education or of the adult education movement (for histories see Fieldhouse, 1996; Bryant, 1984; Simon, 1974; Harrison, 1961). It is a limited and highly selective attempt to rethink the meaning of participation from the angle of radical adult education. It is therefore a very partial account but an important one that is neglected in the contemporary concerns of a professionalised service of adult education. The specific period under focus has been chosen as instructive for the following reasons. Firstly, it highlights the growth of various forms of self-education, building on and contributing towards a radical political culture. It is a period in which the link was made between participation in social and political movements and their educative role.

Secondly, the latter part of the nineteenth century includes the growth of the women's movement and their struggle for social and political rights and an independent education to support their cause - a struggle which, as feminist inspired research points out, has been invisible in accounts of radical adult education. Thirdly, the early twentieth century saw the rise of independent working class education and the parallel development of the social purpose tradition reflected through the Workers Educational Association (WEA). Fourthly, the inter war years marked the end of a particular form of radical adult education as workers' education and signalled the beginning of a new period, the contemporary one (see chapters four and five).

The early nineteenth century added a new attitude to education - 'the attitude which involved participation in social action' (Silver 1965). Historically, 'education from below' developed its own philosophy, curriculum, pedagogical processes and institutions to support popular movements in which the motivation and aspiration for change, rather than education per se, was dominant. An examination of this experience may help shift the problem of participation away from the preoccupation in policy and practice with attempting to recruit and enrol 'non-participants' into educational provision - or, more modestly, help us see this as only one side of the coin. Instead, it will be argued that part of the 'problem of participation' is the divorce between

adult education and struggles for social and political change and that reconnecting the two can help us rethink how, where and why adults learn and the implications which follow for organising and doing education.

### **Radical and social purpose education: pluralism and marginality**

The radical and social purpose traditions have never been uniform or singular. They have reflected the dominant ideological currents of the time and it may be better to think of them in terms of *traditions* plural rather than a *tradition*. The emphasis on the singular obscures the gender and class politics which have given rise to very different purposes and practices which cannot be subsumed under one dominant form.

We can make the distinction between socially purposeful adult education and radical education. The former has been inspired by a reforming politics which has had diverse roots in the history of adult education. Fundamentally, it has seen the state as a potential resource for progressive change and not simply a force for repression, as in many Marxist inspired interpretations. In the twentieth century, the WEA embodied this tradition as did some of the work undertaken by university departments of adult education. Radical education was associated with the more Marxist inspired curriculum demanded by the Plebs League and subsequently supported by the Labour Colleges and the National

Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) during the early part of the twentieth century. Whilst these institutions reflected different politics and ideological divergences they did, nevertheless, display a common interest in workers' education and connecting adult learning to the interests of the labour movement. However, as feminist critiques have shown, this radical tradition has been predominantly shaped around the interests of a white, male working class rather than a more inclusive understanding of democracy and equality (see Thompson, 1983; Westwood, 1988). The experience of women seeking their own forms of 'really useful knowledge' has been overlooked by a reductionist class politics.

We will have to learn from the exclusions and inclusions of *all* these traditions, not simply the dominant one, if we are to enrich our understanding of participation. However, it is also important not to overstate what can be learned from them. The radical and social purpose traditions have always been on the margins of an already marginalised area of educational activity. Working in the institutionalised structures of provided education will mean we have to rethink this past and, where necessary, reinterpret it in the light of current contingencies and contexts for practice. However, the edge of mainstream adult education can also be a creative space in which new educational projects can germinate (Steele, 1997a).

Edges maybe precarious, but they can also be precious places. Viewed from the centre, the concerns of those on the edge may seem peripheral to mainstream debates about learning, education and participation. Viewed from the edge, the limitations of the way these issues are framed are more transparent. Adult education has historically, largely benefited a narrow social stratum and reflects, by and large, the inequalities and hierarchies which are reproduced throughout the educational system (Thompson, 1983). On the edge of mainstream adult education, and concerned with the interests and needs of exploited and oppressed groups, has been a space occupied by radical practice. Might we therefore have much to learn from this experience?

### **Self-education: the early nineteenth century**

During the early nineteenth century there were few opportunities for education, so self-education was often the only option for the working class. This response was not simply a pragmatic one made in difficult circumstances. As Martin (1994) points out, it also involved a principled rejection of ‘education for deference’ and ‘education for utility’ which were the main forms of provided education. The patchwork of voluntary, church and local authority ‘educational’ opportunities aimed to reaffirm attitudes of social and domestic servility or, at best, offered the chance to acquire rudimentary skills in reading and writing.\*

The more liberal Mechanics Institutes, which developed between the early 1800s and 1850s, produced a more ambivalent response: on the one hand, they provided a narrow instrumental and quasi-vocational curriculum controlled by middle class interests and, on the other, they provided some opportunities for a popular scientific education (Steele, 1999) and, where controlled by the working class, they tended to have a more critical curriculum. Their history was one of ideological conflict, with much depending on the issues of financial control and independence. The Glasgow Mechanics' Institute, for example, was formed in 1823 as a democratically managed body in search of independence from the constraints of the Anderson's Institute which had initially pioneered 'Mechanics' Classes' (Bryant: 1984). Certainly, they were attacked by the clergy for encouraging free thinking and universal suffrage, which was some indication of a radical lineage (see E.P.Thompson, 1968b: 819). For the most part, Mechanics Institutes depended on philanthropic support and were controlled by middle class interests. This was reflected in a 'no politics and religion' rule which debarred discussion of controversial subjects (although never universally adhered to, particularly if it referred to orthodox political economy). Consequently, they were rarely appropriate institutions for a more radical education and their constituency was mainly the artisan, clerk and shopkeeper, rather than the working class (Harrison, 1961).

One of the main forms of independent education for working people in the early nineteenth century was the autodidact; the working class man (usually) possessed with a passion for learning, who was self-taught. Though some autodidacts showed an unhealthy reverence for the authority of the text for others it was the route to a critical consciousness (Fieldhouse, 1996). The success of the autodidact was in part due to the intellectual quality of a small layer of working people and partly due to the moral resources required for such effort, which drew on an indigenous tradition of dissent and nonconformism (Harrison, 1961).

The autodidact tradition was an important form of self-directed learning (largely neglected in the contemporary adult education literature on student-centred learning). It was self-directed learning that looked outward at the type of society which existed and what could be done to improve it, which was often, but not always, inspired by the growth of a radical political culture (Ree, 1984). As E.P. Thompson (1968b) remarks, the autodidact had to find his/her own intellectual way and were often attracted to ideas which challenged conventional wisdom and authority. Many autodidacts became leaders of working class organisations and protest movements, for example, the Chartist leader, William Lovett.

Collective self-education came out of the same radical culture which formed the autodidact and was infused by values of intellectual inquiry and mutuality. The latter, referred to the tradition of mutual study, collective debate and discussion, for example, texts might be read aloud so that people with few literacy skills could contribute. The educational process might be 'rough and ready' but it could also be highly sophisticated as Francis Place, a member of the London Corresponding Society, describes:

The chairman ( a different man each Sunday) read aloud a chapter of a book. During the ensuing week, the book was passed around for men to read at home. The next Sunday the chairman read the chapter again, pausing three times for comments. No one was to speak more than once during the reading, and anyone who had not spoken during the first two pauses was expected to speak at the end. After that there was a general discussion during which no one could speak on a subject a second time until everyone who wished to had spoken once.

(quoted in Lankshear with Lawler, 1987: 86)

This form of education was directly connected with the interests of the emerging working class; the growth of Corresponding Societies, Hampden Clubs, Working

Men's Associations, the radical press and a variety of radical movements and organisations grew to agitate for political reform and to educate themselves and others in the process. However, not all collective self-education was explicitly political in orientation; mutual improvement societies, for example, primarily sought to address more basic literacy skills and education for self improvement.

The culture of self-help was inspired by a variety of secular, dissenting and politically radical influences. However, it was also prey to ideological incorporation by the middle classes. For instance, by the latter part of the nineteenth century, self-help had become the catchword for the Smilesian tradition of laissez-faire capitalism. From this perspective, the condition of the working class was to be improved through individual effort rather than by collective action; self-help had been turned into a moral virtue and a means to resolve wider structural inequalities in society. Despite this, as E.P. Thompson notes in his seminal work on *The Making of The English Working Class*, the growing demand for education in the early nineteenth century and the intellectual culture which was emerging was *fundamentally* a radical political culture:

There is a sense in which we may describe popular Radicalism in these years as an intellectual culture. The articulate consciousness of

the self-taught was above all a *political* consciousness. For the first half of the 19th century, when the formal education of a great part of the people entailed little more than instruction in the Three Rs, was by no means a period of intellectual atrophy. The towns, and even the villages, hummed with the energy of the autodidact. Given the elementary techniques of literacy, labourers, artisans, shopkeepers and clerks and schoolmasters, proceeded to instruct themselves, severally or in groups. And the books or instructors were very often those sanctioned by reforming opinion. A shoemaker, who had been taught his letters in the Old Testament, would labour through *The Age of Reason*; a schoolmaster, whose education had taken him little further than worthy religious homilies, would attempt Voltaire, Gibbon, Ricardo; here and there local Radical leaders, weavers, booksellers, tailors, would amass shelves of Radical periodicals and learn how to use Parliamentary Blue Books; illiterate labourers would nevertheless, go each week to a pub where Cobbett's editorial letter was read aloud and discussed. (E.P.Thompson, 1968b: 711-12)

Self-education involved a network of organisations, institutions and movements which were saturated in the cultural politics of these times. It played an important role in shaping the consciousness and identity of the working class - a

class which was partly making itself through its own independent forms of education and learning. For education to be useful in making the world a better place it had to be free from the interests of the state, church and establishment; it had to be achieved through the individual and collective efforts of the working class; it had to be organically rooted in the interests and concerns of movements for social and political reform. It was the movement that generated the 'students' and processes of 'teaching', 'learning' and a 'curriculum' that were an essential part of acting on the world.

#### **'Education by collision'**

'In a large town the influences which educate a man against his will are almost incessant.' So noted the Committee on Public Libraries in 1849, going on to suggest that the consequences of social and political action led to 'exercising the minds of the labouring classes' better than any school instruction. What marked this period was the role of popular movements as educative forces; they provided a motive and stimulus for 'disciplined action and an adherence to principle' on a scale hitherto unseen (Dobbs, cited in Crowther, 1999a: 29)

The wider international context of agitation for social and political change was particularly important in inspiring 'internal' popular struggles for democratic and economic reform. The French Revolution and the American War of Independence in the late eighteenth century inspired political change in that they both signalled the crumbling of the old order and the creation of a new world. Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1796), challenged the assumptions which underpinned the hegemony of the *ancien regime* and rapidly became required reading for radicals.

During the early nineteenth century, capitalism and industrialisation stimulated the growth of urban centres and the associated squalor, poverty and overcrowding it produced. It also brought together large numbers of landless labourers which would constitute the newly emerging working class. Rural life was going through rapid transformations: workers displaced from the land migrated to the cities; 'new technologies' were changing the division of labour and added to rural poverty; pernicious poor laws generated resistance too. In all of this, Owenite communities flourished, co-operative movements grew, combinations (prototype trade unions) emerged, Corresponding Societies were formed to achieve, amongst other things, a way for working people to educate themselves and others about the world they lived in.

The above trends were supported by, and helped to sustain, ‘collisions’ of several kinds: reason and science clashed with the traditional authority of the church and the establishment; the new discipline needed for factory life conflicted with folk customs; poverty and destitution visibly jarred with opulence and wealth; the expansion of urban living created friction with traditional patterns of rural life; the state sought to suppress the proliferation of radical groups seeking political freedoms; above all, the newly emerging working class which was culturally, politically and economically growing in consciousness and confidence as a class collided with the dominant order of society (E.P. Thompson, 1968b).

‘Education by collision’, the term coined by the Committee on Public Libraries in 1849, refers to the process fostered by demands for democratic rights in the early nineteenth century. It involved deliberate attempts by groups *in struggle* to educate themselves and others about society and the need to change it. This was education with a social and political purpose that fostered and supported ‘collisions’ against established customs and conventions. It had at least three dimensions: it helped create a critical intellectual and political consciousness; it fostered people organising to become a political force; once organised, it provided the means to make a difference through concrete social and political

action. Education by collision involved learning to take systematic and principled action to achieve specific objectives. For example, Martineau's estimate of the Anti-Corn-Law campaign was that 'by means of exercising the minds of the labouring classes on affairs interesting to them and within their comprehension, the League Leaders did more for popular education than has yet been achieved by any other means'. J S Mill, the philosopher, perceptively pointed out that, 'the position which gives the strongest stimulus to the growth of intelligence is that of rising into power, not that of having achieved it'. (Martineau and Mill, cited in Dobbs, 1919: 206-207)

Education by collision was not only *about* politics, it *was* politics. It involved creating a change in the common sense outlook of the working class and reconfiguring a new one which was counter-hegemonic and threatened to build a new world (Johnson, 1993). The assumptions about how society should be ordered were no longer fixed; 'all that was solid was melting into air' and education was an important part of the chemistry of this process. During the early part of the nineteenth century two key developments fostered these collisions: the first came from the efforts of Owen and the Owenites and the second came from the emergence of Chartism as a mass movement of the working class demanding greater democratic rights.

## **Robert Owen and Owenism**

Robert Owen was a key figure in the radical movement during the 1820s and 1830s. His philosophy and practical experiments in communitarian living, which included provision for education, were the focus for a great deal of national and international interest. Model communities at New Lanark, Orbiston and in the United States were established and these inspired other co-operative projects.

The educational provision that formed part of these experiments was mainly directed towards children. In opposition to contemporary theory and practice, Owen's scheme valued the role of care and consideration, co-operation and collective experience rather than being competitive, punitive and based on 'rote' learning. His contribution to the development of adult education was not insignificant; opportunities for adult study were available and paid for by a levy on the wages of the work force. More importantly, however, was the growth of Owenite communities, inspired by his ideals, which flourished in many cities in England, Wales and Scotland (Simon, 1974).

In 1841 there were eighteen 'social missionaries' and many others volunteering their services to travel the cities and towns in order to teach the principles of Owenism, denounce the evils of the existing order and encourage people to 'social action. Owenite organisations

...established schools and ran lecture courses on political, social and scientific subjects; they gave rise to private ventures in education and wrote educational aims into the constitutions of trade unions and co-operative societies; they planned infant and adult education; they issued cheap publications and taught masses of people to analyse economic and social issues; they made ideas a real tool in the work of social reformation. All this was in a real sense education from below. (Silver 1965: 203)

Fundamental to Owen's position was his belief that character was shaped by the social environment and, therefore, could be changed and improved by transforming it. Whilst this does not seem revolutionary by today's standards, in his own time it challenged the social and religious dogma that people were born to a particular station in life. It meant change was possible and some control over it was achievable, in other words, it was an optimistic philosophy that encouraged action for transformation. In a world which still seemed to be in the making, his philosophy suggested that progress was possible and collectively people could make a significant difference for the better. In acting on their environment, the conditions could be created which would in turn provide

more favourable circumstances and improve the development of character.

A new intellectual and political culture was being propagated which challenged the conventional wisdom and aimed to reorganise society in the interests of working people. In this process, education was to play a formative and significant role. Owen's ideas also appealed to a wider working class constituency in that he subscribed to the emerging radical theory on political economy that labour was the creator of all wealth and was, consequently, entitled to the whole product of their effort. If all this seems a bit like mechanical social engineering today, it nevertheless provided a foundation which, as Silver argues (1965) bridged concerns for social justice, tolerance and humanity with analysis, education and social action.

Owen's philosophy was, however, a contradictory one. On the one hand, it rejected the dominant shibboleths of the day which sought to instruct the working class in a middle class image; his analysis rejected charity as a suitable form of relief for the poor and looked, instead, towards changing social institutions in society (see Harrison, 1961). To make change consciously would require a genuine form of education which helped people to think, and to think *critically*, about the world they lived in, the interests it was formed to serve and how the future could be made to reflect their purpose. On the other, the world

Owen wanted to create was framed in paternalistic rather than democratic terms and was to be achieved more through reason rather than class struggle (Morton, 1962). Indeed, Owen, was a paternalistic character and probably would not have supported many of the ideas promoted under his name. Although he sought to introduce more humane methods of working in his communitarian experiments, these aims also have to be seen in terms of the wider problem faced by manufacturing capitalism; creating work discipline for new patterns of working. Many of the innovations introduced in his model communities sought to improve the productivity of the work force and strict sanctions were applied to those who stepped out of line.

The Owenite movement, however, extended the meaning of Owenism by subscribing to a more radical, participatory and democratic culture. Aspects of public and private life were analysed by the Owenites for their effect on people's character: the condition of women's lives in the family; sexual relations in marriage; authoritarian schooling; the power and abuses of the Church, were all subjected to relentless and thorough critique. Owenite organisations valued 'co-operation' and 'community' and sought to challenge and change the social institutions - the environment - which undermined the growth of character. Branch life attempted to prefigure a new social order in which rites of passage, such as baptism, marriage and death were taken over and education was

provided and temperance encouraged (Morton, 1962). Unlike other radical movements of this period, Owenism was more directly concerned with gender equality, divorce and child care and more openly aimed to end all oppressions whether based on class, creed, sex or race (Westwood, 1992).

Silver, in his seminal work on Owenism, argues this movement was 'an act of liberation' and rather than distracting from political and industrial aims it added 'a sense of purpose and meaning into the whole'. (1965: 203) If this may seem an overgenerous statement, it was true, that whilst Owen's experiments eventually failed,

the ideas which he suggested were of more value than the system in which they were embodied. A vision had been granted, and character was being formed. When all his schemes had ended in bankruptcy, there were men prepared to continue his work. (Dobbs, 1919: 220)

Owen had been midwife to the idea that education could offer liberation, that learning could be a resource for progressing towards a wider social purpose in opposition to the dominant middle class ideas of individual self-help and laissez-faire. One of Owen's most lasting contributions for the working class was to instil the confidence, and belief, that it had the absolute power and right

to educate and be educated and Owenism left to the working class movement aspirations for, above all, an inclusive democracy which recognised and valued difference (Silver, 1965). Its limitation, however, was probably in its over commitment to education rather than politics as the force for change. Whilst Owenism was never entirely separated from political democracy, the development of the latter was the aim of more overt political movements.

### **Chartism and the struggle for democracy**

Chartism, from the end of the 1830s, embodied, some of the most intensive and far seeing contributions to the radical tradition of working class collective self-help in the field of education yet made.

(Silver, 1965: 232)

In the early nineteenth century, Chartism and its demand for democratic reform created the first really mass movement of working class people. The extent of Chartist organisation varied and its impact across the country was highly uneven. At its best, the demand for democracy prompted the growth of collective self-help and stimulated reading, writing and debate in working class communities, running against a flow of strong establishment and anti-intellectual currents which promoted 'useful knowledge' (see Lankshear with Lawler, 1987 ).

The struggle for democratic rights was not simply about the vote but part of a broader philosophy concerned with equality and human dignity. That is, the demand for political rights was also part of a social and cultural struggle for democracy. The Chartists were uncompromising in their rejection of various forms of provided education, which denied them the knowledge they sought, and were determined in their efforts to educate themselves. They were able to draw on democratic methods for organising educational activities which had been developed in nonconformist religious groups (see Simon, 1974). Above all, the demand for their own independent education was linked with the struggle for a free and independent press and the provision of libraries which would give access to reformist and critical ideas.

The 'unstamped press' (the radical press which the government sought to suppress by taxes) provided a wealth of polemical and critical literature, provided at an affordable price, which was a crucial part of the 'curriculum' for working class people. It analysed social and political developments from the perspective of working class interests. The pedagogy of the movement was informal and close to people's everyday lives; public readings of radical literature occurred in inns, at work and in other public places in villages, towns and cities. Cafes doubled as reading rooms (in London in 1840 there were over

1600); they provided access to literature and papers which might otherwise be beyond the financial means of many and had a clear educational purpose.

*The Poor Man's Guardian* - with its slogan 'knowledge is power' - was widely read in Chartist and radical circles and its editor frequently imprisoned for its publication. Another example, *The Northern Star*, the Chartist paper with the widest circulation, contained writing on much wider scientific and cultural issues which went beyond the immediate political struggle. It contained debates between Chartists and Owenites on political issues and others between Owenites and religious leaders. The term 'newspaper' is probably too culturally specific: 'really we are talking about argumentative, opinionated little magazines, essentially concerned with commentary and analysis, often in support of particular movements. Most were saturated with an educational content'.

(Johnson, 1993: 22-23). Public meetings also provided an opportunity for large crowds to come together to listen and air views about the Chartist struggle. The effect of these networks of informal, educative forces was the creation of an intellectual and political consciousness and the education of desire for greater knowledge, understanding and social action.

It was between 1838-1848 that the development of independent education was strengthened by the building of a network of halls and schools across the

country funded by Chartist and Owenite organisations. Many of the large industrial centres in the north of England and in Scotland and Wales had such buildings. They provided a space for debate and discussion which meant more systematic and planned educational and recreational activity could be organised. The inns and the Mechanics Institutes were replaced with reading rooms and 'Halls of Science'; although some of these buildings were very modest, a few were exceptional given the limited resources available. The curriculum of the Chartist and Owenite meeting rooms addressed the needs of children as well as adults and were never simply restricted to a 'hard' curriculum of politics, economics and the social sciences. Discussions on philosophy, poetry, literature, science, theology and so on were also part of the educational activities, as well as convivial events such as 'tea parties' and dances. In Scotland, Bryant points out that the curriculum of Chartist groups included reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and poetry as well as politics. (Bryant, 1984: 6) 'There is no doubt that the general cultural standard maintained by their press was extremely high', comments Simon, 'and this must have had its effect on the discussions and debates held in the Chartist meeting rooms and halls.' (1974: 251)

Chartism created a critically conscious working class which was learning to 'question and challenge the distribution of power in society through systematic

action. People learnt not so much by a desire to know but a desire to change the world; or at least saw the two as being interconnected. Its impact in terms of educating for critical intelligence was not insignificant as Dobbs points out:

Of a group who were tried in connection with a Chartist outbreak in the manufacturing districts, a large proportion could scarcely read or write. But the human material was different from what it had been half a century earlier. Intelligence, 'in a degree which was formerly thought impossible', had spread to 'the lower and down to the lowest rank'; and with intelligence went the faculty of disciplined action and an adherence to principle. (Dobbs, 1919: 213)

The experience of Chartist agitation confirmed Owen's philosophy that intelligence was not innate but was socially produced and could be nurtured. As William Lovett, a leader of the Chartist movement remarked, 'If I now enter a mixed assembly of working men, I find twenty where I formerly met with one who knew anything of society, politics or government...' (cited in Dobbs 1919: 214-215). Silver concludes, 'in the actual conditions of the 1840s, it might be said that the fight for the franchise and a free press was the best available schoolmaster. Listening to speeches and making speeches, writing handbills, public debate, the clash within the movement itself over concepts of democracy

and rights and strategy - all these were part of the role of Chartism, and indirectly of Owenism, as teacher.' (Silver 1965: 235)

### **The women's movement and radical adult education**

Popular demands for democracy during the nineteenth century were often framed in a way which excluded women. Chartism, for example, was ambivalent about the extension of the franchise to women and universal suffrage was often interpreted as *male*, universal suffrage. Whilst women were able to obtain some educational facilities in Mechanics Institutes (in fact, some positively encouraged women through reduced subscription fees, see Hudson, 1851), Adult Schools and Mutual Improvement Societies were largely aimed at reaffirming more restrictive and conventional roles - 'domestically useful knowledge', in Thompson's (1983) pithy remark.

In the years following the demise of Chartism as a political force, the working class movement turned more to trade union activity which emphasised a familial ideology that reinforced the exclusion of women from the sphere of production (see Westwood, 1992). There was very little in the way of 'independent' education targeted specifically at women until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Some middle-class women and women's organisations were able to take advantage of the early Extension Movement which aimed to develop university

level education, particularly from Oxford and Cambridge, on an outreach basis to different parts of the country. This was missionary work with the purpose of taking *understanding* to people, not as Williams (1983) points out ‘taking the *tools* of understanding’. The space provided for a radical and critical education was usually limited by the assumptions of a missionary kind which underpinned this work. Swindells (1995) argues that the relationship of women to the Extension Movement was different from men’s; some women’s groups, for example, the Leeds Ladies’ Educational Association, were able to use the Extension Movement to campaign for better educational resources for working class women and girls.

Women were also admitted into Working Men’s Colleges in the 1850s and 1860s, and into Mechanics Institutes, but never on equal terms with men and often at best only reluctantly. Moreover, when women did gain access to institutes and colleges the curriculum was differentiated: ‘middle-class women followed daytime classes in ‘ladylike’ accomplishments, whilst working women followed evening classes in the ‘three Rs’ and plain sewing’ (Swindells, 1995: 35). The curriculum available to working class women was limited and instrumental and inspired Elizabeth Melleson to found the London Working Women’s College in 1864. This aimed to provide a broader curriculum specifically for women, but by 1874, it too had reverted to men’s and women’s

colleges (Benn, 1996). Radical education for women was caught in the contradiction of either being underfunded in its own provision or a marginalised part of the provision for men. The co-operative societies of the late nineteenth century were one of the few exceptions in that they demonstrated a commitment to political education, as self-education, for working class women as citizens . However, these societies also exhibited their own tensions between social and political education for men and education for women as consumers (see Swindells, 1995).

It was out of a dissatisfaction with the co-operative men's movement that a more independent and radical form of adult education for women developed. For instance, the Women's Co-operative Guild, influenced by the activities of the Suffragette Movement and the Women's Trade Union League of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was created in 1883 and gave working class women a voice free from male dominance and middle-class patronage. This institution created a space in which women could exercise their own control over the curriculum; in addition to more conventional areas of women's interests this involved education and action for political, material, social, and welfare rights. As Jane Thompson notes, 'a characteristic feature of guild education - be it collecting information on various topics, preparing and reading reports at conferences or reading and discussing books of political interest - was that it

was all bound up with appropriate action'. (1983: 72). And as Westwood (1992) points out, during the First World War it was the working class women's co-operative guilds that campaigned against it, in contrast to the more middle class dominated suffrage organisations and the mainstream of the labour movement.

Between the two world wars the development of Townswomen's Guilds helped campaign and educate for women's legal and economic rights (Benn, 1996) and Women Citizens' Associations created an organisation to educate women into acting as a significant political constituency. Although the latter was dominated by middle class women, they were a powerful force in the demand for political equality - the recognition of 'women citizens' - and its extension into wider questions of gender equality and social rights in relation to welfare provision (Innes, 1999). As Westwood notes, for women 'emancipation was not only about votes, it was about freedom from hunger, from unwanted pregnancies, poverty and domesticity'. (1988: 78)

### **The curriculum of struggle: 'really useful knowledge'.**

Before examining the trend towards workers' education which developed during the early twentieth century, it is useful to make some analysis of the curriculum which the developments already discussed brought about. According to

Harrison (1961) popular protest organisations were educational in three senses:

\* First, they organised classes, lectures, mutual improvement groups and so on to publicise and educate people as to their own objectives and also to train members. This was explicit educational activity aimed at learning and acting.

\* Second, active involvement in popular movements was itself an educational process. The nature and quality would vary with the way these organisations managed their own affairs. Democracy in the *practice* of these organisations was an educative process in that it facilitated participation by instituting democratic processes of accountability. These involved constitutions, order and rights and a constant process of debate, explanations and justifications that had to be agreed by the membership as the basis for concerted action. The integral educative impact of demands for democracy were noted by the philosopher J S Mill - 'democracy is not simply a device for balancing rival interests; it is, at a certain stage of social development, an indispensable means of education' (cited in Dobbs, 1919: 207)

\* Third, the development of an indigenous educational philosophy

made possible a new attitude on the part of workers and women to adult education. The educative role of popular movements was a product of widespread social, economic and political turbulence that provided the yeast for radical education to germinate and flourish. It was the struggle against traditional authorities, and for greater democracy and equality, which permeated the 'curriculum' of the various groups and organisations seeking to develop a popular will to transform society.

Independent education was necessary for the type of knowledge sought by radicals. Knowledge for its own sake was not valued but rather its worth was measured in terms of how it contributed to social and political struggle, that is, it was concerned with 'really useful knowledge' (Johnson, 1993). Bronterre O'Brien, the editor of the Chartist paper the *Northern Star*, captured the essence of the distinction between 'useless' and 'really useful knowledge' in these terms:

Some simpletons talk of knowledge as rendering the working classes more obedient, more dutiful - better servants, better subjects, and so on, which makes them more subservient slaves, and more conducive to the wealth and gratification of idlers of all description. But such

knowledge is trash; the only knowledge which is of any service to the working people is that which makes them more dissatisfied, and makes them worse slaves. This is knowledge we shall give them.

(cited in Lankshear with Lawler, 1987: 111)

‘Really useful knowledge’ involved ‘knowledge calculated to make you free’ and was *practical*, aimed at freeing people from the limits of the prevailing orthodoxies which constrained their lives.

Ideas which were radical were not set against practical objectives as if they were mutually antagonistic, as often seems the case today. Practical did not mean to accommodate oneself to the structure of existing relations as if they were unalterable. ‘Really useful knowledge’ was essential to the pursuit of practical ends to improve collective life. However, the ends knowledge served had to be determined by those who wanted it to make a difference. ‘Practical’ implied a particular point of view, as Johnson points out, practicality ‘depended on your social standpoint and political purpose. One person’s useful knowledge was another’s useless knowledge’. (1993: 23).

‘Really useful knowledge’ was not, therefore, simply about ‘hard’ subjects like politics and economics but was integrated with the experience and interests of

different social groups. For example, the women's movement has been instrumental in shifting what constituted 'really useful knowledge' by relating it to their 'private troubles', often ignored by the labour movement, and turning these into 'public issues' which could be acted on to improve women's lives. In the process of creating their own version of 'really useful knowledge' they also expanded the agenda of politics. Private troubles, which were marginalised and invisible in other forms of adult education, were taken up as educational and political projects almost exclusively by women's organisations; Owenism in the earlier period of the nineteenth century was the exception.

Critical knowledges were 'really useful' in so far as they helped working class people 'to get out of our present troubles'. What was characteristic of movements for change was their belief in the value of education for social transformation. 'The march of the mind' (Johnson 1993) captures the faith in reason that radical education held, alongside an understanding that reason alone would not change things. The 'mind' addressed by radical education was the collective one of the people and 'the march' it sought to foster aimed to educate for ordered, disciplined and calculated action against institutionalised power and privilege.

Harrison (1961) states that the value of protest movements in educational terms

lay in the process and methods of struggle, rather than in the end attained. This was true. Although the Chartists failed to achieve their immediate demands, they did nevertheless, alter the political and intellectual landscape of the working class. Similarly, Owen's experiments in communitarian living failed, but his ideas inspired others and moulded a new and more confident working class self image (Silver, 1965). The informal networks of educative forces which had been developed, stimulated the desire for learning; the creation of organisations, buildings and spaces which the Owenite, Chartist and Women's movements controlled, created the space for systematic study. Moreover, the demand for independent education was also for a curriculum that was broad, open and wide ranging (Johnson 1993). What we should not lose sight of, nevertheless, is that it was the striving for specific *political* ends that generated the 'students' and the educative process; participation in social action educated people and motivated individuals to acquire education. Education by collision happened because '... there were targets that made the clash meaningful and worthwhile' (Silver, 1965: 237).

The limitations of this curriculum, however, were in its lack of sustained resources, and when the momentum for change subsided so too did its educative work. A political and intellectual culture was created but the process needed to maintain it had to have the resources to sustain itself over longer periods of

time. Fundamental change involves a 'long revolution' and if education is to play its part in it then long term educational effort is required. But institutionalising radical educational provision is not an easy task, and the emerging working class and women's movements did not have the necessary resources to make systematic provision available in any widespread way. In the case of the former, the institutionalisation of independent working class education also generated its own problems, as indicated by the experience in the early twentieth century.

### **Workers' education: social purpose and independent working class education**

It is no fault of ours that you have reached your twenty-first anniversary; we should be happier to attend your funeral. You exist to extend the benefits of university culture to the working men that you patronise. Your education, and all education that is not based on the central factor of the class struggle, is false history and false economics.

(Address to the WEA from the Plebs League: cited in Blackwell, 1983: 40)

Workers' education characterised developments in radical education during the early twentieth century. The demand for independent working class education

accompanied the growth of socialism as an ideological and political force - a movement in which class struggle would be educative and which, in turn, self-education would foster and support. The context in which it emerged was the development, in particular, of revolutionary politics associated with the various Marxist inspired political parties emerging and invariably subdividing during this period over various ideological schisms. The main impetus for its development was the secession of a group of militant working class students who left Ruskin College to form the Plebs League.

The Plebs League wanted a more independent form of workers' education which would have a Marxist oriented curriculum to train revolutionary workers, rather than the bourgeois education provided by the universities. Their demands led to the formation of the Central Labour College which was supported by the National Union of Railway men and the South Wales Miners' Federation. During the 1920s, the network of Labour Colleges ( in reality, something like evening class centres) was organised through the creation of the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC). It provided a successful large-scale attempt to involve working class people in adult education. In Scotland, in 1920, some 2800 students were enrolled in 51 classes (see Bryant, 1984). In addition, national postal courses organised by the National Council of Labour Colleges had recruited 2700 students by 1926. At their height the Labour Colleges had

30,000 part-time enrolments, with men outnumbering women by a ratio of twenty to one (Ree: 1984: 21). However, as Phillips and Putnam (1980) suggest, the changing political landscape during the 1920s, with the growth of the Labour Party and the emergence of a Communist Party, opened up ideological differences within the labour college movement. The formation of the NCLC involved a less explicit Marxist ideological commitment than that of the Plebs League.

Social purpose adult education, which drew on reformist ideological influences, had its roots in a coalition of different interests and agencies: the Adult Schools, Mechanics Institutes, Christian socialism, the Working Mens' Colleges, Ruskin College, the Extension Movement of the nineteenth century and the growth of co-operative societies and trade unions (Fieldhouse, 1977). These developments had provided the autodidacts with an opportunity to deepen their own educative efforts and develop a more comprehensive, 'cosmic philosophy' (Ree, 1984). It also epitomised institutions like the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) founded by Mansbridge.

The WEA aimed to provide working people with education which would contribute to progressive social change; it was associated with social democratic politics and saw the state as a potential resource for progressive change rather

than simply an obstacle to it. The WEA aimed to provide working class men (and, later, women) with a university level of education. A characteristic feature of the WEA was its commitment to University standards through solid and sustained tutorial study. It sought to develop a democratic form of education which would be controlled by its students. In terms of its organisational structure, a federal system was devised which allowed a great deal of freedom to its districts. Moreover, its Responsible Body status, which permitted districts to apply for state funding to run courses, also enabled it to acquire resources for its work, thereby enabling the WEA to develop its provision and improve the quality of its curriculum. The opportunity to receive state support was denied, and opposed, by the more radically-minded NCLC.

The historical conflict between the WEA (as an example of social purpose education) and the NCLC (an example of radical workers' education) has obscured many overlaps and interconnections between the two which we will return to below. Both the tradition of social purpose and workers' education were ultimately concerned with education for some form of social and political transformation, although they aimed to achieve this in very different ways.

The Labour Colleges represented a significant attempt by the labour movement to create its own independent educational provision based on a class analysis of

exploitation within capitalist society. Like their counterparts in England and Wales, the Scottish Labour Colleges were to be controlled by committees reflecting the interests of the working class and financed by subscriptions from the trade union movement. In terms of curriculum, the emphasis was on understanding Marxism as a means of workers furthering their interests as a class (MacLean, 1978). An important continuity with the popular education of the beginning of the nineteenth century was the focus on material inequality. 'Collisions' at the point of production had to be reinforced by systematic study of capitalism from the point of view of the workers. The strength of the Labour Colleges lay in their attempt to institutionalise a radical form of education which could create critically conscious and militant workers. But the experiment was short-lived.

The 'purist' position of the Labour Colleges on the issue of independence meant they had to depend entirely on financial support from the labour movement - primarily the trade unions. After the collapse of the General Strike in 1926, working class militancy waned and the trade unions supporting the Labour Colleges demanded a less radical curriculum. Simon (1992) argues this led the NCLC towards a curriculum further to the ideological right than was often the case in the WEA. The subsequent accommodation, between the state and the labour movement, meant that the Labour Colleges became increasingly isolated

and out of touch with their wider constituency in the working class as a whole. Moreover, increasing support for the WEA in the late 1920s and 1930s began to put additional pressure on the Labour Colleges. The WEA made specific attempts to develop educational provision which would be negotiated with the labour movement and during the 1920s formed a special committee to further these links and ensure the relevance of its work to the interests of the labour movement (Workers Educational Trade Union Committee).

The WEA was committed to the development of university level education for working class people and aimed to educate the leaders of the labour movement into the kind of understanding and wisdom this required. The open ethos of the WEA meant it was susceptible to moderate as well as radical ideological tendencies. For example, as Duncan (1999) points out, the WEA in Edinburgh which was under the guidance of Kemp Smith, tried to dissuade students from the doctrines of Marxism and sought to establish links between them and more moderate elements in the trade union and labour movements. On the other hand, some of the leading figures in the WEA, such as Tawney, sought to foster its relationship with progressive social and political forces.

As Steele (1987) argues, the WEA has always been a site of ideological struggle. This coupled with the power of district bodies and the very loose federal

structure of the organisation resulted in it evolving differently in different regions of the British Isles (Fieldhouse, 1977). For example, many WEA tutors were able to develop the kind of political economy within the curriculum which the Labour Colleges would have supported, and indeed, in some cases the tutors employed by both organisations were the same. The accusation of 'class collaboration' levelled at the WEA was over simplistic (Brown, 1980). The federal structure of the WEA, with its twenty-one districts, allowed for a good deal of autonomy which made it difficult to label its activities and dismiss them in over simplistic ideological terms. The Yorkshire district of the WEA, for example, under the control of George Thompson subscribed to an educational ideology which many in the NCLC could have signed up to. Thompson saw the WEA as serving the interests of the working class movement and in tune with the needs of working class students (Harrison, 1961; Steele, 1987).

Where George Thompson differed from the NCLC was on the need to develop a rigorous analysis of society with all the intellectual resources available - not simply Marxist texts - under the democratic control of the labour movement. Its purpose was to train working class leaders for a role in government so that they could advance the collective interests of working people, rather than provide education for social mobility. In this view, workers' education had to deal with the 'controversial' subjects - economics, social and political history, political

philosophy etc - before it dealt with 'cultural' subjects like the arts.

Ideologically, this was along way away from Mansbridge's 'yearning for spiritual perfection' and from the more dogmatic propaganda fostered by the NCLC. Thompson's WEA was committed to a more open pedagogical approach which started with the concrete rather than the abstract and was dialogical rather than directive in approach.

The criticisms made by the Plebs League of the WEA were not altogether unfounded despite being too sweeping and too dismissive. The insistence on University standards and a liberal definition of objectivity could lead to a paralysis in terms of education for appropriate action. Whilst the state may not have had adequate facilities to monitor all of the WEA's curriculum it did have a constraining influence. As Fieldhouse points out:

Nevertheless, in the last resort, the WEA did operate within accepted confines. Its dependence on state finance and University teaching resources meant that revolution as opposed to reform was severely frowned upon. It was possible to countenance some Marxist theories, provided these were always heavily outbalanced by 'orthodox' ones. If its education had any lasting influence at all on students (and there is no reason to

doubt that it had), then the WEA played a significant part in restricting the promulgation of Marxist theory among the British working class... (1977: 45)

It would be wrong to be too dismissive of the NCLC. Their commitment to Marxism certainly introduced into their curriculum a body of 'really useful knowledge' which challenged the intellectual justification for private control over the means of production and which could serve to foster class solidarity. From this perspective, economic equality by means of the socialisation of production was a necessary precondition for political equality. However, the status of this knowledge as 'scientific socialism' put Marxism on a pedestal as an undisputed truth and in the end, the Labour Colleges came to be trapped by the limitations of their own highly economistic version of Marxism, their uncompromisingly directive pedagogy and the general reductionism of their analysis.

The logic implicit in the development of the Labour Colleges meant that the appeal of, and constituency for, this particular kind of adult education was always going to be limited to a relatively narrow section of organised labour - white, male and working class - an elite vanguard of the class rather than the wider membership. The eventual dependence of the Labour Colleges on right-

wing trade union resources and their demand for a more functional and technical curriculum closed the knot even tighter on their distance from a wider cross section of the working class. This prevented them from engaging effectively with the realities of social and economic change, and they gradually lost touch with the real currents of working class experience.

The WEA also began to lose its base in the broader working class after the Second World War, in favour of a more middle class constituency, and debate about its social purpose was conducted in earnest. Whilst the wider context of full-employment and the growth of a welfare society may have reduced the apparent need for social purpose education the way it was framed also had its limitations. The workerist focus of the WEA had to share some of the responsibility for this downward trend. As Williams (1983) notes, in his reflections on teaching in adult education during this period, there was the dominant assumption that only subjects like economics or politics were involved in the business of creating social consciousness. But this gradually began to change and a broader and more complex understanding about the real processes of forming social consciousness developed.

In a way, both the radical ideological strand in the WEA and the NCLC were concerned with what Mulhern (1984) terms 'prospective' rather than

‘projective’ discourses of the left. By the latter he means those which aimed to generate discontent by educating for desired alternatives, in the manner of William Morris’s utopianism. The concern with ‘prospects’ for the future led to an emphasis on strategic thinking, both in terms of the immediate and long term outlook for the class struggle, with the creation of a workers’ vanguard taking priority over giving credence to the kind of future to be created and who would be in it and who would not.

To be genuinely popular, the WEA and NCLC, needed to broaden their appeal and ground their work in the currents which moved people to take action. To create a critical social consciousness in one’s own time is always a matter of *contemporary* analysis (Williams, 1983). In a changing world these currents have to be understood and connected with. In this sense, the focus on workers in production was both a strength and a limitation. On the one hand, it organised adult education for working class people on the basis of their role in the process of production, promoting class consciousness and building industrial organisation. On the other, its neglect of sources of power and oppression outside of production limited its scope and appeal - and eventually its relevance.

## **Conclusion**

One of the obvious points to come from the analysis is how much adult

education was animated by the demand for social and political reform. Social change was invariably seen as an educational as well as a moral and political project and as such it generated initiative, energy and determination to learn and act. In contrast, this dynamic seems marginal in today's world of education. Individual and instrumental motives for learning appear primary and collective ones almost extinguished. So is this history of radical adult education relevant for an understanding of participation today? The 'point of leverage' in the current context has to be in the relationship between education and politics.

An important point for the development of the argument is that we need to reassert the political nature of education and make visible the educative nature of politics. Radicals did not simply accept the claim that education was unconditionally good - they did not feel the need to automatically accept it as something beneficial. Whether it was good or not depended on the values and purposes which informed it.

Radicals were either hostile, suspicious or deeply ambivalent about provided education and although education today is different both in content and quality, the relevance of their point still stands. In terms of reflecting on wider relations of power, educational institutions were saturated with political content - and still are - disguised by a veil of professional neutrality. For radicals,

participation in these institutions was only desirable if they could reflect the interests of working people. 'Real useful knowledge' revealed ways in which power regulated everyday life. It helped people become conscious of it. It helped people organise and act on their knowledge and understanding.

The educative nature of politics - education by collision - approaches the issue of participation from another angle. It highlights the extent to which people engaged in collective struggles are also learning by other means. This may seem very obvious, but the link between the two needs to be argued and the case made rather than assumed. The problem from this perspective, is not the relationship between education and politics, but the attempt to sterilise adult education from its connection with collectivities in struggle. It seems reasonable to assume that making an explicit connection between politics and education can sometimes be difficult ground to tread in practice - for a variety of reasons. But it needs to be argued intellectually and the opportunities this poses for connecting with collectivities in struggle should be placed on the agenda of adult educators. If it is never in our consciousness can it ever be in our practice?

The politics of space was also instructive. One of the strengths of radical education was its roots in everyday life and its location in everyday places. "This closeness to people, rather than being separated off in institutions, meant

educative influences were woven into the pattern of daily living. Johnson (1993) argues there were complex interconnections between the family, neighbourhood, work and radical education so that it was difficult to separate out radical educational initiatives from the general stock of inherited cultural resources. But the informality was also a problem. The politics of space was important in that systematic educational activity could be disrupted without control over the places where it occurred. But then the problem shifted to one of sufficient resources to maintain these institutions and who would control them.

Control over the educational process was also fundamental to the question of the value of participation. The experience of the women's movement demonstrated the need for both a practical and wide understanding of 'really useful knowledge'. It was knowledge which was not limited by traditional academic disciplines, but by the nature of experience and how to make sense of it. Achieving a curriculum to connect with such experience would depend on the issue of control over the learning process and the curriculum. However, this is never easy to achieve. As the NCLC discovered, independence was partly illusive, there was always some other interest that working class education was up against, there was always some piper playing a tune.

Moreover, the experience of the WEA highlighted the dilemmas of developing a

radical social purpose whilst being dependent on state resources for aid. It was possible to be resourced by the state and to still develop a critical curriculum - *within limits*. The weight of pressure to conform to more orthodox forms of education which eschewed a radical social purpose were dominant and constraining. Despite these limitations and the compromises they entailed the curriculum did offer some scope for manoeuvre and to maintain a radical social purpose. If there is a parallel to the current context, it is that radical education will require a dialectical way of thinking which can help to identify the spaces for creating more progressive opportunities.

The vision of socialism which informed the dominant class analysis of workers' education tended to be both patriarchal and parochial and the experiences of other oppressed and marginalised groups were invisible. Ideological inclusiveness, which recognises diversity is, therefore, central to a radical educational project which seeks to connect with new forms of social structure and social interests. Openness and wide ranging discussion of competing and conflicting accounts were vital ingredients in developing critical intelligence.

In the current context, a central issue in the discussion about adult education and participation has to be the way in which politics have been marginalised (or reconfigured?) in people's experience and the manner in which public spaces for

participation in politics is being redefined. Despite such processes, however, wider structural contradictions can never be entirely controlled and different struggles occur, often in unexpected circumstances. If there is one important lesson to learn, it is that the wider structural and material contexts of people's lives create the energy and aspiration to achieve something for the better.

When radical education lost its connections with the underlying springs of action it also lost its energy and dynamic and appeared obsolete and out of touch. Fundamental, therefore, to the issue of participation is the ever unfinished business of analysis of the social forces which move people to act. Finally, participation in politics was also a matter of context. The ebbs and flows of struggles marked high and low tides of political and educational work. When the expectation of widespread social and political change was high, then the possibilities for radical educational activity expanded. But are we in such a context today?

## **Chapter Three**

### **Participation in adult and community education: a discourse of diminishing returns**

#### **Introduction**

...in a society in which learning is unequal certain distinctive kinds of ignorance accumulate in the very heartland of learning. This heartland defines itself; it defines what learning is; it deems what is a subject and what is not. (Williams in McIlroy and Westwood, 1993: 259)

Perhaps the most ploughed furrow in adult education research is that of participation. The survey literature on the subject is weighty, formidable and characterised by unexceptionally similar findings. Local, national and international studies of participation (for example, see Lowden, 1985; McGivney, 1990; Sargant et al 1997; Sargant, 2000; OECD, 1979) have been

strikingly consistent in informing us about who does and does not participate: not surprisingly it is people from 'higher' social classes, the young, men and those seeking vocational education, who are already well educated, who participate most. Within working class groups the same features which characterise inequalities between classes are mirrored (Hedoux cited in McGivney, 1990). Again, it is the materially better off, the more educated and the more socially active who participate. On the other side of the 'learning divide', the non-participants are typically working class, people with a minimum of education, ethnic minority groups, older people, some groups of women (housebound mothers, women from lower socioeconomic groups), unemployed young adults and so on (ibid). Whilst there may be some slight increases in participation amongst working class and unemployed groups (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2001) the overall pattern of provision which has been remarkably consistent over a long period of time - study after study has welded together an 'iron law' of participation.

The opening quote from Raymond Williams alerts us to the possibility that inequalities in learning can lead to a distinctive kind of ignorance too. We may need to ask ourselves if we have been able to step back far enough and ask some fundamental questions about what participation in education means and why? Will more research on the subject help us see its limitations more clearly? If

not, is the heartland of learning blinding us to the terms in which participation is constructed? Have studies of the kind indicated above now reached a point of diminishing returns? If we think the answer might be yes, then a systematic interrogation of the assumptions made about participation in adult education has to be the starting point. This would involve something more fundamental than a review of the relevant literature, or more sophisticated approaches to reconceptualise explanations of participation (see Blair, McPake and Munn; 1995). Unless the parameters of the discourse are made rigorously explicit, such approaches may simply reaffirm participation as a problem which better informed adult educators and policy makers should do something about. This is not to demean the integrity of such efforts, but to recognise that the way our thinking of participation is framed should also be an object of investigation. This chapter, in contrast to more conventional approaches to participation, seeks to deconstruct the rules of the dominant discourse in order to make clear what is included, what is left out and with what consequences.

### **Discourse analysis**

Our knowledge, and more importantly, the limits of what is knowable about the world are constituted through discourses. They frame the assumptions, ways of thinking, problems and practices which are regarded as appropriate and legitimate.

In framing a 'way of knowing' and understanding, discourses also exclude other ways in which we can begin to think about a subject. Knowledge does not simply represent what is true but actively constructs what is taken to be true. Such discourses are not neutral and constitute, in Foucault's (1991) terms, knowledge/power formations; knowledge is constructed out of relations of power and, in turn, is part of the process of reconstituting power. 'Regimes of truth' arrive out of pre-existing power/knowledge formations. Foucault expresses it like this:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctified; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980: 131)

The more powerful the discourse of participation the more deeply embedded in our common sense are its problems, its definitions of learning, its understanding, and the range of appropriate 'solutions' it suggests have to be followed.

Positioned in this process are groups and agencies with *more* and *less* powerful voices. For example, the terms of the debate on adult participation is largely a professional one, 'internal' to adult educators and policy makers, who are the dominant voices constructing its meaning, whereas students are 'external' to it. The voice of this latter group appear as an object of research mediated by the wisdom of the more powerfully placed 'experts' who decide what counts as participation and what counts as significant learning. Our understanding of adults returning to learning, in this perspective, are not simply 'true' or 'false' statements about why adults participate, why they do not and what can be done about it. The regime of truth they create works on another, deeper, level as practices for constructing our understanding of what counts as participation in learning and why it is valued. Consequently, the knowledge/power formation on adult participation embodies the policy and professional self-interests of those who service and control its definitions.

It is quite instructive, for instance, that despite a good deal of recognition of the importance of non-formal adult learning its importance in policy is systematically ignored. There is a useful parallel between the interest of this

study, on learning in popular struggles, and that of research undertaken on learning in voluntary associations. Work by Elsdon (1995, Elsdon et al, 1995), amongst others, has pointed to the significance of learning in a range of voluntary associations. Whilst these are very different contexts to popular struggles their importance is in highlighting the invisible learning which goes on and its wider significance. In these non-formal contexts the overwhelming evidence is again that '*unpremeditated learning and change* are generally more important and fundamentally valuable than *deliberate*'. (author's emphasis, Elsdon, 1995: 79) Moreover, the learning that is acquired in such situations has something of an accumulator effect in that it ripples out into families, friends, neighbours, communities and workplaces. Also Ross-Gordon and Dowling (1995) study of an under represented group in adult education in the USA, such as African-American women, demonstrates considerable learning which goes on but is not identified and recognised as such by those involved.

As Tight (1998) points out, different definitions of learning in research can lead to very different results. For example, the broad one adopted by Beinart and Smith's *National Adult Learning Survey* (1997) takes into account 'taught' as well as 'self-taught' learning efforts and highlights a divide between different types of learning, for instance, more people engage in 'self-taught' learning than in 'taught' learning. In comparison, the definition of learning as a 'taught'

activity used by Sargant et al (1997) can lead to a sharper picture of a 'learning divide' between those who have more and receive more, and those who have had little and receive less. Despite, therefore, a good deal of evidence about the importance of these non-formal contexts for learning their relevance is also frequently marginalised by the policy discourse on participation.

It is worth highlighting what is not being said. Deconstructing a discourse does not mean questioning the veracity of the knowledge it generates. Neither is it being argued that improved access into educational provision is irrelevant for those who have traditionally been denied it. Instead, the purpose of deconstruction is to make visible the limits of a particular way of thinking and acting in order to know how it is both inclusive and exclusive. Whose interests are served by the way participation is constructed? Who loses? What is absent? What don't we see? What are the implications of viewing participation differently? This process is a necessary step in reconstructing participation in a different way so that 'the problem' under consideration can be opened up. Participation has been framed, it is argued, in a way that separates off adult education from a more radical tradition of social action as a resource for learning and education. If it can be opened up, perhaps new possibilities for thinking about participation and how adult educators relate to it can emerge. \*

‘Ways of knowing’ are systematised through ‘rules’ which are often implicit rather than being consciously followed; instead, they provide the preconditions for formulating knowledge. In Gramscian terms they constitute a ‘common sense’ that is taken for granted and which operate ‘behind the backs’ of speakers within a discourse. Discursive formations also differentiate those with the authority to know and act, and those without, and how they should relate to each other. (Philp, 1985) Moreover, there are incentives for compliance which can involve either force, economic rewards or surveillance systems. The rules identified (below) as rule one, rule two, etc, is not meant to suggest they are hierarchically ordered or distinct but it is simply a formula for organising the analysis.

### **Rule one: participation is a ‘good thing’**

Participation in adult education is a normative idea which basically assumes that more is better; that is, better for the individual and better for society.

Historically, its claim to be a good thing is a product of the mid to late twentieth century and has been brought to the fore through contemporary discourses of lifelong learning. Its normative roots probably go back to the association between adult education and moral rescue. Adult education has often reflected a *social conscience* approach (Williams, 1983) with a missionary purpose to ‘remedy the supposed deficiencies of people. This rescue motive

unquestioningly assumes education to be a good thing which can equip people with knowledge, skills and can also be character building.

Because of its normative foundation, much of the research on participation is concerned with endlessly identifying and explaining significant differences in patterns of participation between different social groups of adult returners (see Munn and McDonald, 1988; Blair et al, 1995) and how participation can be furthered amongst those who do not participate. (Gooderham, 1993) But if participation is a good thing why do so few people recognise it as such? Is it because we know something they do not? Or do they know something we do not entertain?

Bown (1989), addressing the issue of motivating adult learners, suggests that involving more adults will require transforming the unwilling into the willing, and adds the important but unexplored caveat:

That of course requires us to be convinced that what we have to offer is really of some value to the currently unwilling, but I leave that uncomfortable thought for another day. (1989: 5)

One of the boundaries of the dominant discourse is revealed, but then avoided as an uncomfortable thought. Instead of questioning the professional wisdom about what educators offer, attention is directed towards how to motivate and induce more learners to participate in what is currently available. The problem to be confronted is the motivation of 'the other' (that is, the reticence of the unwilling) rather than the professional wisdom. Not surprisingly, as lifelong learning has moved to the centre of government policy the normative claim that education is a 'good thing', which research and policy should further, is becoming more deeply entrenched. Recent policy initiatives aimed at widening participation and creating a learning society (see Kennedy, 1997) start from this assumption and, in the government's major policy statement, the *Learning Age*, it has become an imperative that 'everyone must constantly acquire new skills and knowledge' (Field, 1999: 11).

Tony Blair's announcement that 'education is the best economic policy we have', points to the type of educational purpose which has dominated the lifelong learning debate. Education is good for the economy. This way of thinking about education assumes as self evident an instrumental rationality which involves, as Sanderson notes, 'the extension of the imperatives of the market economy and the bureaucratic state over more areas of social life, money and power become the key media of social co-ordination' (1999: 328).

Moreover, Coffield (1999) argues, drawing on an extensive series of learning projects funded by the *ESRC* Learning Society Programme, that the hegemony of a partial and distorted version of 'human capital theory' remains unchallenged:

The language of one research area within economics has hijacked the public debate and the discourse of professionals so that education is no longer viewed as a means of individual and social emancipation, but as either 'investment' or 'consumption', as having 'inputs' and 'outputs', 'stocks' which 'depreciate' as well as 'appreciate', and it is measured by 'rates of return', an approach which produces offensive jargon such as 'overeducated graduates' and 'monopoly producers'. The discourse which has been sidelined as a result and which must now be brought centre stage is the discourse of social justice and social cohesion. (Coffield, 1999: 485)

The type of pedagogy that flows from human capital theory, Baptiste (2001: 198) argues, is 'apolitical, adaptive, and individualistic'. No doubt there are connections to be made between education and the state of the economy.

However, it seems very misleading to link education as a key factor in economic competitiveness. We have to ask, are there better ways of understanding the well being of the economy? What about investment, for example? What about industrial strategy? What about the potential divergence of interests between different sectors of the economy e.g. finance capital and industrial capital? What about the role of multinationals? What about the decisions of World Trade Organisations? These all seem important areas where decisions are taken that have a major impact on the economy. Why is it, therefore, that those with the least influence now have to shoulder the responsibility for the state of the economy?

We might also want to note some more negative associations that may emerge because of this link between education and the economy. Has it led to an increased demand for qualifications from employers which bear little relation to the real requirements for work? Rather than being an undereducated labour force have we become an overqualified one? Are we becoming obsessed with certificates rather than the education that lies behind them? Moreover, what are the implications for those who may not be in the labour market - what value do we place on them?

The perspective taken here, is that we have to situate and problematise the

normative assumptions about education in relation to social and political purposes. We need to remind ourselves, or to restate, that education is an 'essentially contested concept' with legitimate alternative points of view about it (Gaillie, cited in Hartnet and Naish, 1976). The ubiquitous claim that education is a good thing may simply reflect the hegemony of a particular type of education and closure of debate about its purpose.

However, there are competing and conflicting ideologies about the purpose adult education serves. For example, Elsey (1987) identifies the following models of adult education: the recreational model which emphasises leisure and learning; the work training model with a primary commitment to economic purpose; a liberal progressive model with a reformist social purpose; a radical model which emphasises adult education and its purpose to further social change. The point is, before making normative and absolute claims about education as universally good we need first to question the purpose it claims to serve and who benefits from it.

### **Rule two: participation in adult education is voluntary**

Good myths always have some foundation. One of the fundamental distinctions between adult education and the education of children is that the former is voluntarily undertaken whereas schooling is compulsory. Yes, adults do

undertake courses of study which are freely entered into. However, is the voluntary label also covering, indeed disguising, a more complex reality? On the one hand, Tough's (1983) research points to a large area of voluntary learning people undertake which is seldom recognised and, on the other, there is a growing coercive expectation and demand that adults should participate in specific areas of learning which make its claim to be a voluntary activity more contentious.

At the heart of the *Learning Age*, the government's policy on lifelong learning, is the aim to create a learning culture. What if this culture is not shared? Who defines learning? What if the unwilling continue to be stubborn? Perhaps the trend in the policy discourse is not hard to discern.

In the current climate, with the emphasis on human resource development (see chapter seven), the voluntary nature of adult education is being stretched to its limit. In the area of adult literacy, for example, the government's latest drive for improved standards is backed up by a 'carrots and sticks' approach. Adults with low skills are viewed as being poorly motivated and failing to address their learning needs. Training allowances for job seekers, prisoner parole schemes, the military and public sector workers are all identified as areas where more inducements and coercive expectations (e.g. cutting allowances for trainees) are

to be introduced to motivate adults and induce them to undertake courses of learning (see Blunket, *Skills for Life*, speaking on World Book Day, March 2001). Also, as Field points out:

For the sake of argument, let us leave aside programmes for the unemployed such as New Deal, where the coercion is obvious. Without anyone much noticing, a great deal of professional development and skills updating is carried out not because anyone wants to learn or is ready to learn, but because they are required to learn. (Field, 1999: 11)

The voluntary myth serves to idealise and simplify a more complex reality. It perpetuates the claim that participation in adult education is a good thing which is freely subscribed to whilst it obscures how power and authority also interact in more coercive ways with, and influences, the choices people feel they have to make.

Stalker (1993) argues that there are adults who view their participation as being 'self determined' in the sense that it is a matter of their own will and effort. There are some who view it as 'other determined' in terms of being dependant on the decisions made by more powerful individuals or groups. Yet in her

research, she also found that people's capacity for 'self determination' often depended on the extent to which they could influence powerful others into facilitating some choices over others. The gap between learning opportunities which were 'self determined' and 'other determined' was often closer than it might seem. On the one hand, to be offered learning opportunities could be seen as a privilege, as a favour bestowed by those in authority and, on the other, as an 'inescapable activity' undertaken because more powerful individuals or groups expect it to happen. Lifelong learning may, for some, be an unwelcome sentence!

### **Rule three: participation equals learning in institutional provision**

As the quote from Williams at the beginning of this chapter reminds us, participation in the heartlands of learning is also initiation into particular selections of knowledge and understanding.

The meaning of participation is generally framed in terms of adults taking part in a course of study or a specific organised learning activity. More often than not, these are accredited, certificated, endorsed and provided according (increasingly) to market determined criteria. The 'problem of participation' is then posed in terms of 'solutions' which facilitate greater access to those learning opportunities which have been made available. However, the issue is more

complicated than that of simply extending access to under-represented groups. It involves issues of cultural power and communication and not simply the extension of a highly particular and selective view of what constitutes learning.

Educational institutions possess a monopoly on defining what is significant learning. It is participation in the courses of study, subjects and forms of knowledge deemed legitimate by these institutions which is regarded as valuable. Therefore, low take-up of programmes of learning that institutions define as significant is then projected as a problem of 'the other' i.e. people with low levels of learning or low levels of motivation to learn. In this process, however, the role of power in the formation of the curriculum is not made transparent. As Young suggests, '...education is not a product like cars or bread, but a selection and organisation from the available knowledge at a particular time which involves conscious or unconscious choices' (1971: 24). If we start from what people decide to learn, rather than what is assumed is significant, a very different picture emerges. This seems to have been the case in Tight's study (1998) which took a broad and non-institutional view of learning. As he remarked, it became very difficult to find someone who had not been actively learning!

The important point is that, inscribed in the discourse is both a reaffirmation of

the meaning of participation and a reinforcement of a particular and selective definition of what is educationally relevant. Significant learning is, therefore, constructed in terms of a controlled space, time and learning opportunities which are regulated by educational institutions. What people return to, is a particular form of institutionalised education and the role of a professional class of educators who service it. Foley (1994) ironically comments that, so intent have we been on constructing education that we often fail to see learning.

Raymond Williams makes the important point that education involves a selective tradition, which systematically excludes the ideas, beliefs, values and social practices of a large section of the population from wider circulation as valid and worthy. Hence he suggests:

one is bound to be shocked by any society which, in its most explicit culture, either suppresses the meanings and values of whole groups, or which fails to extend to these groups the possibility of articulating and communicating those meanings. (Williams, 1961: 168)

The issue Williams addresses is *not* that of expanding participation into a system which remains unchanged, but the ability of educational institutions to

be open to counter-discourses outwith their control and possible expertise. Because this does not occur, the common culture of ordinary people is delegitimated by an educational system which denies access to the full range of meanings people in society might value and recognise. Is it surprising, therefore, that many adults think that 'education is for other people'? Of course, all curricula are inevitably socially constructed but the question is one about the basis of this selection and whose interests, concerns and values are legitimated and included and whose are delegitimated or excluded - it is in this process that a monopoly of relevant knowledges are constructed. This is a 'political' rather than simply a technical accomplishment. Invariably, as Jane Thompson (1997: 132) remarks, it privileges a 'highly particular (i.e. dead, white, male, middle class and European) selection of knowledge and culture confirmed as truth'.

In the social purpose tradition, the distinction between 'useful' and 'really useful knowledge' highlighted the importance of who controlled the definitions of knowledge and the purposes it serves. What needs to be addressed, therefore, is the openness of educational institutions to discourses of knowledge outwith vocational specialisms, traditionally defined subject areas and professional expertise. The power to differentiate 'useful' from 'really useful knowledge' divorces learning from social action and marginalises critical knowledges concerned with acting to change society. Whilst universities have harboured

enclaves where dissident knowledges have been allowed to lie fallow, the role of university education as E.P. Thompson notes, has been generally ‘...so saturated with class responses that it demanded an active rejection and desposal of the language, customs, and traditions of received popular culture’ (Thompson, 1968a: 14). The possibility that popular struggles are a resource for ‘really useful knowledge’ is given little credence by an institutionally dominated view of learning.

However, it might be objected that the above argument on the tendency to institutional monopoly is contradicted by developments in experiential learning, the growth of new educational technologies, distance learning and procedures such as the accreditation of prior learning. Are these not examples of a more democratic, pluralistic, learning process which both facilitates access and disperses control over the curriculum?

The growth in distance learning and new technologies (for example, email, video conferencing etc) which break down the requirements of traditional modes of study have to be seen in a market context of educational institutions reaching new ‘customers’. Whilst these trends have opened up a form of participation in educational provision (self-study and independent learning replacing modes of interactive and collective learning) the logic of their development has more to do

with reaffirming, rather than undermining, the dominant assumptions about who controls definitions of educationally relevant knowledge. Some of these pedagogies, such as distance learning, can mean that the learning process is less open to the influence of more autonomous teachers or the collective body of students. A similar point has been made by Westwood (1980) about the Open University, a development which she claims illustrates the process of knowledge being commodified and the centripetal impact of such changes on teaching and the process of learning. Whilst undoubtedly facilitating access, these trends do not fundamentally alter the epistemological politics of the educational encounter. It could also be claimed they have a downside by permitting such institutions to impregnate their values and expectations into new private domains. By implication, the educative potential of 'other' spaces in public and private life are obscured. The logic of this process is that institutional borders are being redrawn rather than withdrawn.

On the surface, the growth of interest in learning from experience seems to open up greater recognition of a diversity of learning that results from a variety of life activities. However, the reality is less clear cut. The mushrooming of interest in accrediting learning from prior experience is a double-edged sword. It is useful to make the distinction between the accreditation of prior learning (APL), derived from previously assessed and codified activities, and those gained by accrediting

prior experience of learning (APEL). The first simply involves creating a market system of credits which enables individuals to 'cash in' on the learning already recognised by one institution, or competencies demanded by industries or professions, into access or advanced standing in an alternative (or indeed the same) institution. It enables people to move their resources as students to the provider that they perceive as best servicing their interests.

APEL is, potentially, more open in that it involves the possibility for transferable learning from a broad range of life activities to other contexts. However, as Fraser (1995) points out, identifying a range of transferable skills is not the same as a learning process which entails a critical analysis of 'who and why we are' and the constraints that help shape our experiences and understandings. Whilst APEL would appear to free up what and where learning occurs, it does so in a way that still effectively controls what is to be selected, valued and what is to be rejected. In other words, the logic of the process of accrediting prior experience can tend to exclude, Fraser argues, education for critical intelligence.

Edwards (1994) makes the point that, the growth of interest in experiential learning during the ascendancy of the new right in the 1980s was part of a project aimed at undermining the professional autonomy of more 'progressive'

education/training professionals by centrally controlling the outcomes of learning. To summarise, rather than challenging what counts as significant learning some of the current trends in educational technologies and pedagogies are more indicative of how institutions are restructuring and reasserting their monopoly in a changing context.

#### **Rule four: learners are individuals**

A crude and unsustainable dichotomy between personal and collective development is fostered by the dominant discourse. It frames participation through the lens of a particular and limited concept of the individual which is not self-evident, is not substantiated theoretically and is ideologically biased towards a middle class system of values. By focussing on adults returning to learning situations, studies of participation reproduce and reinforce particular assumptions and understandings about the identity of learners. Fundamentally, this construction is portrayed as inherently unproblematic, apolitical and non-ideological. The individualising of the learner is reflected in, and reinforced by, the general pattern in education which is largely about selecting, categorising and differentiating people according to their supposed merits. But of course, constructing the learner as an individual is an active process which involves abstracting them from their concrete identities and contexts.

In presenting adult education as self-evidently about atomised individuals the hidden curriculum reinforces an unproblematical common sense which has political and ideological implications. As Keddie (1980) points out, conventional adult education stresses individuality and personal development, rather than collective values, and thereby reinforces a middle-class value system. Adult education is also socially mediated in that it can be seen by middle class groups as an appropriate way to spend leisure time and although the appeal to women is greater, the choices made often reaffirms a more restrictive and conventional range of roles rather than, for example, the role of women in public life. Whilst professing a student-centred curriculum, which might then be expected to produce diversity, the outcome is often very uniform and affirming of middle class rather than working class lifestyles and values. This itself may prove to be a sufficient deterrent to working class people. In short, Keddie argues, claims to student-centredness express an alternative mode of control which is related to the expectations of learners held by tutors.

Adult education 'theory' is also constructed out of a similar set of ideological assumptions which are reinforcing the professional ideology of adult education as learner-centred and focussed on the individual. This emphasis should be seen, in part, due to a reaction against the idea that learning should be determined by institutions and disciplines. In this respect, its greater openness and flexibility

has been an asset. It has legitimated the negotiation and construction of the curriculum in ways which reflect the interests and concerns of people - however, only as individuals. This construction has contradictory implications and is not ideologically innocent. In andragogical theory (see Knowles, 1983) the importance of self-directed learning is asserted; although the term may not be common to many adult and community educators in the UK the insistence on the individual nature of learning is more widespread. The claim of self-directed learning is that adults have to be in control of the learning process if the educational experience is to be meaningful and fulfilling. However, Collins (1991) takes a more critical view and suggests:

self-directed learning has emerged in the profession of adult education as an aspect of a constraining or disciplinary technology which forges, in the words of Michel Foucault, a 'docile body, that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved'. Learning experiences shaped by self directed learning methods are individualised in a way that ensures learners become wrapped up in their own *contracted* learning project and the mediated relationship moulded by the facilitator. (1991: 27)

Even if Collins may overstate the case, it is true that self-directed learning

reasserts an individualising pedagogy of adult education. What it evades is an analysis of the unequal relations between the needs individual learners subscribe to and those of more powerful educational institutions. Only by assuming that no conflict of interest will emerge can the fiction of the individual as self-directing be maintained. The technology of self-direction has little to say about the hegemonic forces which shape consciousness and the conditions in which 'self-direction' is genuinely possible. Neither has it anything to say about the importance of structural inequalities arising from class, race or gender and the role adult education may have in relation to the collective interests of such groups. For example, as Fraser (1995) notes, the learner in the andragogical model is highly gendered by being premised on a masculine model of what self-actualisation means. Self-direction for women then is doubly difficult: they have to confront a patriarchal order which also informs the model of what self-actualisation means. Presumably, the same argument can be made about the experience of black people, people with disabilities and so on.

In some instances policy targets 'groups' of learners, but it does so as an aggregation of individuals. It is not their collective interests or concerns that counts but their identity as (usually deficit) individuals with characteristics in common with others. For example, courses for the unemployed or for single parents, simply group together people with elements in common but largely in

pejorative and negative terms. For example, work with 'disadvantaged groups' and an ideology of 'needs meeting' pathologises the learner as deficient in knowledge and skills and in need of remedial intervention e.g. literacy. As Kirkwood (1990) points out, 'they' are the needy and are differentiated from 'we' the needs meeters. The outcome is that deficit groups are constructed as not fully sovereign individuals but, nevertheless, ones in need of a boost to achieve this status. This conceptualisation deflects attention away from the structural interests of such groups that are a product of wider inequalities and reinforces the assumption that 'third-rate' curricula are necessary and appropriate (Thompson, 1997). Participating in learning, it is assumed, has to be hidden behind a soft, friendly, happy experience to avoid difficulty and intellectual challenge. This is a process which can end up selling people short in terms of understanding the powerful forces that shape their lives.

Edwards argues that, 'in focussing our practices on the individual, we are reproducing the fragmentation of collective experience and social relations which is part of the wider, social, economic and political changes in our social formation' (1991: 93). He warns that the reframing of education around the needs of individuals is a political act; 'autonomy within inequality' is reproduced through an emphasis on the individual provided with a quasi market of choice and flexibility of provision. The apotheosis of this system is the

‘bespoke’ learning programme and the educational supermarket. However, educational markets, like all markets, are never neutral in their consequences in that they always reflect a particular set of values and beliefs which are embedded in their organisation.

The taken for granted view that adult education is about the individual ignores the contested nature of what it means. As Williams (1961) points out, the concept of the individual is complex and contradictory. Historically, the meaning of ‘individual’ was understood as ‘inseparable’ in terms of membership of a wider group. The identity of an individual was not, therefore, divorced from their common status with others. He remarks that, ‘the crucial history of the modern description is a change in emphasis which enabled us to think of ‘the individual’ as a kind of absolute, without immediate reference, by the very structure of the term, to the group of which he (sic) is a member’. (1961: 91)

The change of emphasis, that Williams notes above, can express an interest in liberation from the kind of society that regulates and controls people’s lives from above, or it can be seen in restrictive and limiting ways (see Eldridge and Eldridge, 1997). The possessive individualism that characterises the ideology of the New Right, for example, is one in which the individual is narrowly self-<sup>4</sup> interested and acting freely in terms defined mainly by their capacity to acquire

goods. This characterisation of the individual reinforces the view that the state's role is largely in terms of supporting markets and orderly relations of exchange. The role of adult learning, from this perspective, would presumably be in developing and refining an individual's market power.

An alternative way of seeing the individual, from an ideological left position, is offered by Miliband (1994). 'Socialised individualism' in his account captures the sense in which expressions of individuality are tempered by concerns for the common good or, indeed, where individuality is both a function and outcome of social interaction. The 'socialised individual', a person with a wider conscience, prepared to act to achieve common goals beyond his or her own immediate interests, points towards a view of the individual actively involved in the sphere of civil society, practising obligations and asserting rights along with others. In this view, individual fulfilment is combined with the larger demands of solidarity and concern for the public good. Adult learning, for the socialised individual, would presumably involve engagement in forms of learning and action through participation in civic associations and organisations which education would foster. It is this view of the individual and their responsibilities to the wider community that informed the social purpose of adult education practice provided by the WEA (see Fieldhouse, 1977).

The discourse of participation seeks to affirm a particular, limited and unsustainable conception of the individual. It constructs education as an activity driven by individual goals and purposes, rather than a collective project in which 'socialised individuals' learn and act together. The possibility that adults are (potential) learners with collective interests is obscured by the discourse. Historically, the type of concern for democracy and active citizenship which was the 'lodestone' for adult education practice (see Merrifield, 1997), and which has been discussed in chapter two, is therefore ignored in the way the individual is framed in relation to participation.

**Rule five: there are barriers to participation, not resistance**

Perhaps rather than set out to attract the non-participant we should engage with the non-participant. Perhaps we, the educators, are the non-participants in the worlds of many of our fellow country men and women. (Patrick, 1989: 15)

Associating participation with the moral high ground (see rule one and two) has negative implications for how non-participants are viewed. Implicitly or explicitly, they are often denigrated in the literature as holding 'negative attitudes to learning' and therefore in need of rescue. Moreover, negative attitudes to learning are, by implication, adverse attitudes to what is morally a

better way to spend one's time. At best, non-participants may see learning in purely instrumental terms; at worst, they 'possess attitudes which cluster around money, basic needs gratifications, sheer habits, stimulus binding, neurotic needs, convention and...inertia and...doing what other people expect and demand'. (Boshier quoted in Ziegahn, 1992: 31)

There are competing accounts which explain why some groups participate and other do not. The 'motivation-barriers' approach has highlighted hurdles which are situational (such as child care), institutional (for example, enrolment procedures) or dispositional (for example, attitudes and expectations). This last hurdle may amount to a 'blaming-the-victim' in terms of perceived hostility to education: non-participants are identified as 'lacking motivation or are indifferent to learning'; 'question the relevance of educational opportunities'; hold 'negative perceptions of education' and have 'individual, family or home problems', and so on (for example, see Valentine and Darkenwald, 1990: 31).

Some of the justifications given for not participating in adult education do not always seem to add up: people say they do not know what is available, however, there is little evidence to suggest knowing what is on offer makes a difference. Lack of time is most often cited, yet people with more free time are the least likely to participate. The cost of provision is another barrier, yet again

when asked, respondents have little idea about the actual costs involved. (Tett, 1993) Perhaps we need to ask ourselves if we have been asking the right questions. Instead of assuming that barriers can be overcome and motivation to participate can be enhanced by more detailed accounts, might it be more useful to think of non-participation as an active form of resistance to mainstream educational values?

The dominant discourse has difficulty in conceptualising non-participation as a form of resistance. If education is a good thing, why should it be resisted? What does it imply about the non-participant? What seems to be ruled out is the idea of non-participation as an active, informed and rational process. If non-participants' experiences of education have not been particularly good - which the evidence would imply - then why should they think it will be different second time round? Might their refusal to participate be well informed by their previous experience? As Giroux points out:

Resistance...redefines the causes and meanings of oppositional behaviour by arguing that it has little to do with deviance and learned helplessness, but a great deal to do with moral and political indignation. (cited in Quigley, 1992: 45).

People may want to resist for good reasons. Clegg (1989) distinguishes between two forms of resistance, one that attempts to create a new base of power and, two, resistance which involves a struggle to escape from power. The former involves overt conflicts with existing power holders. The latter form of resistance is 'frictional' and does not necessarily involve overt, intended or direct conflict with power. It may be in these terms that we can locate non-participation in adult education as a 'culture of resistance'. If so, what is potentially illuminating is the ethnographic work done in secondary education by writers such as Willis (1977) and Hargreaves (1982). They argue that the oppositional behaviour of certain groups of school pupils can be understood as a very rational, even if unsuccessful, response to the 'hidden curriculum' and the experience of boredom and the indignities of schooling. If this applies to school, why not to adult education ?

There is a strong case for arguing that in its essential characteristics adult education is similar to other aspects of the educational system. Typically for working class students the system constructs a sense of their inadequacy and failure; the middle-class bias of adult education reinforces the hegemony of the current order (see Westwood 1980). This line of argument is developed in Quigley's (1992) account of non-participation as a form of resistance to the practice of adult literacy. He draws the distinction between the 'habitat of

objectified lessons and the habitus of values and culture' in which education is provided. Whereas the 'habitat' of objectified learning may be acceptable to the resister if perceived as relevant, the 'habitus' of education - the culture and values it embodies - are rejected. In other words, resistance is a matter of choice made by the learner. What it also points towards is the importance of an approach which builds its curriculum from the lived experience of the learners - from their habitus. Historically, we have seen how this social dynamic played such an important part of motivating learning which, in the current context, gets lost from sight because of the way the discourse frames participation.

The claim of a parallel to cultures of resistance in schooling may be objected to on at least two accounts. First, adult educators might claim that the experience offered adults is very different from schooling. That is, participation in adult education is voluntary whereas schooling is compulsory. However, as I have already argued, this issue is not as clear cut as sometimes claimed in that power and authority all have a bearing on the choices made. Second, pedagogically (or andragogically), it is claimed that the process of learning in adult education is distinctive in that adult learning requires a very different process, one that is fundamentally shaped by the need for adults to be self-directing. However, this claim is also deeply problematic as argued in relation to rule four. \*

Redefining non-participation as a form of resistance may, however, open up the possibility of rethinking what adult education includes and excludes as legitimate sites and processes of learning. Perhaps we need to move towards the 'habitat and habitus' where people come together and create their own structures, define their own interests, and pursue what is valuable to them. If we start to think about participation in these terms then the problem could be looked at from a different perspective - that is, that adult education is part of the problem rather than simply the solution in terms of developing adult learning. Understanding participation in this way turns things on their head. That is the purpose of this chapter, to substantiate the need for a different hypothesis about the relation between participation and adult education.

## **Discussion**

Rather than simply assume that the bandwagon of increasing participation is unproblematic the aim has been to question many of its central assumptions. The rules of the dominant discourse perpetuate an understanding of participation which is narrow in its purpose, ideologically conservative and restrictive in its definition of what constitutes learning.

The terms in which the dominant discourse of participation is framed systematically reinforces one particular view about the relationship between life

and learning. It is one in which learning is professionally and institutionally regulated and, consequently, defined largely in terms which tend to reinforce patterns of inequality rather than challenge them. This seems to be exactly what studies of participation implicitly reveal; wider patterns of inequality are mirrored in, and reinforced by, adult education. We can busy ourselves with attempts to improve access into the system, but in doing this we should not lose sight of the bigger picture to be addressed. It is the power to determine what constitutes learning, who it involves and where it occurs which needs opening up if a wider approach to learning and life is to flourish.

As Benn argues 'if learning is seen as a function of social relationships rather than as an essentially individual activity, then the concept of lifelong learning is extended beyond solely the acquisition by individuals of formal qualifications. Learning then ties in with a set of other relationships within organisations, families, communities and the economic sector' (1997: 31). This perspective breaks with a narrow view of education which defines the relationship between learning and life largely in instrumental and vocational terms. It therefore widens our perception about learning and what might constitute 'participation'. Also, it locates the 'learner' in a social context rather than as a isolated individual. This involves a shift of register to the collective and educational purposes which are linked to the nature and purposes of social relationships. Moreover, social

relationships are embedded and constituted in wider structures of inequality - for example, of social class, of 'race', of gender and so on - which come together in distinctive ways and benefit particular interests.

In the current context, education as a function of social relationships should include the role of movements and popular struggles as forces for learning and change. Making this connection can draw on the experience and insights outlined in chapter two on adult learning in history. Historically, the social purpose and radical traditions were heavily influenced by the labour and women's movements in which politics and pedagogy were fused. The purposes of education were wide but also connected to a moral and ultimately political discourse of values and beliefs. By building the curriculum from the aspirations of movements for change a broad and proper relationship between learning and life is made. Tawney captures the terms of this relationship eloquently:

If I were asked what is the creative force which has carried forward educational movements, I should reply: the rise of new classes, of new forms of social structure, of new cultural and economic relationships. All these movements have regarded education not simply as an interest or an ornament. They have regarded it as a dynamic, and there is

nothing at all surprising or regrettable in that. Knowledge has been sought in fact to meet a need. That need has sometimes been intellectual, it has been sometimes religious, it has been social, it has been technical, but the process by which it is satisfied is as much educational in the latter case as it is in the first. (cited in Jackson, 1995: 183)

The social purpose and radical traditions attempted to connect adult education with the interests and concerns of ordinary people. The priority given to the sphere of production however, and the knowledge deemed necessary for it, reduced its appeal to a narrow constituency of workers and activists, rather than a broad cross section of working people. In contrast, the rise of new social movements create the possibility of linking learning and life to popular struggles rooted in the material experiences of exploitation and social forces of oppression.

Systematically ruled out in the rules of the dominant discourse is an understanding of participation which draws on the type of 'lived experience' reflected in movements for social change. However, in a context where there is potential for greater participation in social and civic politics, as evidenced by the

growth of social movements, reconnecting with radical ideas about learning in struggle can lead to rethinking the ‘problem of participation’ and its implications today (see chapter five). In understanding how our thinking about participation excludes and limits what is known the ‘regime of truth’ which it supports can be subverted, or at least, challenged.

## **Conclusion**

The repeated way participation is addressed in policy reinforces a professional self-justification and consequently a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the problem of participation is always located in ‘the other’. In this sense, it pathologises the ‘victims’ of the discourse as the ‘problems’ which the system has to somehow manage and incorporate. Questions of *why* people should participate are substituted by technical considerations of *how* it can be furthered.

Instead of demonising ‘the other’ we might, instead, want to question the ‘limited ability of formal providers of adult education and training to engage with the interests and enthusiasms of the adult population across a range of ‘difference’” (Forrester and Payne, 2000: 101) One of these differences it has so clearly found hard to meet is that posed by the interests of groups and collectivities in struggle. Adult education has treated participation ‘as if’ it could

be divorced from a more contentious discourse about 'the politics of participation' (Croft and Beresford, 1992 ). In doing this, it closes down alternative ways of thinking about and developing education through a more participatory and active politics. This reveals the extent to which more fundamental questions about the contribution adult education can make to the lives of people is closed. Yet, as Courtney (1981: 107) rightly points out, 'the notion of participation then is not to be confined to the area of education but must be seen against a broader, and more significant, matrix which we might call "societal participation"'. However, few studies seem to have taken this advice. Deconstructing the discourse of participation in adult education can open this debate up.

As Benn (1997) notes, what has been missing from the debate is the '...under researched issue of the relationship between education and social activity'. To take this view can involve focussing on the educative nature of social activity in order to develop ways it can be systematised. In the radical tradition, participation in civic organisations and activity were the focus for educational engagement. By shifting our attention to a more politicised experience of participation the relationship between it and the radical tradition of adult education becomes visible - a tradition in which the educative experience of 'groups in struggle creates a context and pedagogy for sustained and significant

learning efforts, which is the hypothesis of this account.

In short, the discourse of participation is narrowly conceived. It is cut off from the rich history of social purpose adult education and the educative role of collectivities in struggle. This weakens our current understanding of the possibilities for educational practice. Instead, we continue to plough the same old furrows which, increasingly, shed little more light on the subject and the result is a discourse of diminishing returns.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The shift to cultural politics**

#### **Introduction**

I pondered how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and others have to fight for what they meant under another name.

(William Morris, cited in Thompson, 1955: 495)

The argument so far has been concerned with understanding the broad relationship between learning and life, popular struggles, education and how the preoccupation with professionalised concerns about participation results in diminishing returns. In the current context, however, it could be argued that the radical and social purpose traditions are no longer important or, indeed, are a hindrance because of some fundamental changes in the nature of society and our understanding of it. The politics of socialism and the radical educational projects associated with it are on the decline. In this new climate what type of theoretical analysis can help make sense of society and what, if anything, does

it imply for radical education?

The purpose of this chapter is to address some of the theoretical debates associated with modernism (from a Marxist analysis) and postmodernism. It does this by tracing through the changing relationship between the structural and reductionist politics of the old (Marxist) left and the cultural politics of the new left (referred to subsequently as the first new left). The first new left was concerned with repositioning the former, rather than with its rejection, and its intellectual analysis can still provide a useful way of locating and responding to more recent debates associated with New Times and postmodernist ideas. Because the formation of the first new left was preoccupied with some similar concerns about the politics of social change, they provide a lens in which to reposition these trends within the framework of socialist politics. The New Times debate has rekindled an interest in the cultural politics of social change, but in a way that often seems to ignore issues related to structural inequalities in society. The 'culturalist' trend of New Times has a parallel with issues which preoccupied the formation of popular adult education in the post-Second World War period. Although the first new left was also concerned with issues of identity, diversity and consumption, these were framed within a critical and creative Marxist discourse. (see Steele, 1997; Mulhern, 1996).

The first new left developed a move towards a broader, popular education, concerned with the relatively neglected realm of culture, community and consciousness. Yet the potential of this project of cultural politics was never fully realised. The social movements which might have helped to realise it did not mushroom until the late 1960s. By this time, 'Cultural Studies' was incorporated into the academy and lost its roots in social purpose adult education (Steele, 1997). The argument of this chapter is that an updated version of this project is still relevant to the development of adult learning and popular struggles today.

### **Repositioning the left: project and formation**

The degeneracy of Stalinist communism, the invasion of Hungary in 1956, the Suez crisis and the declining role of Britain in world politics, the Cold War and the growth of a popular and active peace movement, provided a backdrop to a wide range of contradictory processes which were shaping the need for a new political strategy for socialists after the Second World War. Disillusioned by communist and labourist politics a number of radical intellectuals, working in the marginal spaces of adult education, were building a distinct formation: 'those effective movements and tendencies, in intellectual and artistic life, which have significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development of a culture, and which have a variable and often oblique relation to formal

institutions.’ (Williams, 1977: 117) Moreover, this formation involved a political project which connected a democratic education with building a more open and egalitarian society.

The rise and fall of the first new left in Britain has been periodised between 1956 and 1962 (Kenny, 1995). Although the focus of the early founders differed in approach, political and ideological commitment, they agreed on the significance of cultural politics, the complexity of social consciousness and the need to problematise and interrogate symbolic values and the means of representation if socialism was to be viable. As Hall (cited in Steele, 1997) notes, at the centre of debates about how society was changing, were texts written by tutors in University adult education - Williams, Thompson and Hoggart, were among the intellectual founders of the first new left. Williams and Thompson - discussed below - were on its more radical, socialist wing, whereas Hoggart’s work reflected a more liberal, social democratic, perspective. As Kenny (1995) points out, the first new left was sensitive to the diverse interests of different constituencies and their mobilisation in civil society:

...it was the desire to engage and interpret, and ultimately to inflect, the cultural practices of the people which allowed this movement’s radical wing to recast the

socialist imagination in a more pluralistic vein and to present civil society as the natural habitat of left politics. (1995: 115)

### **The influence of Raymond Williams**

Raymond Williams, a key figure, was a committed socialist who wanted to avoid the economic reductionism of Marxist analysis and the managerial politics of social democracy. In his analysis community was a key resource. However, this is not to imply he was unaware of how the term could be used to disguise a range of different and conflicting ideological interests.

Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organisation it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term. (Williams, 1983: 76)

Despite its inherent ambiguities, Williams insists on the importance of community because it upholds a more complex and human set of values to

counter pose against capitalism and the market. Community involves a collective idea for a critique of the competitive individualism of capitalist society as well as the goal for a socialist project concerned with equality, diversity and democracy.

Williams interest in community is not romantic, nostalgic or backward looking. His recognition of the significance of *place* understands that there is an appeal and strength in the local and the familiar. The boundaries between communities and outsiders - the border country - led him to be suspicious of romanticism, in that communities can be constructed through exclusion (e.g. 'race', gender etc) as well as inclusion. Working class communities, as Hoggart's reflections on his own childhood emphasised, were based on a domestic division of labour which located women in the private sphere of the home and men in the public sphere of politics and trade unionism. The relational dimension of community has, therefore, to be sensitive to wider inequalities of power.

The importance of community, for Williams, is that it broadens the arena for political struggle into the sphere of consumption. It does not involve a rejection of class politics but is an attempt to widen it out to include issues of cultural practices, lifestyle, difference and consumption within a Marxist framework which recognises the importance of structural exploitation. The 'long

revolution' advocated by Williams has to entail a moral and political outlook that extends beyond the confines of the workplace, if it is ever to be truly popular and connected to the roots of people's lives. The plurality of lifestyles, rather than being surrendered as off limits for Marxism, is recaptured as an important stage for political struggle. Therefore, the potential for new collective sites of opposition and new agents of resistance to capitalism are increased.

Community, in Williams' analysis, involves membership, for individuals and groups, to a collective set of values which have to be formed and expressed through a democratic, participatory and egalitarian culture. It is through community, conceived as an intermediate level of reality, that more transparent, face-to-face relationships with others can be built and a sense of mutuality and social obligations developed. It is the basis for direct social relations between people, rather than - and in opposition to - market based ones. The 'logic of nomad capitalism', as Williams remarks, is simply to 'exploit places and people and then move on'. (1989)

The reassertion of community for socialist politics seeks to inform the purpose of liberation. He asks rhetorically 'how could it be that people should not want to live in real communities? Is it not so clearly a better way to live?' His affirmative response signifies both the importance of *place* and *social*

*relationships for participating* in the process of constructing a culture. The emphasis on the active, relational and value bases of community opens up potential sites of struggle in which more human ways of identifying need and interests can be undertaken, which takes into account *diversity* rather than ignoring it. As Mulhern (1984: 23) suggests, Williams connects community to 'the principle of maximum self-management'. That is, decision making powers should be exercised, as far as possible, by those directly affected, in their own enterprises and localities. The importance he attaches to community has to be understood in relation to his interest in achieving a democratic society. As Kenny (1995) points out, community is a metaphor for the organic solidarities of life challenged by capitalism and provides the basis for a more diverse and democratic communicative practice.

Recreating community on a wider level, as society, needs the provision of resources and abilities for a diversity of cultural and political perspectives. 'There were no masses', Williams argues, 'only ways of seeing people as masses' and that to go beyond this limitation requires an understanding of particularity and difference. The ideology of socialism, in this perspective, is the attempt to build out of the experiences and struggles of communities a bigger 'community' on a societal level which would respect the individual and provide a wider equality (Morgan, 1996). He believed that the renewal of socialism

required a greater understanding of varied and different needs if it was ever to be meaningful to people.

Williams distinguished three, interrelated elements of culture: culture as the high point of life as a kind of state of perfection; culture as artifacts such as books, films etc; culture in the anthropological sense, as a whole 'way of life' of specific groups. The interaction and contradictions of these three definitions of culture, in the context of an unequal society, is a major preoccupation in his life's work. His distinction between high culture and 'culture as ordinary' broadened and transformed the focus of cultural studies.

Working class culture had a specific focus:

... it is not proletarian art or council houses or a particular use of language; it is rather the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this. Bourgeois culture similarly is the basic individualist idea and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from it. (Williams, cited in McIlroy and Westwood, 1993: 303-4)

Unless this 'collective idea' was critically explored, validated and supported it was subject to colonisation by the basic 'individualist idea' of middle class culture. The cultural struggle over values was, from this perspective, politics by other means. Hence, Williams' concern with how meanings were produced, shifted attention from the arena of material production towards the communications industry and the politics of representation in literature, art, film, drama, television and everyday life.

The task of creating a genuine common culture is up against a dominant one which undermines the diversity of communal life: either reconstructing diversity and difference as alien, problematic and marginal or seeking to incorporate and contain it. Socialist politics has to stand against this. Williams argues for a recognition of diversity and difference in order to build a rich political culture, rather than a monolithic one. It is important to clarify his emphasis is on a *democratic* and *open* process and not a narrow, closed one. Williams' call to build a 'culture in common' draws attention to the systematic exclusions of 'ways of life' in opposition to the dominant one:

...the idea of a common culture is in no sense the idea of a simply consenting and certainly not of a merely conforming, society. One returns, once more, to the original emphasis of a

common determination of meanings by all the people, acting sometimes as individuals, sometimes as groups, in a process which has no particular end, and which can never be supposed at any time to have finally realised itself, to have become complete. In this common process, the only absolute will be the keeping of the channels and institutions of communication clear, so that all may contribute and be helped to contribute. (1989: 37)

Popular education has an important and unending role to play in this struggle against the forces marginalising the diversity of culture, experience and understanding in society. Keeping the channels of communication clear - the one *absolute* - involves acting back against the powerful forces which undermine the diversity and plural nature of 'real community'.

Williams (1977) argues that any cultural formation can be divided into either dominant, residual or emergent forces. He is interested in the variations between the three and how the dominant culture manages to incorporate residual and emergent cultural forces which are genuinely oppositional. The residual is formed in the past but can still be an effective element of the present by reinforcing existing patterns of relationships. Emergent refers to the coming into

being of new meanings and values, new practices and new relationships which may challenge the existing order.

Distinguishing between phases of the dominant culture and emergent elements which are substantively alternative or oppositional, rather than merely new, is by no means straightforward. Change can be a key element in the process of continuity. In making the distinction between 'alternative' and 'oppositional', Williams suggests the former can be more easily incorporated. For example, some of the new lifestyle movements are clearly alternative to the dominant culture and reject many of its practices and forms of relationship. However, whether they threaten a new social order is more problematic (Finger, 1989). The important point is whether their opposition can be accommodated without major concessions being made by the dominant culture. In Williams' perspective, the 'old' movement of labour is still emergent and oppositional in that it embodies collective principles which implicitly threaten the basis of the status quo, despite the fact that in practice it exhibits more tendencies towards accommodation with the dominant culture.

Instead of contributing to a common culture, education is frequently a key force in the process of maintaining a dominant one through a 'selective tradition': By tradition he does not mean the inert rituals of an outmoded culture. It is

something more purposeful and active. For Williams, tradition is a practical and powerful means of incorporation which is selective; an intentional reshaping of the past for the present through ritual, habit and repetition, which embeds a particular cultural outlook as normal and self-evident. In terms of educational work, the focus on cultural analysis draws attention to the construction of the curriculum and the role of knowledge in legitimating and delegitimizing perspectives and experiences.

The practice of educational institutions are, however, more complex than simply socialising people into agreed understandings and meanings, in that there are also spaces and contradictions for conflicts to emerge. There is always the potential for resistance, that is, bringing back that which has been excluded, diluted and misrepresented by the selective tradition. 'Invisible' lives, subordinate knowledges, the experiences of marginal, powerless and exploited groups can become an integral part of the educational process. The creation of a democratic culture, through the construction of shared meanings, is absolutely fundamental to his perspective and the creation of a common political culture. Without building a genuinely open culture how will it be impossible to construct a common political one? How can vested interests and privilege ever be seriously transformed otherwise? The emphasis on democratic participation in Williams' work is central to building what is common, and what is different,

and where to draw the line between the two - a business which could never be finished.

### **E.P. Thompson: struggle and cultural politics**

The emphasis on a democratic culture and a communal politics was located within a critical and creative Marxist discourse which did not abandon the importance of understanding the material basis of class inequality. Building a democratic community had to confront structural sources of power in opposition to it. In contrast to Williams' stress on culture as 'a whole way of life', E. P. Thompson emphasised culture 'as a whole way of *struggle*' (Turner: 1990: 63).

In his major work on the formation of the working class, Thompson defines class in terms of a social relationship which has to be examined in real historical and social contexts (1968b). These contexts are formed by the agency of individuals and groups, of one class, in struggle with another. Class consciousness, the mediation of social class in cultural terms, has to be understood in relation to the values, ideas, traditions and institutional structures which are created through the struggles between classes. Because Thompson attaches importance to agency and class struggle, the role of education - its ability to help or hinder these processes - is very significant. Another key

contribution of Thompson's during this period was the excavating of the moral and utopian dimension of struggle to build a new society. His opus on William Morris (Thompson, 1955) was an attempt to reinvigorate the Marxist tradition by injecting it with a moral and romantic critique. Thompson's remark, that it was not what Morris could learn from Marxism that was important, but what Marxism could learn from Morris, is a telling one. The subjective, cultural and moral dimension of consciousness is argued by Thompson against the dominant and economistic reductionism of Marxist orthodoxy (see his defence of Cauldwell, 1994).

For Thompson, experience is a central but neglected category of Marxist analysis. In the orthodox Marxist schema, the engine of change was located in the contradictions of the 'base'; when it moved, the 'superstructure' more or less followed suit. This squeezed out room for moral, active and creative human agency to influence society and for the working class to have a hand in making themselves. Drawing on Marx's epigram, that 'social being determines consciousness', he argues that this involves a dialectic of lived experience: 'experience walks in in without knocking at the door, and announces deaths, crises of subsistence, trench warfare, unemployment, inflation, genocide. People starve: their survivors think in new ways about the market. People are imprisoned: in prison they meditate in new ways about the law.' (Thompson:

1978: 201) From this perspective, experience can give rise to another type of neglected knowledge-production outside of the walls of the academy.

In the 'dialogue between social being and social consciousness' ideas and understandings are 'tested':

Experience arises spontaneously within social being, but it does not arrive without thought; it arises because men and women .... are rational, and they think about what is happening to themselves and their world. (E.P.Thompson, 1978: 200)

Adult education, for Thompson, is a potential resource for progressive social change. The project of cultural politics - carried through in subjects like English literature and social history - is a means of critically interrogating the experiences of life. In his teaching, the clash of argument has the purpose of developing a popular, critical consciousness. He defined his own purpose in terms of 'making revolutionaries', but this was not to be restricted to an intellectual vanguard of the working class (Searby, Malcolmson and Rule, 1993). His interest in a democratic culture and society, is expressed in a concern to bring together both intellectual rigour and life itself. A creative dialectic between

education and experience is necessary to avoid both anti-intellectualism and arid intellectualism. Thompson's famous remark in the *Making of the English Working Class* (a book that came out of his work with WEA students in West Yorkshire), that he was seeking to rescue 'the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the obsolete hand-loom weaver, the utopian artisan .....from the infinite condescension of posterity' (E.P. Thompson, 1968: 13), provided an inspiration and approach which encouraged others to discover the 'hidden histories' of oppressed groups and peoples.

### **Discussion**

In deterministic versions of Marxism the role of education as a force for progressive change is relatively insignificant. The turn towards cultural struggle, however, reasserts the dialectic between 'social being and consciousness'. Material conditions may set limits within which action occurs, but these can be altered in the process of struggle. From this perspective, popular education as a part of cultural struggle can contribute towards both the shaping of consciousness and the ability of people to change their circumstances. It is a space where people participate, act and learn and involves a more dynamic and inclusive form of adult education attuned to popular experience.

The main concern of the first new left was to begin unlocking working class

experience and resistance to the dominant order in a new way, other than at the point of production. The focus of this project was in developing communities of resistance, which included building solidarity across differences, in order to challenge power and vested interests. It was undeniably modernist, however, it does not fit well with postmodernist accounts which assume that an interest in difference and diversity is an anathema to socialist politics.

The importance of plurality in social life and the need to strive for a better society based on collective human goals and aspirations was an important aspiration of the first new left's politics. Cultural politics which recognise difference and material exploitation have to be brought together in order to deal with the real difficulty of building a common political culture. To achieve some form of genuine community, the forces which undermine a democratic culture and a political democracy have to be resisted. This aim, however, is framed in terms which do not abandon an interest in universal themes of social justice and equality.

It is true to say that the early founders of the first new left had little to say directly about gender, 'race', or sexuality - themes which feminist analysis, post colonialist studies and a postmodernist agenda have brought to the fore (see Dworkin and Roman, 1993). It would be throwing 'the baby out with the bath

water', however, to ignore its understanding of the politics of communities and a politics of class because of its failure to address issues which were more prevalent later. The first new left, as other political formations during this period, did not address these issues directly. Kenny offers the assessment in relation to gender that, '...a simple condemnation of its sexual politics obscures the involvement in this movement of a number of women who came to the fore in the women's movement of the 1970s, as well as the political and conceptual resources it bequeathed for these radicals' (1995: 48).

It is also true that the emphasis on place, in Williams' view of community, is inadequate in the current context. The importance of place should not be undervalued, particularly in more traditional settings. However, there are clearly well established shared interest groups, such as faith communities, which transcend a specific time and place. The growth of 'virtual communities' (discussed in chapter five) is another important trend which reduces the importance of face-to-face interaction, and location in time and place, as significant influences for the construction of shared meanings and collective identity.

Despite the above points, the concerns of the pioneers of the first new left are still a useful intellectual, moral and political resource in the current context.

They can help us relate popular education to the cultural roots which sustain it - and which it, in turn, can help to nurture in a process which is part of a wider project of social change. However, the formation of the first new left came increasingly under attack from a 'second' new left with a political project which was opposed to a socialist politics and concerns with issues of structural inequality. The rediscovery of cultural politics in this perspective is frequently cited in opposition to, rather than in conjunction with, the politics of class.

### **New times**

The 'New Times' argument is that the world has changed, not just incrementally but qualitatively, that Britain and other advanced capitalist societies are increasingly characterised by diversity, differentiation and fragmentation, rather than homogeneity, standardisation and the economies and organisation of scale which characterised modern mass society. (Hall and Jacques, 1990: 11)

New Times emerged in the late 1980s as part of an ideological repositioning of the left which sought popularity after the electoral successes of Thatcherism. Its main support was associated with the journal *Marxism Today*. New Times referred, inter alia, to changing aspects of production, a changing social structure

and the rise of new social forces as agents for change.

The meaning of New Times is by no means straightforward or uncontested. It points, however, to a new interpretation of social, economic, political and cultural changes which are underway. It is associated with the idea of a fundamental shift towards a post-industrial society and 'post-Fordism'. The former suggested the break-up of a traditional division of labour on social class lines and industrial class conflict. Post-Fordism refers to the replacement of mass production organised on assembly lines in capital intensive industries with decentralised methods of production and control. The emphasis on 'flexible specialisation' accompanies the idea of changing patterns of production and consumption. Along with the decline of mass manufacturing industries there has been a growth in service industries and self-employment. In this vision, class struggle has been replaced by new struggles associated with new production regimes and the emergence of new social movements.

New Times is also indicative of an ascending intellectual discourse of postmodernism and its emphasis on the particular rather than the universal, local rather than grand narratives, difference and diversity, rather than commonalities and structural analysis. Modernist discourses, such as Marxism, are claimed to overemphasise homogeneity and deny the plurality of social and

cultural life. From a postmodernist perspective, the self is understood to be fragmented, partial and changing and the role of work for making identities is de-emphasised. More weight is given to the role of consumption and reproduction in constructing a kaleidoscope of identities which are multiple rather than singular. 'New Times', as Hall argues are "both 'out there', changing our conditions of life, and 'in here' working on us" (1990: 120). The processes by which subject positions are made and remade is given precedence over 'impersonal structures' which work in the background.

Identity politics, inspired by the women's movement, draws attention to enduring experiences of discrimination and oppression that exist alongside, or override, the class struggle. Class politics has been inscribed with a patriarchal and 'racialist' oppression rooted in the wider social structure. However, as Segal (1991) points out, social identities are not political identities and some of the differences which dramatically divide women emanate from a female identity, such as abortion. She goes on to argue that the position of women in the United States has deteriorated because of increasing poverty and that this decline has not been due to the weakness of the feminist movement, rather the inability of the labour movement to defend living standards.

The impact of New Times on education at the workplace is clearly an

important issue in this new context. The post-Fordist emphasis on new working methods, new technologies, reskilling, 'flexibility', core-peripheral work forces, all have important implications for working practices, unions and the role of education and training. The rise of new communities of struggle around single issue politics is also widening the process and constituencies of politics. However, some postmodernist discourses reject the grand narratives of modernism, a politics of class, and the social purpose associated with radical adult education.

### **Postmodernism and radical adult education**

Postmodernism defies simple classification in that it has to be understood as a plural rather than a singular set of ideas and understandings, covering the arts, philosophy, science and other areas of inquiry as well as education. As Elliot (1995: 4) claims, 'different postmodernist writers are not just advancing different particular views within a clearly demarcated category of the postmodern; in some cases they are advancing radically different views about what postmodernism is, and about whether inquiry is even possible'. Moreover, some thinkers associated with postmodernism, such as Foucault, rejected this categorisation of their work and may be more appropriately linked with poststructuralism (see Barr, 1999b).

In a minimal sense, postmodernism involves a rupture with modernism. Modernity is characterised by Enlightenment ideals of truth, certainty and control over the natural and social world. It involves belief in the power of reason and rationality to guide social, economic and political progress through 'grand narratives' of change. Postmodernism rejects all this. It involves a sceptical view of the possibility of absolute universal truths; it seeks to locate the power of reason within particular discourses; it rejects the possibility of progress through collective change. The 'grand narratives' which derive from Enlightenment beliefs have led to the gas chamber and Auschwitz rather than a socialist nirvana. The postmodernist response has been to fundamentally question the failure of 'big ideas' and their foundations. Instead, postmodernists emphasise difference and the lack of a unitary self; in some forms this embraces a cultural relativism whereas in less extreme versions the emphasis is more on a process of critical dialogue which can incorporate differences (see Kanpol, 1992). The critical pedagogy of writers like Giroux (1992) would be an example of the latter.

Because the postmodernist critique rejects the grand narrative of socialism, it also aims to displace the relevance of radical adult education as a viable political and educational project. In the following sub-section, four salient criticisms<sup>5</sup> from a postmodernist perspective are debated: the first concerns the issue of

social purpose; the second involves decentring of the educator's role; the third challenges the claim that the commodification of culture undermines the basis of the radical project of cultural politics; the fourth questions the role of consumerism and identity in popular education.

*(i) the issue of social purpose*

Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997), argue that the guiding paradigms of adult education, its theory, purposes and practices need to be rethought. They see postmodernist theory as the resource for this task. The authors counter pose a 'moor land' of learning in opposition to the 'field of adult education'; a metaphor indicating the sense of a looser form of learning freed-up from the disciplinary authorities which dominate the institutional 'field'.

Whilst postmodernism has raised doubts about grand claims of 'truth' and 'progress' its own construction of purpose is ambiguous, highly problematic and apolitical. In the position advocated by Usher, Bryant and Johnston, the purpose of education is linked to improving performance. That is, adult learning is harnessed to the knowledge and skills which enhance the ability and effectiveness to perform various tasks. On the one hand, this connects closely with the idea of efficiency and productivity and, on the other, with the notion of efficacy as something achieved in a successful way. They argue this can

involve supporting the performance of difference and diversity and provide opportunities for critical educational practice:

Postmodern social movements... work not through conventional political and community action methods but by surfacing local and very often subjugated knowledge and getting people to think about their situation through role play, workshops, street theatre and popular carnivals - in effect through performance - performance which might often be transgressive...

Performativity, therefore, does not simply mean 'efficiency' in the reproduction and maintenance of a market-dominated capitalist system. Whilst there are certain practices where performativity is linked in this way, there is also, as we see, scope for critical, oppositional practices. These, however, are not the practices of the traditional, modernist Left... It is not the efficacy of commitment to totalising projects of transformation, rather it is a more modest yet no less effective efficacy of 'giving voice' to specific, subjugated knowledge, of empowering through a learning that is both participative and

performative.

(Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997: 21)

The above view can be useful, but it is not particularly novel, in that there are clearly elements of cultural work, such as community arts, that see their purpose in the terms suggested above. Improving the ability of communities to 'come to voice' in an efficacious way is an important practice which is often in opposition to professional and top down processes of labelling communities negatively. We need, nevertheless, some way - or some wider set of values and criteria - which help us differentiate between those voices we want to make efficacious and those we may want to challenge. Performance for what is a question that has to be asked.

The danger of putting the emphasis on performativity, in a context of structurally unequal power relations, is that it can quite easily be accommodated to powerful interests. In a post-Fordist world of production, the emphasis on performance may simply dovetail with vocational training which merely reflect entrenched positions of power. It may well be that the knowledges demanded in the workplace challenge the disciplinary knowledges of the academy (see Solomon and Usher, 1999); however, the workplace is hardly an uncontested space itself and without a serious attempt to confront unequal power relations

in this context it would be quite easy for 'performance', as a goal of education, to be equated with an argument for 'merely useful knowledge'. We need to ask who defines the performance? Who benefits and why? It is too easy for this purpose to disguise the fact that powerful interests may prefer some performances over others, for example, greater productivity by workers rather than more efficacious practices for workers to assert their rights.

*(ii) From adult education to adult learning*

'Adult learning' does not, therefore, simply signify 'out of school' or 'outside' the formal educational institution, the widening and increased incidence of learning opportunities, but more significantly the lessening of the power of the educator to define what constitutes worthwhile knowledge and serious learning...(Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997: 24)

Postmodernism rejects absolutist claims of the academy to be the guardian of knowledge. It is interested in diverse sites of learning and not those simply associated with educational institutions. For its recognition of the 'local narrative' and the diversity of sources of knowledge this critique is welcome. However, in its rejection of definitive positions, foundational assumptions and educational claims to self-importance, postmodernism diminishes the role of the

educator. In contrast, the role of the worker has to be reasserted and a proactive vocation robustly defended.

As the above quote indicates, postmodernism challenges the educators right to define what is regarded as 'appropriate' and 'worthwhile' learning. Discipline based knowledges are seen as knowledge claims along with the valuing of different sources and forms of knowledge outwith educational institutions and would include knowledge from experience. In this view, the modernist project is flawed, by an attempt at social engineering, which is mistakenly based on Enlightenment assumptions about truth and progress. However, in recognising diverse sites of learning and a variety of sources of knowledge, we need to be wary about paying the price for this in terms of the curriculum as a resource for purposeful social change.

Some of the above criticisms share common ground with aspects of radical education. The idea of decentring knowledge or asking who defines it, is a helpful one. However, in the radical perspective this is used to make the claim for 'really useful knowledge' which would help people struggle for collective change. In other words, it involves an assessment about the status and usefulness of knowledge in relation to furthering a social purpose. The idea of 'really useful knowledge', however, is undercut in the epistemological pluralism

of postmodernism. The decentring of knowledge in the academy should not be a license for relativising all forms and sources of knowledge. As Barr (1999b) argues, it makes sense to talk about progressive knowledge which is disallowed in postmodernist theorising.

Postmodernists may reject the charge of epistemological relativism but they nevertheless encourage a form of cultural relativism. The celebration of difference and the privileging of identity politics can lead to the view that in the marketplace of cultures there is an implicit equivalence, as if all have the same moral value and legitimacy. Nussbaum (1997) argues that simply because norms and values are human and historical, this does not preclude the search for some rational justification. Education is an important resource for developing an attitude of mutual respect: why can't cultures be crossed, understood, and respected in a way that recognises difference and commonality in terms of rights, aspirations and problems?

Without some (needless to say provisional and open) universal aspirations and ethical position which transcends the particular, it is hard to imagine how a broad social purpose can be constructed. In valorising the local narrative the big picture can be obscured. As Jane Thompson points out:

It is clearly premature to speak about the death of grand narratives in relation to the significance of capitalism and patriarchy, for example, when both sources of power so obviously continue to be reproduced and reconstituted.  
(1997: 121)

*(iii) Is culture still a site of struggle?*

Radical education sees its role in working on the cultural terrain in terms of excavating suppressed meanings and experiences and interrogating these. The narrowness of the dominant culture and the interests it reflects can be interrogated by including into the curriculum a wider range of culturally significant meanings, particularly those which have been largely ignored or devalued. Culture is a resource for *reading* the world and, as Freire advocates, for *rewriting* it (Freire and Macedo, 1987). From some postmodernist perspectives this may seem like a hopeless exercise. Why?

A postmodernist response to the above question is that the role of culture is being transformed. Increasingly cultural commodities are produced for profit rather than for ideological control and the power to regulate behaviour has shifted from sites of cultural production. The discursive nature of culture, built upon reason, argument and principle is devalued in a context where imagery is

more important than the word. This undermines the importance of culture as a site of struggle in which meanings are subject to critical enquiry (see Plumb, 1997).

The increase in the use of imagery as cultural 'signs' goes hand-in-hand with a decrease in the possibility of making sense of them because they communicate directly to the senses and desires rather than any rational process of understanding. Images do not present themselves as serious knowledge claims open to dialogue and critical interrogation. The emphasis on visual imagery involves a different logic than traditional forms of cultural representation. One outcome is to devalue the kinds of activities promoted by adult education in that there is no role for an analysis of cultural politics. Instead, there are 'declining opportunities and increased uncertainties for counter-hegemonic cultural practices like critical adult education' (Plumb 1997: 184). Plumb argues that the commodification of culture is more supportive of instrumental forms of adult education; money can be made from knowledge which people want to buy. This is not the case for critical adult education; culture is in the process of being destroyed more quickly than practices such as adult education can hope to counter.

The above argument overstates the significance of imagery and understates our

inability to deconstruct it rationally. Even if visual imagery is more important in our lives, it has hardly replaced discursive modes of understanding and justifications for action. Moreover, the opportunity visual imagery presents for deconstructing the way messages are made can be the focus for critical enquiry. The postmodernist argument attaches too great an importance on imagery as a source of satisfaction and insufficient attention to the reality of people's lives as creators of cultural meanings. The extreme (and ludicrous) position, of course, is the refusal to distinguish between social life and its representation in the claim of a hyper-reality, where the event and its imagery are infused (or is it confused?). For example, Baudrillard's analysis of the Gulf War in which the reality of the event was less important than its representation.

*(iv) the role of consumerism and identity*

The importance attached to consumerism as a signifier of identity, as distinct from social class, is another aspect of the shift in focus from the impact of postmodernism. In this perspective, people are adding to the diversity of their social world and extending their autonomy and choice through what they buy. Marxist accounts of society, from this viewpoint, have failed to recognise its importance in the construction of meaning and the pleasure it generates.

Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997), point to the role of consumerism in the

binding of people to a capitalist social order. The freedom to consume, and the pleasure of creating new identities through it, is written off by the left as another sign of hegemonic persuasion. Therefore, its importance as a way of differentiating and classifying identities is missed. They go on to suggest that, lifestyle practices and patterns of consumer behaviour may be as significant as social class, if not more so, in forming the identities people value.

Whilst the above criticism has some validity, the difficult task is surely in fostering out of the diversity of consumption common interests? In celebrating its association with identity and lifestyles the end result may be simply to affirm the obvious success of consumer capitalism. This seems a bit like 'fiddling while Rome burns'. The unequal distribution of resources between different groups, and between different societies, involves unequal access to consumer goods. In a context of scarce resources, the postmodernist celebration of consumerism reinforces inequalities rather than challenges them. It also projects consumer capitalism as a progressive force, rather than an inherently unstable and potentially regressive one, in the process of constructing identities.

Klein's (2000) argument about 'branding', in contrast to the postmodernist one, points to how consumer identities are products of persuasive processes by corporate bodies to create demand for Nike shoes or some other product in

order to further corporate material interests. A superficial sense of belonging is created through consuming the brand. Moreover, this process of brand creation has implications on the process of production which is subcontracted to firms who can profit from the sweatshops and child-labour available in third-world countries. It becomes difficult, therefore, to celebrate the way consumerism creates diversity outside of a discourse of how powerful forces shape and fashion identities, the desire to consume and its implications for the process of production.

The relationship between a provider and a consumer may, at times, work to the benefit of the latter in some circumstances. Where the provider has to be sensitive to demand and the identities of different groups, their different lifestyles and so on, there is potential for consumers to collectively resist through their market choices. Consumer boycotts, for example, may have an impact on the internal decisions of companies and their production processes. The boycott of Shell products over the decision to dump the Brent Spar oil platform at sea is a case in point. Moreover, market relations between providers and consumers has some interesting parallels in the creation of quasi-markets in the public sector. Indeed, the role of consumer bodies such as the recipients of care/ user groups etc have created a context for the emergence of communities of interest to make their voice heard in ways which were not obviously intended

by policy (Shaw, 1996; Jamieson, 2001).

The politics of consumption and the opportunity it creates for collective identity, organisation and resistance is an important mobiliser of people to learn and act. The Rochdale pioneers of the nineteenth century understood the importance of consumerism as a collective issue and the part it played in socialist politics. Moreover, in relation to the state, the demand for more responsive and sensitive provision of high quality public services can inspire community politics and local social action (see Lovett, 1988). In a context of scarcity, and in terms of the potential health risks created by new production technologies, the politics of consumption cannot only be left to market processes, or the wheeler-dealing of governments to sort out. It has to be resolved through the application of criteria based on agreed values and concerns through a democratic process.

## **Discussion**

The visibility of a cultural politics of 'race' and gender have been positive aspects of the demise of class politics. As Steele argues, '...the power of marginalised cultures' needs to be recognised in education because they enrich our common one, '...such cultures are not dens of ignorance which only an \* enlightened middle class culture can illuminate but sites of resistance and

communal value.’ (Steele, 1997: 209). They are a rich resource for the construction of a ‘common culture’ which recognises diversity. Identity politics are not posed as an alternative to class politics but must be interconnected with it. It is in the context of community, that the potential for these interconnections to be experienced and made, occur. This business is by no means unproblematic. As Gilroy (1987: 234) notes, ‘community is as much about difference as it is about similarity and identity. It is a relational idea which suggests antagonism - domination and subordination between one community and another,’ and, it might be added, within them too.

Martin is critical of the over culturalist emphasis associated with the more postmodernist interpretation of New Times and argues that, ‘if it is necessary to ‘modernise’ class theory this is precisely because we can’t do without it’ (1993: 145). It is rather ironic, that the concern for difference in postmodern theorising seems to have ignored the significance of social class as a difference (Coole, 1996). On the other hand, postmodernism highlights the importance of local and deinstitutionalised spaces for learning. As Westwood notes, ‘adult education in Britain, especially through the community education variant, has consistently looked to locality and region in order to develop specific practices appropriate to local areas; it should, therefore, be well placed to intervene’ <sup>6</sup> (Westwood 1992: 242)

Postmodernism is too positive about the role of consumerism and markets in the construction of identity. The market language of acquisition works internally on us in a way that educates desire, and whilst this may have pleasurable consequences, it can also create the basis for envy and competition to possess goods, not because of innate need or their intrinsic value, but simply because they exist to differentiate people and create a shallow sense of belonging. As Orbach (*Guardian* March 20th, 2001) argues, ‘the values of community which once forged civic life and civil society are synthesised and encrypted by the brand makers’. The outcome is a rapacious, anything goes culture, which some variants of postmodernism seems to celebrate rather than criticise.

The emphasis on the particular can also play into the hands of dominant market interests by dismantling principles of universalism (such as in relation to welfare) to replace them with market ones (Martin, 1993). The main issue, as Raymond Williams points out, is not simply to celebrate diversity but to construct out of it a common political culture and programme. In the context of unequal power, how can difference and diversity be achieved in any meaningful way without the latter? The dominant forces of power are not simply going to disappear and the opportunity to make them accountable is weakened by a

fragmented political culture which cannot forge anything in common, because it cannot see further than its difference.

The major task therefore, is one of constructing a community which is open to difference and diversity and which, at the same time, seeks to build common concerns. However, as Westwood (1992: 244) indicates 'the emphasis on difference can all too easily assume an equivalence which ignores extant power relations.' This means recognising and responding to the cultures of communities, without slipping into mere 'culturalism', and catalysing them in order to 'recover the idea of a more dense and participatory culture...the project is ultimately to reconstitute the wider meaning of community as society, and to show through our actions that there is such a thing.' (Martin, 1993: 145)

## **Conclusion**

New Times has had some contradictory implications. It has generated a debate which has brought to the fore 'the generalisation of politics' and the importance of new social movements as catalysts for change. On the other hand, New Times also seems to be 'Thatcherism in drag' (Sivinandan, 1989) which separates off an analysis of culture and politics from their material context. It is still clear that inequality and oppression are systematically structured and <sup>+</sup> related to cultural and economic power.

An unreconstructed structuralist analysis and politics of class which ignores diversity and difference is inadequate. The New Times debate reminds us to be clear about different forms and sources of oppression and their differential impact. It draws attention to the politics of identity and sources of oppression which cannot simply be 'read off' from social class position nor, indeed, should it be ignored through privileging the politics of class. However, social diversity, pluralistic lifestyles and consumerism are not simply concerns of postmodernists, because they have also preoccupied socialists within a modernist and Marxist framework. Instead of abandoning a modernist Marxism, as New Times has, the aim of the first new left was to transform it.

The argument of this chapter has been that we need a qualified but modernist understanding of society, grounded in a structuralist analysis of inequality and exploitation. The first new left's revitalisation of Marxist analysis, with its shift towards cultural politics, provides the basis for an updated and modernised modernism. To quote an unlikely source of support for this position, Derrida (1994: 38) suggests that, 'a dogmatic consensus on the death of Marx, the end of the critique of capitalism, the final triumph of the market, and the eternal link between democracy and the logic of economic liberalism' has to be resisted.<sup>†</sup> Marxist analysis can still help us make sense of the nature of class inequality

and exploitation in capitalist societies.

Rather than abandon the project of the first new left, we need to reassert its relevance and the role of communities in the politics of social change. We need to maintain an interest in the 'old' movement of labour as well as a sensitivity to the range of interests presented by 'new' social movements. It would be misleading to assume that new and old movements have a natural predisposition to go together. In the jungle of postmodernity, diversity and difference can lead to dividedness, and alliances with politically regressive forces rather than progressive ones. (Mercer, 1990) The role of social movements in social change is, therefore, the focus of the next chapter.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Social movements and change**

#### **Introduction**

If you want flowers you must have flowers, roots and all, unless you are satisfied, as many people are satisfied, with flowers made from paper and tinsel. And if you want education you must not cut it off from the social interests in which it has its living and perennial sources. (Tawney cited in Jackson, 1995: 184)

The focus of this chapter is on the role of both old and new social and urban movements and their potential to provide both a popular education and a positive role in social change. The important task is to build links between progressive movements and the point made in this chapter is that because old and new movements draw on different sources of power, and mobilise different constituencies, making alliances between them can enhance the potential for a more widespread project of social change. Moreover, the roots and social

interests to which Tawney refers are constantly being reshaped and reconstituted. This process offers new opportunities for adult education to participate in popular struggles. In recent years, new social movements have emerged, rooted in contemporary culture, representing new social interests and actors and generating new 'collisions' with dominant social forces. This is the context of the current stage in the dialectics of popular education.

Movements occur when a number of people decide to act collectively to make some difference to their circumstances. Kane points out that:

There is no clear-cut definition of what constitutes a social movement, though they are generally seen as: autonomous from the state and political parties; more loosely structured, democratic and participatory than traditional political organisations (such as trade unions); advancing particular interests and ideas within the context of 'civil society' rather than in the workplace or political institutions. It would be easy to find social movements where one or more of these characteristics do not apply, however. (2001: 5)

Social movements are generally autonomous from the state and major political

parties, and may challenge conventional political processes. The term 'social movement', for Gilroy (1987), refers to 'new patterns of political action and organisation, which have emerged in the overdeveloped countries as their old industrial order has begun to decompose and social and political collectivities based away from the workplace have become as vocal, militant and politically significant as the residues of the workers movement'. (1987: 244) By contesting the dominant political agenda, social movements imply new ways in which to understand social reality. The following definition of a social movement is a useful guide:

A social movement is a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity. (Diani, 1992: 13)

The emphasis is, therefore, on diverse networks, political and cultural conflicts and collective identity. Rather than write-off the worker's movement, the argument is that old and new movements, taken together, can extend politics and help to connect issues of class with those of communities; link the personal and the political; join the local and the global; redefine and reappropriate the sphere of the public and the private.

The argument of chapter four focused on the need to locate issues of diversity and difference, that characterised New Times within a framework that could take account of structural inequalities. Social movements, as oppositional forces in civil society, have helped form identities and a political agenda outside of the sphere of production but, ultimately, it is in making connections between different spheres including production, consumption and reproduction that the real possibility for more widespread social change lies. In challenging the political agenda and sharpening the arguments and pressure for significant reform, movements can have a decisive and progressive impact on the politics of the state. This interest in social movements as well as social structure, has important implications for popular education. As Westwood notes:

...the message to radical adult education is a very clear one:  
homogeneous conceptions of the working class, women,  
black people and community require deconstruction if they  
are to be in any way effective starting points for a politicised  
adult education. (Westwood, 1992: 243)

### **New social movements**

The term ‘new social movements’ refers to the social forces which emerged in

the 1950s and 1960s (the second-wave women's liberation movement, the peace and disarmament movement, the green movement, local and urban movements and the student movement) - not all of which were, in fact, new. It was a period when such movements flourished and more established movements reformulated their objectives (Miliband, 1989). One of their defining features is their exclusion from - and often their rejection of - 'mainstream' politics and the old labour movement.

Dissatisfied with the marginalisation of their interests in formal political processes, the new social movements inspired direct forms of popular protest and social action. Generally, the problems and concerns they addressed moved the site of struggle from the workplace to civil society. Direct resistance to state policies was also a catalyst for some of these movements such as the disability movement (Oliver, 1986; Petrie and Shaw, 1999). Furthermore, these movements could mobilise people around 'single issues' which may have helped to expose wider concerns about the nature of society. For example, the women's movement and feminist theory raised questions about the nature of power within patriarchal capitalism. As Petrie and Shaw (1999) argue in relation to the disability movement, 'there is something intensely liberating for all of us about the rejection of aspirations towards perfectibility about the existential understanding that human beings are more than their physical form'. (1999: 171)

In challenging cultural norms the disability movement promotes a more popular and genuinely inclusive form of citizenship. In general terms, therefore, movements can be said to extend the sphere of politics and provide possibilities for the radicalisation of selective values (see Welton, 1993).

Urban social movements share similar characteristics of social movements, however, they tend to be locally based, territorially defined and mobilise people to act around three central goals: one, collective consumption; two, cultural identity; three, political self-management. The focus on collective consumption refers broadly to the goods and services which the state supplies. The issue of cultural identity becomes an issue when it is closely linked with a specific territory and is defended because of this. The reference to political self-management relates to attempts by urban groups to become more autonomous from local government which directly effect their environment. (see Gilroy, 1987: 230)

Whilst urban social movements may not be agents of structural change they do point to 'symptoms of resistance to domination'. As Gilroy suggests, they are best understood as defensive organisations: 'the politricks of the system is replaced by an authentic, immediate politics' (1987: 232). However, such organisations are unlikely to generate a stable politics and democratic processes

which go beyond the variety practised in their own organisations.

In an attempt to theorise social movements as ‘revolutionary learning sites’, Welton (1993) suggests they embody the following characteristics: they articulate a collective identity which brings people together in a common cause; they crystallise and generate opposition to a dominant group or set of beliefs and values; they embody a normative dimension of shared beliefs and values which people are prepared to act on. In E.P. Thompson’s terms, they embody a ‘moral economy’ in the sense of articulating grievances and formulating opinion about legitimate causes of concern and courses of action (cited in Martin, 1999).

### **Participation in change**

In relation to conventional politics, membership of political parties is generally on the decline and low turn outs for elections are a cause for concern. In contrast, the involvement of people in social movements has been on the increase (Byrne, 1997). Although those actively participating in social movements are the minority of the population, the numbers involved are far greater than the membership of political parties. In organisational terms they rely on mass mobilisation rather than mass membership. ‘By defining politics more broadly’, Paterson points out, social movements have ‘involved people in political action in a variety of forms that in the old accounts would not be

recognised as central to the struggle. In education, we could readily cite here recent campaigning over school closures or the resistance to primary school national testing in Scotland in 1991-92.' (1999: 47)

Paterson (1999) goes on to argue the new social movements can be distinguished by three characteristics: they reject the old politics of earlier social movements on the grounds that they have ossified as vehicles for change; they have insisted on autonomous organisation in order to keep control of their interests; they have not believed in subsuming their demands in some greater whole of mass politics. However, the basis of his argument is that social movements are, despite their rhetoric, often dependent on the state for support and for guarantees of their rights. In this argument, some 'centre' which can act to counter inequalities and promote common interests must exist. In other words, the politics of communities and the political culture of the state are interconnected and the role of popular education is to make the dialectic between the two work (Martin, 1999).

Social movements can be weak agents of social change, however, because they have a tendency to ebb and flow with changing social conditions and, by definition almost, they lack the institutionalised base and the resources required for sustained, organised, action. The distinction made by Williams in chapter

four between dominant, residual and emergent social and cultural formations - and the shades between them - can be a helpful way of thinking about the complex role social movements might play in social change. For instance, not all movements are progressive: some dominant and residual cultural forces have evolved into movements simply to defend privileged positions against threatening trends (for example, aspects of the current mens' movement, the 'countryside alliance' and its defence of fox hunting); different ideological positions within emergent cultural forces can lead to alternatives which can be readily incorporated rather than being genuinely oppositional (the fracturing between 'old' and 'new' feminisms); some residual forces may seek to achieve a less rather than a more open society (such as the growth of neo-fascist movements). We should avoid making any hasty and over generous assessment of their transformative potential for the better.

Moreover, new social movements which are predominantly middle class have failed to involve a wide cross-section of working class people. In addition, some progressive movements have developed to assert and protect the rights of individuals against the collective, for example, in the civil rights' movement. Whilst such movements can play an important and positive role in opposing authoritarian states, they have also worked against organisations which have largely sought to protect working class interests, such as trade unions.

### **The curriculum of movements**

Despite the reservations noted above, movements can be powerful forces for progressive social change located in civil society. In participating in social movements people develop solidarity and cohesion as well as generating new knowledge and understanding.

Eyerman and Jamieson (1991) argue that social movements involve a 'cognitive praxis' which distinguishes them from other forms of collective behaviour. It is the formation of new conceptual territory which is the salient characteristic of social movements. By this, they mean that movements create a context for new knowledges to emerge and old knowledges to be reinterpreted. In developing a collective identity and purpose, movements 'open a space in which creative interaction between individuals can take place'. (1991: 55) They go on to point out that, 'not every social problem generates a social movement; only those which strike a fundamental chord, that touch basic tensions in society have the potential for generating a social movement', which they acknowledge means 'our approach tends to limit the number of social movements to those especially 'significant' movements which redefine history, which carry the historical 'projects' that have normally been attributed to social classes' (1991: 56).

Using the term movement to signify struggles that are part of a 'historical project' and generate a 'cognitive praxis' can be quite narrow and limiting. For example, action groups and single issue protests may involve popular struggles but are excluded from Eyerman and Jamieson's definition of a social movement. However, popular struggles may start locally but, in the end, involve action on a wider level and generate new understandings in the process. A tenants' group seeking to repair the housing stock may have this aim solely in mind. Yet how they formulate the problem, and how they respond to it, can change. Whilst they may not operate on the same level as larger movements they can, nevertheless, generate new knowledge and social processes of learning. The key point is that the potential of struggles may be relatively open ended and can create the impetus and energy for learning directly related to people's lives and concerns. So in contrast to Eyerman and Jamieson, the view taken in this study is that local action groups and single issue protests are included with movements under the broad term of popular struggles.

Martin (1999c) identifies four features of a movement's 'curriculum': first, they ask fundamental questions about the human condition which concern the relationships between people and between people and the environment; second, they embody a 'relational understanding' of the connections between learning and living which applies both to people and their environment; third, they are

more concerned with issues of 'being' rather than 'having' in that they tend to focus on social relations rather than economic ones; fourthly they reassert the power of human agency to make choices and then to act to make a difference. (Martin, 1999c: 10-11)

By moving people to act, progressive social movements foster a sense of agency and urgency in people to challenge established ideas, values, customs and practices. They assert the capacity of people to 'learn that the first lesson of freedom is to understand the reality of unfreedom' (Martin 1999: 12). It is a commitment to extend freedoms and the necessity to struggle for these that creates an important role for popular education. Martin goes on to argue that social movements constitute an intermediate level of reality between the direct relations of individuals and the wider relations of society in which people come together and generate social as well as intellectual capital. They create cohesive bonds and affiliations between people and, as Eyerman and Jamieson (1991) state, they produce a 'cognitive praxis'.

Gramsci's (1971) distinction between a 'war of movement' and a 'war of position' can be useful for thinking about the contribution of movements to social change. It helps to connect the immediate and local with the wider picture. In a 'war of movement', change occurs by the swift seizure of power, as in the

Russian Revolution. The state is seized by an intellectual cadre of the revolutionary class, in this historical example, the vanguard party.

In a 'war of position', social change is characterised by a protracted and longer struggle of building alliances and securing smaller transformations which are a necessary foundation for a new social order. These struggles occur in civil society and may involve challenging a range of positions, values and beliefs which undergird the status quo. Gramsci argued that, for a 'war of movement' to be successful, in the long term, it needed to be built on strongly cemented foundations. That is, widespread and popular support had to be deep rooted and hardened by intellectual and moral arguments which would provide the foundation for sustained struggle on a political level.

Work with social movements can be located as part of a protracted 'war of position' that takes place in civil society around the themes of democracy, equality, and social justice. The separation of the private and the public spheres of experience requires a *determined* and *active* role for the educator to identify ways of connecting the two. In these terms, popular struggles create the position and locus of a particular kind of educational work. Keith Jackson, reflecting on the community debate, describes it in these terms:

By referring to ‘communities’...we meant specified groups of actual people, not society as a whole and certainly not a market. In short, we used the term to indicate the ‘place’ and ‘moment’ of engagement with specific groups of people around their interests. (Jackson, 1995: 194)

In operating between the individual and the wider society, movements create a public space which can be used to challenge and change institutionalised power. In C.Wright Mills’ (1970) terms, they connect ‘the personal troubles of milieu’ and the ‘public issues of structure’.

### **The public and the private sphere**

Far from there being no resistance to the system, there has been a proliferation of new points of antagonism, new social movements of resistance organised around them - and consequently, a generalisation of ‘politics’ to spheres which hitherto the left assumed to be apolitical: a politics of the family, of health, of food, of sexuality, of the body. (Hall 1990: 234)

The distinction between the public and the private opens up a broader continuum in which we can locate a 'new' politics inspired by social movements located in communities and operating outwith conventional party politics.

The term private is used to refer to those areas of life which are outwith the scrutiny of a wider public: the home, the family, personal relationships. The public sphere, is normally used to describe those areas of political and collective life in communities and society which are more openly accountable and are outwith a market system of relations. Increasingly the 'private' and 'public' domains are overlapping in different ways and through different influences. Social movements, government intervention, and the dominance of market forces are reshaping what we understand to be private and public spheres and the connections between them.

The bridges between private and public life - the *agora* of Bauman's (1999) analysis - are in the process of being dismantled. Public spaces are depoliticised through market mechanisms and private spaces are being trivialised: where the private has become public, he argues, it is in ways which have been represented as '...private agonies and anxieties which do not turn into public issues just for being on public display.' (1999: 3) The promotion of the market and consumption under the 'New Right' during the 1980s and 1990s was part of a

strategy of undermining public spheres of democratic participation in politics - having a voice - with a market option of 'exit' by consumer choice.

Martin (2000b) argues the need to 'reconstitute the agora' as a project for adult education committed to the struggles of ordinary people for an inclusive and democratic citizenship. As he puts it:

Essentially what is missing in our lives today is the opportunity to meet as citizens and, once again, make democracy work....historically the kind of adult education in which citizens met together to talk and learn and argue helped to fill precisely this space - and to make it a uniquely democratic and creative space. Indeed, it could be said that in a very real way adult learning, often autonomous and self-directed, *constituted* this space.

(Martin, 2000b: 257)

However, the project of constructing shared meanings through democratic communities is systematically undermined by the imperatives of a market philosophy (Sanderson: 1999). Public spaces, where common issues and concerns can be debated, are undermined by a personal, self-interest, favoured

by a market mechanism. Of course one of the outcomes of this process is to turn political processes into private choices - in effect, to undermine community in the sense described in chapter four by Raymond Williams. This is not to claim, however, that all movements that occupy or create public spaces generate progressive communities. Indeed, some of the examples that can be cited - communities against paedophiles, communities against prostitutes, for example - seem to be driven more from fear and hatred than a desire for social justice, equality or democratic participation.

### **The local and the global**

Bauman argues the urgent need to rebuild the *agora*:

one needs to arrest, simultaneously, its privatisation and its depoliticisation. One needs to reestablish the translation of the private into the public. One needs to restart (in the *agora*, not just in philosophy seminars) the interrupted discourse of the common good - which renders individual autonomy both feasible and worth struggling for. (1999: 107)

The argument here is that movements can play an essential role in remaking the connections with local experiences, issues and wider contexts in order to

identify and promote common interests. They have reinvigorated the public sphere by providing a space for discussion, and action, over issues which the formal political processes exclude or narrowly constrain. A key feature of their activity is the opening up of participation, often situated on a local basis, where new forms of democratic debate can emerge and people can act in concerted ways. As Durkheim points out, 'a nation can be maintained only if, between the state and the individual, there is intercalated a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individual to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag them, in this way, into the general torrent of social life' (cited in Eldridge, 1996: 35). Moreover, wider outcomes are often seeded through the activities of individuals, or small locally based groups which begin to seek change in circumstances that directly affect them. In the demand for better child care, safer roads, more facilities, better health care, improved schools, a healthier environment and so on, the public spheres are created.

Social movements have also been very effective in using information technologies to connect the local with the global. The internet and its potential to compress space and time, have been exploited to organise, recruit and circulate information amongst disparate groups of activists on a transnational level. From the privacy of a personal computer the possibility of public and collective activities has emerged as a force of resistance to global capitalism. As

Vidal (*Guardian*, 19 January, 2000) writes, there has been a globalisation of opposition to the power of big capital, multinational companies and authoritarian states: 'huge networks of public interest, environment, human rights, consumer development, religious and umbrella civil society groups, drawing in local, national and international organisations, are beginning to emerge'. This 'netwar', as he terms it, creates 'virtual communities' prepared to reclaim public spaces in opposition to established authorities.

The process of globalisation and the role of multinational enterprises, however, means that communities which operate simply at the level of the locality are unlikely to have any serious leverage on such powerful forces. An alternative globalisation 'from below', as a counter veiling force, could be one means of checking such powerful forces.

'Virtual communities', constructed in cyberspace, create the basis for new patterns of communication and interaction that can lead to resistance 'from below'. Whilst Raymond Williams argues the importance of place - 'we start to think from where we are' - in the process of constructing meaning, this emphasis is certainly inadequate in relation to making sense of virtual communities. It is exactly the opposite that can be powerful, that is, it is their ability to transcend the particularities of place which gives virtual communities

an ability to construct meanings which are locally important. The contradictions implicit in the technologies which help to create virtual communities have to be recognised, however. On the one hand, globalised economic processes have marginalised nation states and local communities and new technologies are contributing to a new work order which reinforces inequalities within societies and between them. The 'information society' is ratcheting up wider inequalities. However, the growth of resistance through popular struggles, which are local as well as global, and which utilise new communication technologies, create the possibilities for powerful communities of resistance to global capitalism.

Klein (2000) argues, that popular education is contributing to a growing community of resistance which is truly global and has achieved some important successes:

As connections have formed across national lines, a different agenda has taken hold, one that embraces globalisation but seeks to wrest it from the grasp of the multinationals. Ethical shareholders, culture jammers, street reclaimers, McUnion organisers, human rights hactivists, school-logo fighters and internet corporate

watchdogs are at the early stages of demanding a citizen-centred alternative to the international rule of the brands. That demand, still sometimes in some areas of the world whispered for fear of a jinx, is to build a resistance - both high-tech and grassroots, both focused and fragmented - that is as global, and as capable of coordinated action, as the multinational corporations it seeks to subvert.

(Klein, 2000: 446)

Since her book was published, we have witnessed vividly how ‘virtual communities’ can materialise into very concrete and effective ones when they meet in terrestrial space as evidenced by the demonstrations against world trade cartels in Seattle in 1999, Prague in 2000 and Naples in 2001

Klein (2000) argues that, unintentionally, some of the best popular education tools we have are the activities of global corporations and their back door wheeling and dealing. Their practices have lent urgency to a coalition of interests around issues of employment, civil liberties and civic space. In opposing their practices movements of resistance have to build on the interests of the old labour movement as well as the new social movements. To resist the invasive and harmful strategies of corporate ‘branding’ a new breed of radical movements

act, both locally and globally. As she puts it:

the claustrophobic sense of despair that has so often accompanied the colonization of public space and the loss of secure work begins to lift when one starts to think about the possibilities for a truly globally minded society, one that would include not just economics and capital, but global citizens, global rights and global responsibilities as well. (2000: 442)

### **The political and personal**

The Women's Liberation Movement was a key force in challenging the political agenda during the 1960s and a major resource for developing a curriculum for women's education / women's studies. The flourishing of feminist analysis from the late 1960s onwards created a new dynamic with correspondingly new types of analysis. The opposition of this movement to the politics of class highlighted a concern for 'the personal and the political' and struggles at the point of reproduction rather than simply at the point of production.

As Barr (1999a) argues, by the 1980s the trend in feminist education has been away from consciousness raising and into the counsellor's chair or the academy.

The wider trend of ‘finding private and personal solutions to what are essentially public and political problems’ (1999a: 75) has been an outcome of a waning of political and social movements as forces for change. One of the positive roles of social movements, therefore, is in creating opportunities for ‘personal problems’ to be transformed into ‘political issues’. That is, in Sivanandan’s (1989) terms, the ‘political is personal’, in that opportunities have to be made to widen out the point of reference from the individual in the pursuit of a common political culture. Whilst old movements are considered to have paid insufficient attention to personal experience a criticism of some of the new social movements is that they neglect the wider political dimension by focusing too narrowly on the significance of personal experience and interpersonal relationships. What really matters is that we learn to locate personal experience within a framework of collective interests and recognise the relationship between the two.

### **Old and new social movements**

If radical education is to shift our understanding of what participation means it needs to be authentically popular; it must be a part of the New Times without abandoning an understanding of ‘Old Times’. It must be rooted in people’s experiences and aspirations both as workers (that is, in the sphere of production and the labour movement) and as citizens (that is, in the sphere of reproduction

and consumption, as reflected in the new social and urban movements).

Miliband (1994) suggests the idea of coalition between different movements and forces needs to be acknowledged and developed. He argues that it is unlikely that any single organisation of the Left will ever again be able to claim they represent all movements of protest. In order to build progressive coalitions negotiation and compromises will be essential elements to their success. We have to recognise, however, that there are real difficulties in making coalitions between the politics of fragmented and sometimes hostile movements. The history of the labour movement has been a deeply ambivalent one: on the one hand, it has championed the interests of exploited and marginalised groups, nationally and internationally and, on the other, it has all too often in its practice, embodied racism, sexism and prejudice against minority interests.

Issues of identity and difference, based for instance, on gender, 'race', disability and sexuality are crucial aspects of popular experience which have been systematically marginalised or ignored by the traditional labour agenda. Consequently, for many groups and interests, the labour movement has been part of the problem rather than the solution; this relationship has to be turned around for widespread social change to occur.

The potential for connecting adult education to popular struggles through building coalitions is significant. On the one hand, new social movements mobilise people to act and give voice to concerns which formal political processes ignore, suppress or dilute. But the new social movements cannot draw upon the same working class constituency as the traditional labour movement - nor its endurance. Despite its obvious tendencies to bureaucratisation, the labour movement has survived for nearly two centuries and it has successfully withstood continued attempts to undermine it. Whilst it may have ossified as a vehicle for radical reform, the labour movement still represents a wide variety of ideological interests which cannot be completely set aside or dismissed as irrelevant or ineffective. Changing circumstances can provide the impetus for more radical reformist tendencies to assert themselves.

In the end, as Miliband (1989) argues, the success of the new social movements is ultimately predicated on the success of the old. An example of this was the action of new social movements against the Bank of Scotlands proposed link with the fundamentalist and reactionary American evangelist Pat Robinson in the late 1990s. Whilst much of the direct action against the bank was inspired by new social movements, the threat of losing significant bank accounts with representative groups of old movements was highly significant too. (Vidal, *Guardian*, June 7 1999) Ways have to be found to build alliances between old

and new movements in order to pursue what are, fundamentally, common interests, and popular education has, potentially, an active role to play in this process.

In the contemporary context, it is perhaps in reconstructing the discourse of citizenship, that this potential for popular education to catalyse alliances between old and new movements, has the best prospect of success.

Traditionally, the labour movement has defined citizenship primarily in terms of economic and political rights. New social movements, on the other hand, have challenged traditional ways in which these are defined. They have demanded the right to define their own problems and to develop their own organisational forms to make their voices heard. This has frequently involved a politics of protest and direct action which is, in itself, a form of active citizenship. The active citizen, in this sense, is the dissenting citizen, demanding to be directly involved 'in politics' - as subject rather than object (Crowther and Shaw, 1997).

The politics of citizenship will have to build into it a very different understanding of the subject of politics. However, greater sensitivity to the experiences of oppression should not involve a rejection of class politics. There can be no genuine citizenship without some rough degree of equality (Miliband, 1994), therefore, the concern to improve the material circumstances of the worst

off, should be an important point for connecting interests in citizenship with the concerns of the labour movement. This will require a new kind of politics based on a new kind of relationship between the state and civil society. It is essential that both old and new social movements consider how they can build coalitions which go beyond formal political processes if they are to have any significant impact on redistributing wealth and power. Of course, this aspiration increasingly has international dimensions. In a global economy, for example, the power of multinational companies is often greater than that of national governments. We need, therefore, to understand the economic as well as the political dimensions of citizenship because to be citizens in society we also need to be citizens at work.

## **Conclusion**

The social motivation for collective action, through the rise of new and urban social movements, creates fresh possibilities for politics and pedagogy today. The new movements rely on popular protest and direct action of a ‘personal and political’ kind in order to create social change. However, as the discourse of participation in adult education clearly reveals (see chapter three), the potential of movements as sites of learning is often ignored and adult educators are often preoccupied with their own highly specific and politically sanitised ‘problem of participation’.

The collapse of the 'old' socialist vision in the contemporary context may actually be an important factor in the possibility of radical education built out of diverse communities of struggle. The vacuum it creates opens up possibilities for democratic, socialist visions, 'from below' to emerge through the multifarious activities and campaigns of popular struggles.

In aiming for the creation of a common political culture, and a cultural democracy, popular education has a potentially significant role to play. It is important not to lose sight of the relevance of both old and new movements for this project. Taken together, they extend the terrain of educational activity and the potential constituencies it engages with and offer the best chance for widespread and significant social reform. The importance of the changing context in which this occurs, is crucial in that new struggles are constantly generated and old struggles reformulated. The case has been made for making alliances between fragmented movements, or at least connecting with them, in order to maximise the learning opportunities they create. It is the process of learning in struggle which is the focus of the next chapter.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Learning through struggle**

#### **Introduction**

A community is not a classroom, however, and the people are not students coming to classrooms for education. The Peoples' Organisation must create the conditions and climate in which people want to learn because the learning itself is essential to their own life. (Alinsky, 1969: 164-65)

This chapter deals with adult learning in the context of struggle (for related and relevant literature see, Kane, 2000, 2001; Crowther, Martin and Shaw, 1999; DeKeyser, 1999, 2000; Foley, 1999; Kilgore, 1999; Newman, 1999; Welton, 1993; Regnier, 1991; Finger, 1989; Paulston, 1980). Whilst there is some writing about social movements as educational resources there is a dearth of literature about learning in struggle or how it differs from adult learning in other contexts. So this chapter focuses on understanding processes of learning when people with a shared political or cultural interest seek collectively to influence or control their circumstances. Its aim is to provide a brief review of adult learning and move from this to an understanding of learning in struggle. This provides the conceptual setting for interpreting some of the issues involved in learning in struggle following an analysis of four selected case studies.

### **Understanding adult learning: a brief review**

Much of our understanding of adult learning has been dominated by American pragmatism and its emphasis on meaning and experience (Wilson, 1992). This tradition had an important impact on the work of Dewey who, in turn, had an important influence on succeeding generations of adult educators interested in learning from experience and experiential learning (Finger and Assun, 2001). The former embraces reflection on the meaning of lived experience whereas the latter involves a pedagogy of learning from experiential activities. In addition, humanistic philosophy has an important impact on adult learning with its claims about learning processes specific to adults. Before turning to discuss more critical theories of adult learning, a brief summary of these positions is warranted.

The significance of Dewey (1964, 1971) is his emphasis on experience as the means for learning and growth and its connection to a democratic process. The link with democracy is made in terms of individuals learning in the context of a wider community in which ideas and action are tested and feedback is received as a way of reviewing understanding. This learning cycle then leads into a further spiralling process of human growth. Dewey's work had a direct impact on other adult educators such as Lindeman, and has led to various attempts to develop, refine and redefine the learning cycle. The contribution of Lewin (see Finger and Assun, 2001) on learning in organisations and Kolb's (1984) identification of different learning styles both draw on Dewey's influence.

Finger and Assun (2001) argue that this tradition of adult learning is basically astructural, non-institutional and apolitical. Whilst the non-institutional point may be relevant to this account, the astructural and apolitical nature of adult learning are

weaknesses in understanding learning in struggle. Its valuable contribution, however, is in its linkage of individual learning with a collective context. Education contributes to democracy and involves a democratic process in order for people to learn and grow which can be relevant to thinking about learning in the context of a movement.

The humanistic influence on adult learning can be traced back to the work of Rogers (1969) and his opposition to behaviourism. In contrast to an emphasis on behaviour and conditioning, the humanistic approach is concerned with the individual's subjectivity, their inner world, and the need for self-actualisation in an alienating reality. In Roger's analysis, the point is made sharply that people cannot be taught, they can only be encouraged to learn. This emphasis on the learner became part of the professional ideology of adult educators through the work of Knowles (1970). In his account, adult learning is also located within an individual framework where the learner's experience of the world, his/her intentions, purposes, and needs have to drive the learning process. Individual learners, not subjects, disciplines or institutions are the starting point. Personal growth, or self-actualisation, involves a genuine attempt to meet a person's inner needs. In Roger's and Knowles' position, learners have an innate need to be self-directing in the sense of determining their own destination and purposes.

Knowles made the distinction between pedagogy (the art and science of teaching children) and andragogy (the art and science of teaching adults) as a key issue in how adults learn. This distinction is used to argue that pedagogy is inappropriate for work with adult learners. He argues that in some crucial dimensions (self concept, experience, social roles and orientation to learning) children learn

differently from adults: adults have an innate desire to self-direct whereas children are more passive in this respect; unlike children, adults have a vast reservoir of experience to draw on; adults have expanding social roles, which provide the impetus to learn, whereas a child's role is more limited and circumscribed; the orientation of adults to learning is a problem-centred rather than the subject-centred one which children are familiar with. The emphasis on self-direction, therefore, suggests a facilitative role for the educator who is responsible for resourcing and constructing a suitable learning environment. Moreover, this learning environment has to be a supportive and comfortable one in which individuals experience positive self respect; learners resist learning when their ideas and beliefs are not given credence.

The distinction between pedagogy and andragogy received a good deal of criticism and led to Knowles modifying his position substantially (see Youngman, 1986; Griffin, 1983). It over asserts the importance of individuals giving meaning to their experience and downplays the wider structural forces which construe meaning in that it has no theory of ideology. From a feminist perspective, andragogy was clearly (and inadequately) based on a male model of self-actualisation (Fraser, 1995). Some attempts to resuscitate this perspective for critical learning have been made. Brookfield (1993) argues that self-directed learning, if interpreted politically, could play an important role in developing a rationale for critical practice. If self-direction is to be meaningful, it has to involve struggle to control the definitions, processes and the evaluation of learning. The political nature of self-direction requires that certain conditions are met and resources put into place which also involve political struggle. In a culture which is highly controlling, a fully self-directed form of learning would challenge taken-

for-granted positions.

In some respects, Brookfield's argument for a political understanding of self-directed learning has parallels with the autodidact tradition which was self-directing and, frequently, highly political. However, the strength of the autodidact tradition was often because the individual man or woman was stimulated by, and involved with, a wider movement for change. The dominant ethos of self-directed learner is clearly very different today. That is not to suggest, however, that the meaning of self-directed learning cannot be stretched outwards to connect with issues of power and control.

The liberal ideology of self-directing adults and a more collective and political one associated with radical education are not, however, altogether compatible. The apolitical and individual focus of the former and the collective orientation of radical education begin from very different starting points and purposes. Brookfield's argument may, however, have strategic value for those working in an unsympathetic institutional environment. Having said that, the dominant view on self-direction is individualistic, astructural and apolitical in its analysis and is, in its common meaning, not very helpful for understanding learning in struggle. Indeed, the association of struggle with conflict and the clash of ideas is anathema to the humanistic perspective on how adults learn.

### **Non-formal adult learning and popular struggles**

In non-formal learning contexts we can distinguish between deliberative, reactive and implicit learning according to the degree of intentional purpose involved (Eraut, 2000). Eraut prefers the term non-formal to that of informal because of the

colloquial use of the latter, to refer to styles of dress, meetings etc. Deliberative learning involves the kind of intentional learning cycle described by Dewey. That is, it involves explicit learning activities through a process of reflection on experience whereas implicit learning, at the other end of the continuum, involves no such intention to learn. Reactive learning lies between the two 'and is used to describe situations where the learning is explicit but takes place almost spontaneously in response to recent, current or imminent situations without any time being set aside for it.' (Eraut, 2000: 12)

Popular struggles can involve all three forms of learning. The case studies (discussed later) highlight the type of opportunities for learning that occurred and which could have provided opportunities for more deliberative learning efforts. The important point is that they create opportunities for learning which are often overlooked or are underdeveloped. We have to recognise, of course, that this claim is contingent on a variety of factors, not least the struggle itself. Popular struggles come in various forms, shapes, sizes, life-spans and, consequently, with differing amounts of human and material resources. The more ephemeral, short-lived ones probably offer limited learning opportunities.

Foley's (1999) research suggests, however, that 'some of the most powerful learning occurs as people struggle against oppression, as they struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it.' (1999: 2) Having said that, their potential may go unrecognised and what is learned can easily be left implicit, forgotten, or reinterpreted in quite different terms. Pratkanis and Turner (1996) make the distinction between grassroots movements which foster 'deliberative persuasion' and those which

promote 'propaganda'. The former involves democratic processes of debate, reflection and critical analysis in the production of knowledge and action and the latter mobilises support on the basis of sloganising and prejudice. Popular struggles may involve contradictory learning experiences which are educative and maleducative. The potential for the latter creates a good rationale for the role of the educator to make a positive contribution to learning from struggle.

### **Voice and tacit knowledge**

Struggles enable people to articulate a position which may have been marginalised or unheard in the main channels of communication or representation in society. They create a platform for voices to emerge, for debate to be aired and for common interests to be identified. bell hooks puts it more forcefully, 'moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonised, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and growth possible.' (1994: 186)

The process of 'coming to voice' is a basis for the sharing of tacit knowledge amongst members of a movement. In the process of articulating and sharing knowledge, people may reflect on their own experience and that of others. Creating the opportunities for this is, therefore, part of a process of keeping 'the channels of communication open', as Raymond Williams puts it.

Wainwright (1994: 52) draws on Polyani's definition that tacit knowledge is 'those things we know but cannot tell'. She argues that the women's movement helped women to make explicit their tacit knowledge which provided for the 'collective, transformative action of a knowing but not all-knowing kind.' (1994:

79). It involved a recognition that women's knowledge had been either devalued or unrecognised. Eraut (2000) makes the point, however, that tacit knowledge is not as straightforward as it may seem; while 'tacit knowledge is not a sideshow but central to important, everyday action', the actual process of eliciting it can be problematic. In Wainwright's definition, it is paradoxically both something 'we cannot tell' but also which can be told in an appropriate social context. The attribute of tacit knowledge is in the knower, inscribed in his/her experience, rather than a quality of the knowledge itself. The resolution of this paradox is, presumably, in the motivation to share knowledge which the movement recognises and supports.

The difficulty, also, with the type of definition Wainwright advances is in relation to its implications for the role of the educator. If tacit knowledge is in the experience of the knower, what does the educator do? In one respect, the answer would seem to be parallel to the type of argument advanced by the humanist position discussed earlier. That is, the role of the educator is to create the right type of environment so that people can articulate their experience and recognise the knowledge inscribed in it. In what terms, however, can the maleducative role of experience be challenged? Is the tacit knowledge and experience of those who have been silenced then privileged?

The discourse of voice is problematic and can lead to a relativist pedagogy where all voices are equally valued despite their limitations (Moore and Muller, 1999). Whilst coming to voice is valuable, equally important, however, is the business of ensuring voices are heard and interrogated. It is not necessary to be over committed to a rationalist position to recognise that some stories and accounts are

more convincing than others. The tacit knowledge of the knower has to be differentiated and assessed. To avoid the potential relativism of all voices being equal the educator has a responsibility to engage critically with the limits of experience.

However, if we understand tacit knowledge as an epistemological category - as an attribute of types of knowledge - then the key issue is the process of abstracting and generalising it from its embodiment in particular practices. That is, the problem is one of making explicit the knowledge that lies behind particular claims and practices people undertake. Facilitating this process would ideally involve someone in the role of an 'outsider' and 'insider' - that is, someone who both knows what the struggle involves, as an 'insider' would know, but is also 'outside' in the sense of not being directly involved so that they have some distance from it and can provide a critical but supportive perspective. The role of the 'outsider' can then be to mirror back what seems to be happening and why. Whilst it may not be possible to get at all the tacit knowledge people possess, some can be elucidated and inferred from action and experience.

In Eraut's research, which focussed on the very different context of the workplace, he found that people were more able to articulate their experience, and make sense of alternative perspectives, when their tacit knowledge was informed by more systematic reading and study:

Such educational experiences were not simply making tacit knowledge explicit, but using some of their tacit knowledge as one component of a more developed, as well as more explicit,

understanding of their working situation. (Eraut, 2000:18)

In popular struggles, the exposure to radical and critical discourses of knowledge can provide the vocabulary that enables groups to link their tacit understandings with explicit knowledge claims. Where the opportunity to mix experience and theory is missing, then the potential for learning may be lost. To minimise this the educator has an important role to play.

### **Context and content of learning**

Once we begin to think about the context of popular struggle as the site of learning, we need to include what is distinctive about it in our understanding of the learning process and its curriculum. An important characteristic of struggle is that, to one degree or another, it is in conflict with either official knowledge, state policy, the forces of 'law and order', capitalist institutions, the media, dominant institutions or conventional cultural practices. It involves developing a critical consciousness which goes against the grain of 'common sense', habits, values, attitudes, identities and patterns of behaviour.

It is useful to keep in mind Freire's (1972) distinction between modes of consciousness: magical (a kind of fatalistic understanding), naive (a surface level understanding) and critical consciousness (an understanding of relevant and appropriate wider social processes and forces which help make sense of events). These types of consciousness co-exist in that we may have a magical understanding of some things (for example, how the internet works) which co-exist with a naive knowledge of the workings of a computer combined with a critical awareness of the role of this technology in global capitalism. The point is,

that people can occupy all three levels of consciousness simultaneously.

Popular struggles can create critical consciousness in specific areas of life. That is, they create possibilities for connecting the specific and the local with a deeper understanding of wider processes of control and systems of authority. In challenging dominant understandings and discourses they involve unlearning the previously taken-for-granted which may have been understood in a magical or naive way. This process is often contrary to a more common sense view, that learning occurs by adding to what is already known and the learning process is sub-divided into a sequence of logically related steps with each building on the preceding one. In contrast, critical learning involves unpacking previous maleducative experience which block the development of an alternative outlook, values and desires.

Popular struggles for unrealisable aims may simply teach people they can make little real difference and that they are as well looking after themselves rather than aspiring to the common good. For example, the failure of the miners' strike in 1984-85 resulted in various divisions, recriminations and fragmented groups in its aftermath. Foley (1999) argues, that the development of critical consciousness has to involve exposure to emancipatory discourses and ideologies which provide a means of securing an alternative identity and basis for action. This would confirm Eraut's point, made earlier, that systematic study is an important way of developing tacit knowledge.

In relation to the content of learning, Welton (1995) argues for a 'critical theory of adult learning' which occurs in struggle. Using the work of Habermas, he

claims that there are three types of knowledge-constitutive interests; instrumental, interpretive and critical which are relevant to differentiating the status of knowledges that occur in struggle. Instrumental learning involves acquiring 'useful knowledge' which enables people to undertake activities competently, for example, the skill and ability to write a leaflet, letter or poster. Interpretive learning is about understanding the ontological condition, what people are like, what they desire, what they mean by various activities and so on. It involves understanding what motivates people and what they cherish. For example, the words inscribed on the leaflet produced through instrumental learning involve communicating a meaning, an interest, an issue that is important to a movement of people. Critical learning involves questioning and challenging others as well as ourselves. It involves identifying the interests that may be masked and making explicit the role of power in everyday affairs. It also involves a critical reflexivity. As Newman (2000: 304) comments, 'it helps us strive for a meta-awareness in which we are not only more acutely aware of ourselves and of the world around us, we become aware of our awareness.' This form of learning involves unlearning what was previously understood and how we came to our former consciousness. In this sense, it is a deeply political form of learning in that it opens up the possibility of different choices and courses of action to be made.

The influence of Habermas connects with and reinforces the Freirian theme of dialogue as central to a critical theory of adult learning. For Habermas, the condition of undistorted communication between different parties is important for genuine learning to occur. Similarly, for Freire (1972), dialogue as an open exchange - free of attempts to manipulate - is integral to the process of creating knowledge. Dialogue in this case is more than a discussion or an attempt to win

an argument in that it has both an epistemological and pedagogical status. It is about generating new knowledge through a process of knowledge production arising from the clash of different points of view, experiences and values. In other words, it involves a recognition of difference and the possibility of arriving at common understandings. In the context of a ‘culture of silence’, participants in Freirian ‘culture circles’ are encouraged to find a voice through a systematised pedagogy which involves deconstructing generative themes relevant to people’s lives. When participants in the culture circle begin ‘to say their word’ they start the process of making their world.

Foley (1999) offers a framework for analysing learning in social action based on his own case study research.

Political economy		Micro politics
Educational interventions	Emancipatory social struggles	
Learning	discursive practices	Ideologies

Foley: 1999: 9

The above framework is a helpful one for organising our understanding of learning in popular struggles. Foley starts from the centrality of struggle against domination in people's experience. History is characterised by attempts of people to learn their way out of exploitative and repressive relations. These types of relations are constructed economically, politically and through ideologies and discourses which help people generate meaning. People learn the possibility to create new social relationships in local contexts which are shaped by broader economic and political influences. The possibilities in this context for learning are ambiguous and contradictory. At its best learning and education is concerned with making connections between the micro politics of struggle and the wider political, economic factors and ideological and discursive practices which exist. (see Foley, 1999; Newman, 1999) They can help people to develop emancipatory discourses and ideologies which sustain their action and link local concerns with wider issues.

Foley suggests the above framework raises various questions which help us think about the dynamics of learning in struggle:

- \* what forms do education and learning take?
- \* what are the crucial features of the political and economic context? How do these shape education and learning?
- \* what are the micro-politics of the situation?
- \* what are the ideological and discursive practices and struggles of social movement actors and their opponents? To what extent do these practices and struggles facilitate or hinder emancipatory learning and action?

\* what does all this mean for education? What interventions are possible and helpful?

(1999: 10)

These questions will inform the case studies analysed below.

### **Case studies**

The account below is based on four case studies which are numbered A,B,C and D. I will first explain the basis of their selection and the issues this raises.

Cases A and B are set in the context of the miners' strike 1984-85 and reflect on work with an unemployed group and the Lothian Womens' Support Group. The former is an example of how the experience of the miners' struggle became a learning resource for an unemployed group. The latter is, in one sense, a case study of an alliance between an 'old' and a 'new' movement and how the extension of the struggle, from the point of production in the workplace extended out into communities and in the process involved women and families. The presentation of these two cases is different from the others, partly because they draw on my own experience and partly because they involve an explicit educational role. Cases C and D are summarised from a book I co-edited (see Crowther, Martin and Shaw, 1999). Case C refers to a Glasgow Housing Dampness Campaign and is based on interviews undertaken with two of its activists (Martin and McCormack, 1999). Case D is drawn from the reflections of an activist involved in the anti-poll tax campaign, who identifies the significant learning generated through the experience of one local group (Dickie, 1999). Whilst all the cases are different they have one important element in common in that they involve struggles against material exploitation and oppression.

The case studies create an opportunity to relate the hypothesis of the study to an empirical context. Their relevance has to be judged in terms of illuminating the opportunities for learning that occurred in specific contexts and cannot make any claims beyond this. They are limited in another sense as well. They are interpretations based on accounts which may not reflect wider experiences of those involved. Case A is largely based on my work with the group of unemployed young men in which I had the responsibility to generate learning activity. The claims made are based on my interpretation of this work. In the other cases the learning opportunities occur spontaneously in the context of the struggle. While case B is also based on my role, the voice and experience of the women involved is more clearly evident. The other cases involve an interview with two highly committed community activists reflecting on their experience. The fourth case study draws on the reflections of one anti-poll tax activist involved in a local campaign group.

The cases have been selected for a number of reasons. First, they all involve struggles that provide an opportunity for consideration of their educative potential. Their inclusion is not based on chance. It is based on their value to illuminate the potential of learning in struggle and some of the issues involved. Second, because I had different types of involvement with the cases the bringing together of the accounts draws on my own interests and experience. Jean Barr makes a plea 'for more such case studies and for forms of research (and writing) which are unapologetically value laden, clearly committed and do not fear the 'I' word' (2000: 312). Third, they highlight the role of 'old', 'new' and urban movements in a range of activities in a Scottish context and the contradictory aspects of

learning in movements. Fourth, they demonstrate, in diverse ways, popular struggles acting back on the forces which constrain and limit people's lives. Fifth, they also illuminate - more by default rather than example - the opportunity for adult and community education workers to connect with and contribute towards maximising their educative potential.

The cases have their limitations. None of them started out as case studies for research and do not therefore conform to any explicit methodological criteria of case study research. In this sense, they are not research case studies but case materials which are interpreted in terms of the research interest of this thesis. All involved me as a committed educator. In the first two as a tutor and in the latter as an academic engaged in writing but working in a university setting. Because the former involved me in an educator's role it is perhaps worth making some further comment about how this had an impact on the subsequent account. The dilemma it raises, is that being involved yet having to make an assessment of the impact of my involvement is never altogether satisfactory. As Kafka (quoted in Collins, 1977) points out, 'only a party to a case can really judge, but being a party, it cannot judge'.

In case A my reflections on the value of what was learned may not correspond with those involved. We no doubt held very different values about what was important. In addition, there is little way of corroborating my story of this activity. It was my political interest in the issue that made the connection between the interests of the unemployed group and the miners' strike. In order to make a good film I was also very concerned to make it visually interesting and ensure we had a good finished product. Whilst this involved workshops and on-the-job training to

pick up the instrumental skills necessary for making the film, I did not organise in a more structured way time to reflect on any of the complex issues raised by the struggle. In one sense I avoided this for fear it might alienate the group. In another, because it seemed to me that the real 'teachers' in this case would be those with the experience. I left much of what they were to learn about the miners' struggle and the issues it raised to those they talked to. The subjects of the film were the 'teachers' of the film crew. Taking the film crew to see two dramatic performances about the miners' strike was about as far as any opportunity for other serious reflection went.

In case B, I was employed to work with a regional Women's Support Group in the immediate aftermath of the miners' strike in 1985 to produce a book about their experience. This gave me an opportunity to talk with them about what they had learned during the dispute. Whilst a number of interesting issues are raised in this study it does have its limitations. Before agreeing to work with the group I did raise the issue of whether or not they thought it was appropriate for me to do it and that it might be better done by a women. They argued that the issue of gender did not really matter and that during the dispute they worked alongside the men. We agreed to go ahead. I am aware on reflection, however, that there are more intimate areas of home and family life I refrained from discussing. For example, there is no discussion of sexual relations and how they may have been effected during this period. Whilst the experience of the strike clearly sharpened their critical consciousness about wider economic and political issues its impact on the sexual politics of the home is addressed but not very systematically. Moreover, cases A and B are situated in a different historical period. My own awareness and interest in the radical nature of education was also very much tied up with class

politics and would have reflected those particular interests. Cases C and D are also based on personal reflections from those very involved in a dispute. Their experience is no doubt accentuated because of their commitment and probably does not reflect the experience of those who were less involved or on the fringes of their campaigns.

Despite the above reservations and qualifications the cases do illuminate the opportunities for learning and the 'curriculum' of struggle. Perhaps the measure of their usefulness in achieving this illumination is the most important way of judging their value.

### **Cases A and B: political and economic background**

The national context for the coal miners' strike 1984-85 is reasonably well known. The Thatcher government's energy policy sought to reduce dependency on coal power sources by switching more to nuclear power. Cheap coal imports, and a desire to settle old conflicts with the miners' union, led to a rundown of coal fields and the staged confrontation with the National Mine workers' Union. The dominant discourse in which the programme of closure was justified involved claims about uneconomic pits which could not keep on being subsidised.

The National Union of Mine workers and other sympathetic unions, political organisations, radical newspapers and journalists, miners' support groups, some academics, cultural workers including theatre companies, entertainers and singers provided alternative sources of information and ideas to counteract the official line on the strike. Williams' (1989) argues the four key words of the strike which there was deeply divided views on were as follows: the rights of management to

manage; how economic was defined; the importance of community; and the meaning of law-and-order. These informed the main ideological disputes and discursive terrain of the struggle.

The industrial struggle of the miners for their jobs rapidly became a community struggle as many of the places where the closure programme was envisaged had been one-employer towns and villages. The loss of jobs in the coal industry would, consequently, have a major impact on communities. The struggle was eventually lost and the subsequent rundown of the industry was even greater than officially envisaged. In Scotland, for example, there are no publicly owned mines in operation.

Whilst there have been some accounts of the educational work done with mining communities during this period (Fryer, 1990) these were the exception rather than the rule. In Lothian Region, for example, most adult and community educators had little involvement in the strike *in their role as educators*. Where support work was undertaken, this was largely through personal and political affiliations with the miners' cause, rather than as an aspect of educational engagement. That is, it involved activities such as fund raising and providing rooms and facilities, where possible. Despite the importance of this type of work, it did not seek to contribute towards the learning potential that the struggle created. I was fortunate to be provided with such an opportunity, as a part-time adult education tutor, working with a group of unemployed young men at Paradykes Community Centre, Loanhead, Mid Lothian. This work also led to another project involving the Lothian Womens' Support Group.

## Case A

Paradykes Community Centre is located in a council house estate in Loanhead, Mid Lothian. Loanhead was a one-industry town with most of the employment based on the coal industry. During the 1980s, like many other places, it was feeling the bite of recession and rising unemployment, particularly amongst young people. As a freelance adult education tutor, with experience of making 'socially useful' videos, I was invited to work with a group of unemployed young men. It was expected that a video project would provide a diversion from the usual recreational use of the Community Centre by the group (such as playing pool) and might boost their confidence and skills in the process.

At my first meeting of the group, we agreed to make a film about the impact of the miners' strike on life in Loanhead, which I steered them towards. I was interested in the group thinking about their own personal experiences in the wider context of its political economy and the miners' strike seemed to fit that bill. By making sense of what was happening to the miners the group might draw a parallel to their own experience of unemployment. To my surprise, in our initial discussions about the subject it was clear that they were not sympathetic to the miners' cause. Their analysis of the issue tended to be very parochial. They held the view that having a job meant the miners had little to grumble about. The local Bilston Glen pit was regarded as the 'jewel in the crown' of the Scottish collieries and was, therefore, not under immediate threat (the pit closed shortly after the strike ended). My aim for the project was to teach basic film making skills whilst also developing solidarity or, at least, an understanding of why the struggle was important in communities like Loanhead. In addition, it seemed that the miners had little or no contact with the unemployed group so it was a useful opportunity for them to

make connections in a common cause.

The video project was a typical short-term piece of work and followed a conventional process of people learning skills to make a film. After each sessions filming, we decided what was worth using and what was not. Sometimes this process involved miners who were interested in finding out what we were doing and seeing themselves on film. This was later technically edited by me in a video film studio. There were no dropouts from the 'film crew' during the project.

Whilst the process of making the film was conventional the context was not. We moved our base from the Community Centre into the local Miners' Welfare Club which gave an opportunity to get to know miners in the club, find out what was going on and interview them. The 'curriculum' of the film was the authentic voice of the miners because it gave them an opportunity to state their case. In addition, local councillors were interviewed as well as residents and shopkeepers in Loanhead. In recording these marginalised voices the film crew were be able to find out what was happening to the strikers and how it impacted on life in the community. Why the strike had started and why it was important was our starting point for interviewing people. Many of the miners' stories involved lost jobs, accounts of intimidation, police brutality, problems of debt, divided families, broken marriages, hardship, acts of generosity, acts of camaraderie, support from strangers and so on. The end of the project coincided with the end of the strike and a return to work for those still with jobs. On a very emotional Saturday evening at a benefit night in the local Miners' Club, the film was shown to a packed and appreciative audience of miners, their families and local people. All the members of the group attended the presentation and received a huge ovation and

thanks for their effort.

On the positive side, the project created an opportunity for the unemployed group to operate in a public sphere which the strike had generated. They learned about the strike from the direct experience of the miners as well as attending two plays that I was able to get free tickets to which portrayed the miners' struggle in sympathetic terms. The voice of the miners, whilst clearly partial, was a counterbalance to the government and media portrayal of the struggle. The personal troubles of those involved in the struggle was made sense of in terms of a government which was seeking to tame the trade unions and had a score to settle with the miners' union. The deeper issues of the struggle, as referred to earlier by Williams (1989), were never far from the surface in the discussions with the miners. Having said that, the opportunity to systematise and develop a more rigorous educational effort around these events did not occur.

Whilst some instrumental skills were learned through workshops which I provided and in a 'hands-on' manner, interpretive and critical learning was acquired non-formally in reactive and implicit ways rather than overtly developed. It is probably wishful thinking to say their experience had any lasting impact on members of the group. The reception of their video, undoubtedly, raised their self esteem, however short lived that might have been. Confidence was built amongst members of the group. On the more negative side, this was a limited project for a short period of time. The curriculum of the project never developed in terms of any formal study or analysis of events. Whatever was learned may have been rapidly lost without further reinforcement and development.

The above project, nevertheless, demonstrated the potential for the strike to become a learning resource for the group and a way of building links and solidarity between the two. It certainly altered, at the time, some of the perceptions of the unemployed group in relation to the strike and its causes and, in equal proportion, their sympathies for the miners' cause. It also provided a platform to help voice the miners' concerns and an opportunity to make a contribution to their struggle. Whilst this project generated elements of *learning* and an act of *solidarity* I suspect much more could have been done. The casual nature of my own employment as an adult education tutor limited the scope of my own role and time that could have been spent working with them.

### **Case B**

After the work with the Paradykes Unemployed Group, I was approached to work as an adult literacy tutor with the Lothian Women's Support Group who wanted to write an account of their experience. The aim was to publish a book to highlight the victimisation of miners unable to return to work and also act as a fund raiser (see Lothian Women's Support Group, 1986).

It was agreed that the book would be structured around the collective experiences of the local area support groups which made up the Lothian Women's Support Group. It would be a collection of different accounts from groups which had been active in Roslin, Dalkeith, Prestonpans, Loanhead, Musselburgh and Penicuik. Altogether sixteen women were involved in the project. The process aimed to allow individual experiences to be heard in the context of the *collective* nature of the struggle.

In this study the learning processes which occurred were organically related to the experience of struggle. Learning to run a soup kitchen, organise parties and holidays for large groups of families and children; learning to distrust the news and answer back; learning to speak at fund raising events to large and small audiences and learning to act together on picket lines were all elements of their experience which developed deliberate as well as reactive and implicit forms of learning. Whilst they may not have been systematic their power was their rootedness in the everyday life of the women. It brought them into experiences which challenged taken-for-granted views about the role of the police, the government and the media as well as the activities of professional services and the support of families, friends and communities - it also challenged their own view of what they were capable of doing.

The year of the strike turned their world upside down and in the process generated new understandings, values and perceptions. The union and other sympathetic groups and political organisations provided a wealth of counter-information in terms of leaflets, videos, books, news sheets, plays and so on which helped participants in the struggle to reinforce and develop their understanding. This was the curriculum of the struggle. In contrast, my main educational role was in organising the process of producing the text for their book by discussing what was significant and what was not, in relation to their experience. It helped to create a context for reflection and assessment of what happened to them and, more positively, what they achieved through their own actions. When the text was produced a graphics designer helped with the layout of the book which included poems, children's stories, photographs and memorabilia from the strike. A grant from the former Lothian Regional Council was given and a 1000 copies of the

book were printed and sold. When the strike finished the unity of the support group, was put under pressure by an emerging division between those whose husbands had returned to work and those who could not.

Chapter nine of the book looked at how the strike had affected those involved and some of the comments made are worth reproducing in greater length. The impact of the struggle had, for some, a holistic impact on their life, orientation and values:

Pre-strike days you'd worry about holidays and money in the bank. Now I dinnae look at life in the same way. I dinnae bother about savings. If I've got money now I'll go for a night out...I don't think I'll go back to those stupid days when things mattered more than people. Money is no my God anymore.  
(Mary)

The process of coming to voice was often fuelled by anger and emotion:

There was one time when Jimmy was away picketing and I was hanging the curtains in the living room. The doorbell went...it was a policeman from Dalkeith and I knew it was to tell me he had been lifted. Before I might just have answered him or shut the door, but this time I got my tuppenceworth in. I ranted and raved at him and I've never done that before. (Eleanor)

The need to support their families on less income was addressed collectively through organising in the community. Raising funds involved speakers

prepared to go to public situations and plea their case. In opening up a public space for women in the strike, the support groups created a platform for some to take on active and high profile roles which they had not previously entertained:

We did things during the strike that you never knew you were capable of. When Davy was in Saughton [prison] I was asked to speak at the Usher Hall with Tony Benn. There were hundreds of people there. I couldnae remember lifting my eyes off the paper to tell the truth, I was so nervous. Looking back now I'm awfy proud that I had the nerve to do that. (Jean)

The contradictions between the experience of the strike and its representation in the media, created a steep learning curve which enabled people to discover the interests that were represented, and those which were not, as well as having the confidence in their own voices to speak back. Moreover, this experience provided insights which could be extended to make sense of developments outside of the immediate issues of the strike:

I wasn't a member of the Labour Party and I didn't think much about politics. I don't ken much more now though I'm more aware. I'm just more interested in what's happening. Take for instance the papers, before I'd read all the scandal bits. I still do but I also read the political bits and I can sit and take it in, *and question what's been written*. (Margaret, my emphasis)

I'm a lot more involved now in anything to do with the working class. When I see things on TV I just take it all with a pinch of salt. Before I'd have believed it all. (Ann)

The struggle involved various aspects of critical learning: it sharpened perceptions of the state, the role of the police and the politics of the media; it challenged some sense of what life was all about; the logistics of running soup kitchens involved difficult feats of organisational and instrumental learning; it also enabled individuals to find a depth to their own abilities which had not been publicly visible or valued. Moreover, as key people in the home and in the upbringing of their children the meaning of the strike was no doubt extended into the lives and common sense of their children. The production of the book in a way mirrored an essential feature of the struggle in that it provided the women with an opportunity to voice their experiences.

The public role of the support groups provided the context for women and their families to play an active role in the strike and extend the nature of the struggle into communities in ways which had not been anticipated. Above all, it created a critical awareness. Without further opportunities, or systematic educational work, much of this might have been lost. One of the limitations of learning in movements has to be related to what follows on when the movement subsides and how the learning it generates can be consolidated.

How much of the learning was carried on is difficult to measure and the lasting impact it had on domestic relations would be a research project of its own. Their experience did, however, create an appetite for learning which was not immediately

lost and led, for example, to the provision of a short, work based education initiative. Some of the women were members of the former National Union of Public Employees, but were not shop stewards and had little opportunity to participate in courses run by the union which were mainly targeted at lay officials. In discussion with them, a 'communications course' was organised which was largely aimed at their ability to represent their interests when dealing with their management. A good number worked for the regional authority as low-paid, home helps. This eventually led to the organisation of a course, supported by Lothian Regional Council, to provide communication classes for home helps as part of their work and became the forerunner of other work based education schemes in the local authority. (Crowther and MacAskill, 1991) Whilst this intervention was a helpful one it offered only a limited opportunity for educational work. Much more along this direction of extending the organisational capacity of the women, in the sphere of work, would have been desirable.

### **Case C**

The wider context of this case is the inadequacy of public housing in post-war Britain and the relationship between health and the environment. The case originates in the activities of housing tenants, primarily women and mothers, living in Easthall, an outer-city housing estate of Glasgow with a notorious reputation for poor housing, a low level of amenities, services and numerous 'social problems'.

This is an example of a popular struggle which began from the grievances of a few women concerned about the health of their children and damp houses. The 'cognitive praxis' generated by the campaign challenged the medical discourse

which blamed the lifestyle of tenants as the source of the problem. The tenant's struggle was against both the medical discourse which pathologised the problem and the political apathy of the local authority. The learning processes it generated is narrated by two of the key activists. In it, they describe their own motivation, the formation of a community campaign, research into the conditions of dampness and housing and their subsequent efforts to publicise their findings and pressurise Glasgow City Council into supporting their aims.

*Helen Martin and Cathy McCormack*

Both activists came to be involved in their community campaign against dampness through their experience and concern as mothers trying to bring up children in difficult circumstances. In the following account they speak for themselves with some interspaced commentary:

*Helen Martin*

At the age of six my son Scott was diagnosed as being asthmatic. As a mother you become totally paranoid that you've created a problem and that there is nothing you can do about it. I felt powerless. I was being continually blamed for creating the child's health problem because I wasn't doing the things I was supposed to do at home - like stop smoking or keeping my flat warm. Financial constraints didn't allow me to feed my electric meter any more than £25 a week, which was only heating the living room. Being in the community hall and listening to other women talking about how their kids were suffering similar problems, I realised that it couldn't just be our fault - there must

be a different reason - and I became active in the dampness group. It was a very powerful experience. None of us were members of any political organisation. Our motivation was that we were mothers and our children were suffering. (1999: 254)

*Cathy McCormack*

I never related my health problems to my living conditions until I got married and moved to Easthall and had children of my own. The bedrooms were so damp that when we stripped off the wall paper the pattern was imprinted on the bare wall. When they were born, my children were bouncing with health, but once in our cold damp flat the doctor became a regular visitor.

Although my children were breast-fed, they always had thrush and my health visitor had never heard of this before. It was then that my own personal fight with Glasgow District Council really started. At that particular time, the health problems associated with damp houses weren't really seen as the issue. The real issue was who was to blame for the dampness. (1999: 254-255)

'Listening to other women talking', as Helen Martin puts it, was the basis for her own recognition that her experience and knowledge were valid and could not simply be dismissed. Yet their understanding of the problem of dampness did not figure in the official definition of the problem and what could be done about it. To challenge the way this problem was defined, the tenants' group started their own

research, to construct their own view of 'really useful knowledge', that was pertinent to their circumstances. The collective organisation of the tenants, provided the opportunity to link their 'private troubles' with a 'public issue' and fuelled their anger to find out more about its causes. The strength of feeling generated was an important motivating resource for learning and acting; reason was fuelled by emotion and, rather than being mutually exclusive, they combined to provide the synergy for collective action. In the process of organising they also built support in the community and earned the legitimacy to speak with a collective voice that challenged official explanations of dampness:

*Helen Martin*

In the beginning, people were afraid or ashamed to admit they had a damp house because of the stigma and blame attached. Then in 1984, at our annual general meeting, angry tenants demanded that finding a long-term solution to damp housing should become our number one priority. As a result, the anti-dampness task force came into being. We did another door to door survey and found that 76% of the tenants were affected by dampness. The survey also revealed the extent of the health problems and exposed the asthma epidemic and the common dependency of young children on inhalers. We were no longer speaking just as members of an Association but as the collective voice for the community. (1999: 255)

*Cathy McCormack*

Our struggle was very difficult because we knew we would have to produce the evidence to prove that it was not poor people to blame for the dampness. In fact the cost of heating added to people's poverty. We were very fortunate in that the Technical Services Agency had just been established. They were a user-controlled community technical aid centre and the architects were independent of the City Council. They were really a godsend. We enlisted their help to explain to us the real cause of the housing problems. They carried out an in-depth survey of our flats and issued us with a long, detailed technical report which confirmed our common sense approach. They also taught us the technical language so that we could translate it into a language in tune with our own common sense. This exercise was a powerful tool in our campaign. It meant that the experts of our landlord could no longer try and bamboozle us with their technical arguments. We could also explain the technical problems to tenants in a language which they could understand. (1999: 256)

The health research project provided the evidence which further legitimated their experience and also illustrated the importance and usefulness of sympathetic professionals with whom they could work. A key ingredient in this process was that the tenants kept control over the overall direction of the research, and the purposes it served, so that a mutually productive relationship occurred. It created one of the largest research projects conducted into the relationship between housing and health and involved some 250 families co-operating with the project.

In redefining the problem, away from the official explanation of lifestyles, the tenants were then able to reconstruct an alternative way forward, which sought to redesign the structural problems inherent in the design of the houses. A programme of investigating alternative housing designs, which would maximise solar energy, was developed collaboratively with academics, tenants, and students with an interest in housing and health. This eventually led to a European project application to fund the new housing design. However, in pursuing this development, the tenants had to enlist the financial support of a reluctant Glasgow City Council. To build a wide base of support for their project within local communities the tenants devised an educational programme for tenants.

*Helen Martin*

There were a quarter of a million people in Glasgow and an estimated ten million nationwide living in damp houses, so we organised a conference to try and enlist the support of other tenants' organisations. They were as desperate as us for a solution, so they in turn put pressure on their elected council representatives to give us the money.

Unfortunately, the council had other priorities in mind. After all, they were about to host the 1990 European City of Culture, an award which the tenants in Glasgow felt they richly deserved. So in 1989 we decided we would capitalise on this and write a play about our 'years of culture' - the sort that grows on the walls. The motive was to try and shame the powers that be in

Glasgow and keep the results of the health research on the boil. At first the idea was to perform a play, video it and send it round other communities. But other communities didn't want a video. They wanted us to come and perform. So Easthall had to establish a theatre company and we all became actors. (1999: 259)

*Cathy McCormack*

We enlisted the help of a professional writer to work with local people who then became active in the writing and acting. It took a year to plan, write and raise the thousands of pounds needed to travel round the other communities. There were so many requests that we had to do another tour.

The idea was to write a comedy about the problem that people could enjoy and see themselves in. We designed programmes for the play and published the results of the health survey on that instead - the play was called 'Dampbusters'. The main characters were *Aspergillus* and *Penicillium*, the two funguses who came to life and couldn't believe their luck that humans had built these houses which they were thriving on whilst the people were dying. (1999: 260)

*Helen Martin*

We had housing officials in the play and we called them their real names, but the Director of Architecture decided he was

going to stay in a flat in Easthall for a year. We sent him an invite to the play and, where possible, he made his officers attend 'Dampbusters'. The kids in the play were the councillors who were shouting and bawling and screaming at one another - just like weans would do. It was really powerful stuff.

Eventually, we got the money from the Council and the Solar Housing Project was completed in the summer of 1992. The heating bills were reduced to around £5 per week, the families who live in them are a lot happier and healthier and can now grow fruit instead of mushrooms and other fungi. (1999: 260)

As Cathy McCormack points out 'Easthall became a learning school for other tenant and professional organisations, students and academics - not just from Britain but from Europe and the Third World'. The success of their project also brought the tenants into bitter clashes with the ruling Labour Group. 'Rather than embrace the energy and aspirations of our community, they regarded us as some kind of threat and did everything in their power to keep closed every door we tried to open. It became obvious to us that they were terrified of people like us - not because we had any political power, but because uneducated people like us had become experts in understanding what we were talking about. When we talked, people listened'. The last comment from Helen Martin sums up the powerful educative experience involved, 'The struggle took over our lives, but it really opened up our minds'.

## Case D

In the early 1990s the flagship policy of the Thatcher administration was the poll tax. This was a flat rate tax and was established to replace the variable tax on properties collected through the local rate charge. The poll tax was introduced in Scotland a year before it became law in the rest of the UK. It led to collective opposition and became possibly the largest mass campaign of civil disobedience in modern British history - over 14 million people refused to pay (Hoggett and Burns, 1991/2). The movement was located in communities and eventually proved to be so unpopular it was replaced. The focus of opposition to the poll tax was locally based anti-poll tax groups. The following is based on the experience of one such group in Edinburgh, as recounted by Dickie (1999). His account of the learning generated amongst those involved in neighbourhood campaigns draws on the experience of the Broughton/Inverleith Anti-Poll tax group. He seeks to identify what was learnt from this social action and what *could* have been learned.

One of the key strategies of the Anti-Poll tax campaign was non-payment and this gave rise to the need for mutual support groups to form a network of resistance across the country. They functioned, in DeKeyser's (1999) terms, as 'multi-functional' groups for learning, the promotion of awareness, mutual support and emergency help. The activities of local groups involved disseminating counter-information to undermine the rationale for the poll tax and to provide advice about how it could be resisted and what support could be called on in cases of poindings and warrant sales (the forceful acquisition of resources for payment of the tax). Although the main element of this strategy was non-payment, disrupting the administration of its collection was also a key feature of the strategy of resistance. To build support for the campaign, regular public meetings were organised in

which the tax could be debated and strategies for resisting it discussed. The usual activity of campaign groups - producing leaflets, distributing them, putting up posters, joining demonstrations and producing a newsletter were all developed by the Broughton / Inverleith group.

Dickie points to the importance of the local nature of this national struggle:

The Broughton / Inverleith group often worked with other Anti-Poll tax groups and was a member of the Lothian Anti-Poll Tax Federation but members also valued their independence and the fact that they were first and foremost a local group. I had previously been active in the local branch of a national political party and in the local work of a development agency but this was a new level of commitment for me - to both cause and people (people who lived within walking distance of my home) (1999: 265)

The importance of locality added another meaning to his own commitment. The people involved in the campaign or affected by the poll tax were real and visible. The Broughton / Inverleith Anti-Poll Tax group constituted a community of resistance underpinned by a sense of place, a geographical space, which was part of the context in which social relationships occurred.

In identifying what was learned from the campaigns Dickie points to the following attitudes, skills and understanding (which are illustrated with quotes from his text):

\* **organisational skills:** 'I would structure a campaign committee a lot better so that there were clear channels of decision-making'.

\* **communication skills:** 'he understood how to deal with the press. He could call a news conference. He knew how to get the story out, how to get them to come'.

\* **awareness** about the way the political system works e.g. 'just who is it that our local councillors represent - us or their party?'

\* **building social relationships** and a sense of community: 'I've met a lot of people and it's really opened my eyes. I really like knowing other people in the area, people of different ages and different backgrounds'.

\* **accessing information:** 'there's so many things we could have found out if I had realised how much information we could have got...that we just assumed we wouldn't get'

\* **sharpened perceptions:** 'what it adds up to for me is a feeling that people want more power and they want collective power - collective *local* power'.

\* **changed attitudes:** 'I'm all in favour of direct action on such issues - pensioners getting on buses and demanding their rights for example. Before the Poll Tax that would never have occurred to me whereas now that's the first thing I think of'.

\* **self-confidence:** 'what I've learned is that if you're the meekest, quietest, most vulnerable person in the world you're actually more powerful in a way - as long as you're resolved to do something'.

(my summary, taken from Dickie, 1999: 268-269).

Much of the above reaffirms Welton's claim that popular struggles can be

understood as collective learning sites. In this case, it clearly generated collective opportunities for instrumental, interpretive, and critical learning which had an impact on personal development and growth. However, the main thrust of Dickie's article is that *much more* could have been learnt from the experience and that the gains made may have been lost because the learning during the struggle was never systematised or recorded. The implicit and reactive learning that characterised their experience was never explicitly recognised and therefore is not available to be capitalised on in the future. The success of the struggle and the dissipation of the organisation that it had generated, may mean 'the wheel' having to be reinvented, if necessary, in the future.

## **Discussion**

One point that applies to all the case studies is that much more educational work could have been done - perhaps with the exception of the dampness campaign. The learning generated in struggle created various possibilities for educational intervention which could have been taken further.

We need to recognise the contradiction that, on the one hand, the struggles which people participate offer a range of opportunities for learning but, on the other, many people find adult education unattractive and irrelevant to their daily lives. They are uninterested in it and are likely to remain so. Despite many well intentioned efforts by adult educators to attract people, the sense of frustration felt by their failure to respond to what is offered is sometimes evident. It is easy to assume people are 'apathetic' and have limited horizons. The point, however, is that this discourse marginalises the kind of hidden processes of learning identified in the cases discussed above.

The difficult task is to create a synergy between learning in popular struggles and more systematic educational work. This productive type of relationship characterised some of the best historical examples of learning in social movements. Popular struggles move people to act and generate learning processes, but they also frequently lack the resources and professional expertise to make these more deliberative and systematic. The important point, therefore, is to take the strengths of educational approaches to learning such as its resources, specialist expertise, rigour and methodology in a way that can be harnessed to the needs and interests of movements in struggle. To explore some of the issues this raises in greater depth five key themes are addressed: a) organic processes of collective learning; b) the embodied learner; c) voice and experience; d) the social motivation to learn and e) learning and social action.

*a) organic processes of collective learning*

A reasonable distinction between learning and education is that the former involves processes whereby people acquire knowledge, understanding and skills, whereas education is the process of intervention which seeks to systematise this by making the learning explicit and rigorous. Although it is important to distinguish between the two, the processes of learning and education in struggle sometimes blur into each other. This can occur naturally, in the sense that they are organically part of what people are seeking to achieve. Once decisions are taken to reflect on action the process of more deliberative educational activity is underway. In this context, therefore, people have little difficulty in seeing learning and education as relevant to their lives.

Different kinds of learning and education go on in popular struggles. People learn instrumental skills, they learn to make sense of themselves and others and they learn to think critically about the underlying causes which shape their experience. If adult education is to be relevant and connect with these type of learning processes it will need to make the connection with popular struggles as a site of learning. It needs to get close to popular struggles if it is to be of use to them. Much of the literature on adult learning, however, seems to get in the way of this. For example, the dominant humanistic perspective on adult learning seems to exclude the idea of conflict and collective struggle as a suitable context for learning. If learning is to be built on systematically then educational activity is necessary. The development of emancipatory discourses, as Foley (1999) puts it, can help to deepen and focus the organic processes which struggles generate.

Whilst the type of instrumental and interpretive learning that went on in the case studies varied, one unifying theme of this context for learning is that it involves a struggle against power. The miners and anti-poll tax campaigners struggled, amongst other things, against the power of the state and the dominant discourse generated by the media. Similarly, the housing campaigners struggled against the power of the local state and the medical discourse which pathologised their experience of ill health. Learning in popular struggle involves, inevitably, making sense of how power works and what can be done about it. An important contribution adult education can make in such contexts, which can facilitate learning and struggle, is to help make sense of the diverse way power works (Newman, 2000a). Understanding power can involve very different types of analysis at the macro, meso and micro level (see Clegg, 1989). In making sense of how power works adult education can contribute to making it visible and,

ultimately, to struggles acting back on it. As Meluccci comments, 'power that is recognisable is negotiable.' (1988: 250)

The argument for a more 'collective' understanding of adult learning, needs to begin from where people live, act and learn, working back from this to our role in encouraging and supporting learning. The curriculum for educational activity has to be built from lived experience and extend it. In Collins' terms, we need to '...explore the meanings, in context, and cognitive structures that adults bring to their learning endeavours.' (1991: 23) In order to get at the meanings and cognitive structures people bring to social action, we need to be both 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in popular struggles. In relation to the role of the 'insider', it may be useful to think of popular struggles as collective learning maps.

In adult learning theory, maps are used as an analogy about where people position themselves and others on their 'reality maps'. (see Rogers, 1993) These maps change partly due to everyday changes in the tasks we undertake but, more importantly, as new perceptions and understandings develop. Participating in popular struggles not only brings people into potentially new situations, and new social relations, it also opens up a range of new meanings which people have to make sense of. For people to change their thinking, as Youngman (1986) points out, they need both different ideas and different experiences, in that learning is both a theoretical and a practical activity. The collective experience of struggle involves individual's learning but as part of their involvement in a collective process. The struggle provides the collective learning map in which new realities emerge and new challenges are posed.

As Rogers suggests:

it may thus be argued that the process of learning, seen as a process of change in knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes, leading ultimately to changes in behaviour inevitably includes the redrawing of these reality maps as new significances are seen, new relevances are identified, new experiences build new expectations. Learning then consists in large part the learner moving items on their maps, bringing them into different relationships with other items and generally moving them from the outer zones into the more active, more immediate zones... (Rogers, 1993: 208)

The task of the educator, therefore, is to move closer to an understanding of the 'learning map' in order to begin learning from a position of strength, by knowing where the learner positions things on his/her map.

The obvious point, from the above, is that educators have to be out of their buildings in order to begin the process of connecting with popular movements. They have to develop an 'insiders' knowledge about what motivates people to act before they can respond appropriately to it as a sympathetic 'outsider'. The educator who assumes what the students/activists needs to know, will be of little practical use to their struggles.

*b) the 'embodied learner'*

How we perceive the identity of learners has important implications for

educational work. In this connection, it is important to recognise that 'learners' in popular struggles have an embodied identity. Firstly they are people with a grievance who have made a common cause. Their primary objective is change of one type or another and the learning that comes out of their activity is subordinate to what motivates them in the first place. This status has implications for what counts as relevant learning and what ends it serves. In educational institutions the identity of the learner is both specific and undifferentiated. It is specific in the sense that learners are defined by the institution as access students, Second Chance etc and are enrolled for a course of study. Whilst some may have 'special needs', the tendency is to think of them primarily as individual learners. In some instances, specific groups of learners may be targeted such as the unemployed, but the overall emphasis is on a homogeneous group which only have their status as learners in common.

Educators working with popular struggles have to resist the temptation to turn people into *disembodied* learners. The really important point is to change what we do, not simply recruit new students to provision. Worst still would be efforts to turn them into local entrepreneurs, subverting their own agenda, by our own implicit concerns and preoccupations deriving from the contexts and agencies we work for. It is also important to recognise that 'embodied learners', are also potential 'teachers' within and outwith their movement, of fellow citizens, tenants, workers, taxpayers, and so on, as the cases described earlier demonstrate.

### *c) voice and experience*

The experience of struggle created a context for people to recognise their concerns and interests and to find a voice in which to articulate it. The struggle over

dampness involved firstly a recognition that the tacit knowledge gained through their own experience had some validity and that the health problems experienced could not simply be explained by lifestyle choices. The women meeting together created the space for experience to be articulated and heard and knowledge to be generated 'from below'. In making their own voice heard the campaign also involved mastery of another voice - that of the professionals and their wisdom. The research campaign enabled the dampness group to assimilate the expertise of others and show themselves to be informed and knowledgeable. In hosting a conference on how the housing might be improved the tenants became the teachers of the experts.

Experience gained in struggle can be a powerful force. It can create the power to speak back. It should be recognised, however, that powerful experiences can motivate learning or misdirect it. Unless experience is interrogated its potential as a resource for learning may not be maximised. Rossing (1991) makes the distinction between direct experience, vicarious experience and guided experience. By direct experience he refers to those learning incidents which occur through direct involvement. Learning based on observation of others he terms vicarious experience. Guided experience refers to the more organised and systematic educational activities. His research indicated that one of the most powerful situations for learning occurs when individuals have direct experiences which make them reassess what they do. Sustained reflection on experiences in struggle can, therefore, be a powerful context for learning.

Learning in struggle can correspond to a more democratic, student-centred and adult like way of working. This challenges the idea that learning is always about

subject knowledges and implies that people are, to some extent, their own 'libraries' of wisdom. This may decentre some institutional sources of knowledge and end up privileging personal experience. In other words, the contradictory nature of experience and its politics may be overlooked. By creating a public space for an alternative voice to emerge, popular struggles create a context for experience to be 'tested', debated and assessed.

Unlearning involves meta-awareness, in Newman's term (2000b), and has an affective and cognitive dimension. Institutions and social practices may encourage a 'common sense' which is secured both cognitively and affectively. As Williams (1977) states, if all that had to be done was to dispense with false ideas - as if they were somehow simply in the 'roof of the brain' - then the project of change would be relatively simple. It is not. Experience has an affect and an effect. Despite this, consciousness always embodies contradictions and working on them is a way of developing 'good sense', in Gramsci's terms. Thus he argues 'every relationship of hegemony is an educational relationship' and the important point is that it can also be unlearned.

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Such an inventory must therefore be made at the outset. (Gramsci, in Forgacs, 1988)

*d) the social motivation to learn*

Motivation is the key to adult learning. It creates the energy required for sustained

intellectual effort and hard work. In educational settings the motivation is often construed in either vocational or personal terms as peoples' life situations develop. In institutional provision, motivation is mainly linked with accreditation, certification and the likelihood that what is learned will lead to greater rewards at work or in life.

In contrast, central to the cases described is the fuelling of motivation through anger at a perceived injustice or threat to a way of life - a social problem which is ignored or disguised and which the popular struggle is mobilised to resist. Motivation in this context, therefore, is linked with collective interests and the struggle for a better way of life. A good deal of the literature on the characteristics of adults as learners, fails to locate adults in these terms as active, collective, and political agents in the broad sense of this term. However, as Jackson (1996: 184) points out, 'adults bring something which derives both from their experience of adult life and from their status as citizens to the educational process'.

Kilgore (1999) argues that 'understanding learning in social movements requires not only a concept of the group as a learner and constructor of knowledge, but also an understanding of the centrality of the group's vision of social justice which drives it to act - mostly in conflict with other groups - in the larger social, economic and political field of meaning making' (1999: 191). Locating adults as citizens and active agents, rather than passive objects, presents a much more 'adult' characteristic of learners which is ignored in the literature on adults as distinctive types of learners. The role of political desire is an important part of 'readiness to learn' and connects contemporary concerns of social movements with a long tradition of adult learning for democracy, equality and social justice.

*e) learning and collective action*

For the relationship between learning and collective action to be productive, it has to be understood as two-way. Learning can be the basis for taking action but equally, action can be the impetus for learning. In bringing these two dimensions together, the issue is one of avoiding 'action-less thought' whilst also avoiding the celebration of 'thoughtless-action'. It is about a process of making the implicit praxis of learning and doing into a more explicit process of action and reflection.

In collective action the public and private aspects of life are reconfigured, for example, as Helen Martin states in relation to their struggle, 'it took over their lives'. When this happens, things begin to change and people acquire new roles and have new demands placed on them which involve learning. Acting against power also brings out counter-resistance which is educative in that it clarifies the interests and issues at stake. Without this happening, part of the learning in movements might remain opaque. However, celebrating action without being clear about its purpose or reflecting on what it achieved, is inadequate. Dewey's insight was that action has to be informed by reflection if it was to involve learning and development. In the more productive learning situations this occurs, without it the tacit knowledge acquired implicitly or reactively may go unrecognised and be lost.

Struggle can encourage people to think about the circumstances which can and ought to be changed. As Alinsky (1969: 170) claims, 'if people don't have the power to change a bad situation, then they don't think about it'. By moving people to act in determined and conscious ways the impetus for thought is created. Taking a slightly different perspective, Alinsky goes on to argue that a good part

of our understanding and knowledge arrives through a process of rationalising our actions. In psychological terms the 'cognitive dissonance' created between action and its justification can provide a motive for learning if the two are not consistent. The important point, therefore, is that acting can lead to attempts to systematise an appropriate and coherent way of thinking about what we do. Moreover, if as Kilgore (1999) points out, social movement members are mainly recruited through friendship networks rather than first fully grasping the vision of the movement, then this act creates an opportunity for learning to occur. In other words, the focus on individual consciousness as a basis for understanding learning processes in movements is inadequate.

## **Conclusion**

Social movements provide important opportunities for informal learning in struggle. The strength of the case studies has been to highlight both the opportunities that learning in struggle can create and the organic processes which facilitate this occurring.

Learning in struggle is neglected in the literature but it is an important if, nevertheless, highly ambiguous, ambivalent and contradictory experience (Foley, 1999). At one extreme, it can provide critical learning experiences which enable people to extend individual and collective control over circumstances which affect their everyday lives and, at the other, its potential may be unrealised, partial, lead to reinforcing prejudice and ultimately involve disempowering experiences. It is never pure or self-evidently better than other ways of learning. It is different and it does open up fresh opportunities for learning that lie outside the field of more formal educational institutions and discourses of participation. Its location in

social action, its unsystematic nature, the possibility of it resulting in learning the 'wrong things' means there are ample problems as well as possibilities. Having said that, it provides another way of thinking about the 'problem of participation' and offers another way of responding to it. To maximise the possibilities educators may have a significant role to play - as long as they don't get in the way of what is important.

The strength of much learning which goes on in communities often goes unacknowledged and escapes the attention of 'outsiders' such as adult educators. As Dickie's account points out, if learning is not adequately recognised and preserved it easily gets lost; 'the wheel', as it were, has to be continually reinvented. Making the learning explicit and systematising what is learnt is an important task and one in which adult and community educators have some expertise.

Popular struggles are a resource for adult learning that is often neglected. If we locate adult learning in the context of struggle both the 'learner' and the 'educator' are repositioned, with the latter outside of where people learn and act in communities. By recognising the tacit knowledge generated in struggles, a more 'inclusive' way of thinking about participation in adult learning could seek to develop a curriculum from the social context of experience. This demands an engagement with popular movements. The idea of activists as learners connects us with a tradition of radical social action concerned with equality, democracy and social justice. If we make the connections between these concerns and adult learning in movements, we can seek to enrich both. To make this happen, however, requires a highly proactive approach to make the most of policy's unintended as

well as intended outcomes (Martin, 1999). The contradictions of the current policy context and the worker's role in relation to popular struggles provide the focus for the next two chapters.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **The dialectics of the policy discourse: ‘the popular’ and citizenship in Scotland today.**

#### **Introduction**

Are we thinking dialectically enough? (Hall, S, 1990: 129)

The preoccupation of current policy makers for lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship seems the ideal context to reassert the importance of the social purpose and radical traditions in adult education. As Murphy comments, ‘although adult education concepts, philosophy and practices have interested policy makers in the past, never before have they been accepted on such a scale. Adult education and lifelong learning are now becoming institutionalised. Lifelong learning has become enshrined in the laws of states, local authorities and regional bodies, as well as the favoured doctrine of think tanks and other opinion makers.’ (2000: 166) However, we cannot assume this is automatically a good thing. The concept of lifelong learning can be vacuous and provide a home for a whole range of conflicting ideological interests. The reality is that the policy environment is contradictory, and often hostile to a social purpose and radical tradition in

adult education. If creative and critical spaces are to exist, they will have to be made. Historically, these spaces have existed outside the state in social movements and in civil society.

‘Squeezed in the vice of possessive individualism, on the one hand, and the globalised power of transnational corporations, on the other’ (Martin, 2000b: 257), the spaces for critical and creative work are increasingly under threat. In the public sector the language of enterprise - value for money - is dominant. Moreover, the freedom traditionally associated with the voluntary sector has been tethered by the reins of the state through a ‘contract culture’ that sets market criteria in opposition to democratic ones (Shaw, 2000). At a time when an assertive, critically informed and active citizenry is essential for the future of democratic societies the trend seems to be in the opposite direction. Public spaces are on the decline whereas market mechanisms are growing. The arena of politics, as Giddens’ (1998) points out, is paradoxically characterised by disillusionment just when there is need for a renewal of democracy.

‘Democratising democracy’, in Giddens’ term, is not only an issue of democratic procedures of government, but a question of how we extend and enrich the experience of democracy in the institutions of everyday life. That is, democracy is a social and cultural issue as well as a political one. It is therefore, both an educational and political task and work in communities is

an integral part of this. It is between the private world of the home and the political and public world of society - the meso level - that opportunities for participation in the political life of communities occur. This is where people learn to participate as citizens in society. So what can be done? What type of strategic response is possible for those employed 'in the state' whilst perhaps, at the same time, working 'against it'?

### **Policy and relative autonomy**

The social control of expertise in society involves at least two strategies. The first is to subject professional activities to cost accounting criteria - a trend which has affected most spheres of public life, transforming professional agenda into narrow managerial ones. The imperatives of efficiency, effectiveness and economy supersede an interest in equity and equality. We are taught to learn the cost of everything but not its value. The second is by regulation of the knowledge and skills of different professional groups, through a closer relation between professional and industrial interests, and those in the academy. In the context of adult and community education, in Scotland, this has been in the form of professionally endorsed courses regulated by a state sponsored body, CeVe (see Shaw and Crowther, 1995; Alexander and Martin, 1995). Its purpose is to oversee the specification of professional functions and competencies and to endorse training courses.

Increasingly, the field of practice is regulated through performance targets and 'best value' criteria, imported from the sphere of business and applied across a wide range of public sector activity. To what extent, therefore, is there room for manoeuvre? Has the relative autonomy of workers been reduced to the extent that there is no longer space for critical and creative work? Undoubtedly, restrictions have increased, however, the argument of this chapter is that some opportunities can be made and spaces opened up to develop the unintended outcomes of policy.

One of the real dangers of the current context is that we end up policing our own vision - in Freire's terms creating 'limit situations' without testing the boundaries of the possible (see Crowther, Martin and Shaw, 2000). To avoid self-surveillance and censorship we need to continually reassert our own agency and possibilities for action. Policy is not a fixed and fixing set of purposes and prescriptions. Fletcher (1991) argues for a dialectical approach to thinking about the contradictions and tensions policy generates for adult and community educators. Working with the contradictions requires the determination to develop what he calls 'both /and thinking'. He identifies the following fallacies (*italicised below*) of policy:

*\* a policy is a thing and only a thing*

Fletcher draws attention to the fact that policy is a process and not simply a plan or scheme that is handed down to workers who then

have to implement it. It involves the crucial mediating activity of interpreting and making sense of policy which is a potential site for contesting meaning.

*\* policies solve problems*

The fallacy of the classical liberal assumption of policy making is that it is about solving ‘problems’ in a kind and caring way. However, the issue of who identifies the problem and how to respond to it is not self-evident. There is a distinction between ‘problem-solving’ and ‘problem-setting’ (Gusfield, 1989). In the former the problem is assumed without question. In the latter, the problem has to be defined and explored. If adult and community educators are to work with people on what is relevant, they have to be prepared to challenge what is identified as a social problem. For whom is it a problem? What is the cause? What is the solution?

*\* policy is made by the state*

Rather than assume policy occurs in one arena, the reality is that it is produced in multiple contexts; it is made at national, local and institutional levels and these may produce contradictions and conflicts which can create spaces for different purposes in practice to develop.

*\* policy has a superior and special language*

Community education is fairly unique in that it seeks direct, effective representation from the community rather than being dominated by political or professional values. In part, the rationale for adult and community education is more open and tied to the language and values of those it works with rather than the aspirations of policy makers.

*\* policies produce only the intended positive effects*

Policy has contradictory effects in that there are those who gain and those who lose and there are usually unintended opportunities to develop practices which may not be envisaged by policy makers.

*\* policy is long term*

In reality policy tends to be short term in that it is always under review and susceptible to change.

The above fallacies challenge the argument that policy neatly defines and limits practice. Instead, there is scope to exploit our relative autonomy as educators. The implication, therefore, is that we need to be conscious of the politics of policy and approach it creatively and dialectically. As Fieldhouse notes, 'it is important to recognise the concept of the state as an enabler as well as a controller. In certain circumstances it will promote adult education for one reason and reap quite a different result.' (1991: 79).

If we are to maximise the potential ‘to reap quite a different result’ then we need to have sound educational arguments to legitimate practice. In the context of community-based adult education, the importance of building the curriculum out of the situation and experiences of people’s lives in communities - rather than from the imperatives of a top-down policy initiatives - can provide the ethical, equitable and democratic principles for making sense of policy and asserting our relative autonomy. The radical and social purpose traditions, as outlined in chapter two, suggest practices which can provide an alternative model for active citizenship .

Of course, the closer one touches live political nerves the more contentious and difficult keeping the creative spaces open may become. On the one hand, we do not know where the limits of acceptable practice are and to set boundaries short of them is self-censoring, on the other hand, to act without regard for political realities would be reckless (Crowther and Shaw, 1997). The difficult feat is to strike an acceptable balance between the two poles. It is argued this might be achieved through at least two strategies: one involves *stretching* the policy discourse and the other *turning* it towards communities in struggle.

*Stretching the discourse* involves taking the acceptable and respectable vocabulary of the current agenda, in order to extend its meaning outwards

and embrace some of the central concerns of the social purpose and radical traditions (Martin, 1999a). This involves a strategy of renegotiating what constitutes the dominant meaning of the policy discourse; the purpose of access and participation, lifelong learning, social inclusion, active citizenship, can all be challenged to enrich their meaning. A key issue in this proposal is that language is a site of contest and struggle. It can be reclaimed, its ambiguity explored and ideas forced to live up to their promise by exposing any shallowness of application. (Cooke and Shaw, 1996)

*Turning round the discourse* involves a more radical project (Crowther, Martin and Shaw, 2000). It seeks to build the curriculum from the shared social and political interests of communities in struggle. Turning the curriculum in this direction involves challenging the indifference, if not hostility, of policy to these collective interests. It involves at least three things: firstly, a distinctive theory of knowledge which sees it as actively and purposefully constructed out of experience rather than simply being a preserve of the academy; secondly, this derives from a particular political analysis and theory of power that can take into account the politics of identity as well as the politics of position; thirdly, it involves a pedagogy based on a process of action and dialogue rather than transmission. This involves an open commitment to make education serve the interests of communities in struggle, by generating its curriculum from their experience and concerns, in a process which seeks to unify learning and collective

action.

Stretching and turning the current policy interest in lifelong learning, active citizenship and social inclusion may, therefore, generate opportunities that go beyond or even subvert the limited interests and intentions of policy makers. This will involve a struggle to assert our own agency and relative autonomy, in order to maximise the possibilities for critical and transformative work with communities.

### **What we are up against: the dominant policy discourse**

...the passage to the late-modern or postmodern condition  
has not brought more individual freedom...It only  
transformed the individual from political citizen into  
market consumer. (Bauman, 1999: 78)

The concerns of western European political nation states seem to have coalesced around common problems relating to, amongst other things, economic growth, migration, ethnic tensions, social cohesion, crime, and welfare dependency. The broad consensus on how to tackle these problems has been in terms of developing policies on active citizenship and human resource development, based on skilling people for jobs and social inclusion. Those on the fringes of society, the socially excluded, the poor, and groups

subject to discrimination and segregation are to be reintegrated back into the mainstream of social, political and civic life through a more inclusive citizenship and by acquiring the necessary skills for success in the job market. Lifelong learning, or to be more precise, lifelong training, is the remedy. In the background, punitive measures await those who shirk their responsibilities.

Jane Thompson notes that the language of lifelong learning - targets, standards, skills - is indicative of a new professional discourse in adult education and one that ignores the historic tension between '...adult education's concern to serve the interests of political and social movements committed to social justice and progressive social change and its role in servicing the state and the economy' (2000b: 135). The vision of a learning society, in official policy terms, is primarily concerned with future employment, economic success, civic responsibility, mobility and social cohesion. However, these 'top down' solutions invariably pay insufficient attention to the realities of people's lives and the problems and issues they perceive as relevant.

There is a danger that issues like social exclusion are reduced to problems of access and participation within formal educational systems and the job market (Johnston, 2000). Policy frames issues like social cohesion and social integration in terms that are depoliticised. In the UK, the promotion of an

ethical community, in which individuals are essentially cooperative (Bhaskar, 1994), is counter posed to a political one where collectivities seek to defend and extend their rights. Although communitarianism may challenge the neo-liberal hegemony of possessive individualism, it does so by a process of remoralisation rather than politicisation. More volunteers are required to support and develop public services and, in the process, generate a greater reservoir of social capital (and perhaps reduce the demand for state resourced public services?). The emphasis is on the duty of citizens to actively seek work or give their time and effort for the wider benefit of the community. 'Good citizens' perform voluntary 'good works' as opposed to actively questioning the responsibilities of the state through a public sphere of political action.

In conceptualising the discourse of lifelong learning, Edwards (1995) identifies three versions of it: firstly, the learning society as an *educated society* which was the dominant policy framework in the post-Second World War period. People were provided with learning opportunities to become active citizens of a liberal democracy. Secondly, the learning society as a *learning market* in which people can develop the skills and competencies they need to survive and prosper in the economy. This is the currently dominant discourse. Thirdly, the learning society as a *learning network* with an emphasis on learning as pleasurable consumption in which individuals and communities pursue a variety of goals. We might want to

add a fourth version based on the vision of a more *equitable, just and democratic society* which connects lifelong learning with a collective project of social change - an ambition linked with more radical and social purpose adult education.

Martin (1999b) suggests we need to make the distinction between the *rhetoric* of the current policy context on citizenship and lifelong learning and the *discourses* that inform them. The rhetoric of New Labour has been seductive (such as promoting active citizenship and social inclusion), however, the discourses that influence how policy is inscribed in experience are more limiting than the political rhetoric implies. He identifies two dominant economistic discourses of citizenship that position the adult learner as either a worker/producer or as a customer/consumer. In the first, education is equated with training for work. In the second, education is understood as a demand-led commodity to be bought and sold. Both are reductionist in that adult learning is seen only in economic terms:

It is not, of course, that these economistic discourses do not matter – self-evidently, they do. Rather, it is that they simply do not account for enough of what adult education, let alone lifelong learning, should be about. We are not just servicers of the economy or traders in the educational marketplace. On the contrary, our interests lies in enabling

people to develop to their full potential as ‘whole persons’ or rounded human beings. This suggests that adult education should help people to engage in a wide range of political roles and social relationships which occur outside both the workplace and the marketplace. We are more than simply creatures of the cash nexus. (1999a: 17)

The preoccupation with training for the economically active, rather than offering a broad and rounded education throughout life, means that lifelong learning is neither lifelong, nor primarily about learning. (Johnston, 1999)

Rather than being an under-educated work force we need to ask whether we are in danger of becoming an overqualified one. The result can be an inflationary demand for credentials as a way of differentiating people rather than as a way of denoting the knowledge and skills necessary to perform the tasks of a job. Moreover, in the context of post-Fordism and flexible specialisation the implications for core and peripheral workers in segmented labour markets will be highly uneven and may result in reinforcing rather than challenging inequalities as workers in more secure jobs reap the benefits of their position (Westwood, 1993). Learning for *a living* rather than learning for *life* is the imperative informing policy.

Another criticism that can be made of the economistic discourse is that it also constructs work in a narrow way because it simply equates it with jobs

in the job market. The meaning of work needs to be extended outwards, to include a wider range of relevant activities such as unpaid activity in the home, the range of voluntary activities people undertake in communities, and the tasks that collectivities in struggle perform to achieve their goals. The purpose of widening the definition to include ‘socially useful work’ is an argument for redistributing economic rewards. The equation of work with jobs, ignores a wide range of activity that is unrecognised and invisible, such as care of the elderly by family members, usually women. The point is reinforced by Hart (1992: 8) who argues that, ‘instead of simply adjusting people to the hierarchical and divided reality of work, adult educators need to ask the question of how we could and how we should work in a manner that contributes to the maintenance and improvement of life rather than profit. The question of *how we should work* is also a question of *how we should live*’.

Paradoxically, the dominant discourse of citizenship severs discussion of it from that of the type of society we live, and work in, and the nature of the democracy that we aspire to. The promotion of citizenship and social cohesion, however, cannot occur independently of political and moral questions about social justice and the forces generating inequalities in one form or another. As Carr (1991) makes clear, citizenship is a ‘contested concept’ in that the ‘criteria governing its proper use are constantly challenged and disputed’. The meaning of citizenship is always open to

conflicting interpretations. Carr and Hartnett (1996) point out in relation to more formal citizenship education that:

The only kind of civic education which can prepare people as citizens for life in a fully democratic society is one which acknowledges both that the meaning of citizenship is perennially the subject of contestation, and that it is through this process of contestation that the relationship between the citizen and the state is being continuously redefined. (1996: 82)

The rights and duties of citizens is an obvious source of tension and conflict in relation to where the balance between these lie. Marshall (1950), in his seminal analysis, makes the distinction between three types of rights essential for understanding citizenship. The first, civil rights, involves individual freedom of the person, of speech and so on. The second, political rights, concerns the extension of the franchise to enable people to share political power. Finally, social rights, indicates the right to economic welfare, social security, health and education as a context in which other rights are exercised.

The focus on a broad range of rights suggests if citizenship is to be meaningful, it has to be inclusive and pluralistic (Johnston, 1999). It will

need to involve making the connection between equality, democracy and citizenship. People who are unable to exercise their rights are not equal citizens. If rights are to be of practical value they will have to carry more than a paper status. As Hall and Held (1990) argue:

Membership, here, is not conditional: it is a matter of right and entitlement. But it is two-sided, reciprocal: rights in, but also responsibilities towards, the community [but] rights can be mere paper claims unless they can be practically enacted and realised, through actual participation in the community. These then are citizenships three leading notions: membership rights; rights and duties in reciprocity; real participation in practice. (1990: 175)

There is an important difference, in addition, between approaches to citizenship which focus on its *ascribed status*, that is, formerly recognised rights and those which focus on citizenship as an *asserted practice*, which refer to rights achieved through struggle. (Lister, 1998) Instead, of seeing the adult learner as a worker or consumer, the 'adult education of engagement' (Jackson, 1995) characterised in this study is one where adult students are located as active (and, if necessary, dissenting) citizens in a democratic society. Fundamental to the emergence of a popular adult education has been

the importance of claiming rights and learning about them through active participation in struggles (Crowther, 1999b).

### **Asserting our relative autonomy: the Scottish policy context on citizenship**

People should be well equipped to play an active role in civic life and voluntary organisations and to work as volunteers; but if they do so, their needs for learning must be clearly identified. (SOEID, 1999: 4.2)

The theme of citizenship is the focus for a number of important policy developments in Scotland today which provide opportunities for debating the meaning of citizenship: the Osler Report (1998) *Communities Change Through Learning*; COSLA (1998), *Promoting learning - Developing Communities* and in more recent policy focussed discussion papers *Education for Citizenship in Scotland*, (Munn, 2000) and *Building an Active Democracy* (Community Learning Scotland, 2001). Scottish Office circular 4/99 also establishes the requirement for community education services to publish a Community Learning Strategy and develop Community Learning Plans which take into account citizenship, lifelong learning and community capacity building. These plans have to demonstrate articulated service responses in partnership with the voluntary sector and other relevant

groups and agencies.

Unfortunately the Green Paper, *Opportunity Scotland*, (Scottish Office, 1998) is bereft of any intention for lifelong learning other than as a support for pre-vocational competence, or as an element of workplace learning. In Martin's (1999b) succinct assessment, 'it is a miserable document.' Moreover, the linking of basic skills with vocational opportunities has resulted in a realignment of literacy provision to bring it closer to further education rather than with its former location in community education (see Hamilton, Macrae and Tett, 2001). The emphasis on vocational training opportunities, or basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy as prerequisites for entering the job market, are insufficient for developing a critical citizenry. Individual Learning Accounts, which are part of a broad strategy for developing a learning culture, are also loosely connected to the imperative of vocational training.

The challenges for radical and social purpose education, in the above context, are significant. One important issue is how to respond to the 'top down' managerial tools of policy, in order to turn them into 'bottom up' opportunities to develop a curriculum from the lived experience of people in communities. Community learning strategies, citizen juries, learning plans and other mechanisms for consultation can be exploited to provide more genuine dialogue between providers of educational services and learners and

avoided, where possible, if they are merely tokenistic. The experience of adult and community work with ‘user’ groups, in the context of community care, can be helpful because there are parallels to be drawn with practice in that policy context. For example, the tendency to co-opt user groups into policy processes in a tokenistic way, can be stretched into critical and collective learning opportunities which enable silenced groups to make their voices heard (see Jamieson, 2001).

In current policy initiatives citizenship is couched in terms of identifying the learning needs of volunteers, skilling people to be active in the labour market and the duty to vote. Challenging this discourse of citizenship will have to involve linking it with questions about what type of democratic society we aspire to live in. If education for citizenship is separated from the issue of democracy, it can then be reduced to a technical and procedural problem, rather than a political one.

Whilst adult and community educators are urged to address active citizenship, they are also discouraged from seeing it as a political process: ‘achieving education of our citizens, as opposed to politicisation of our citizens, is perhaps the most difficult balance to achieve’ (Osler, 1999: 10) The chief HMI goes on to propose that educating the ‘good citizen’ involves the following:

- \* **Political participation:** providing individuals with the capacity, confidence and interest to engage with the political decision making processes at all levels;
- \* **Economic participation:** through functional preparation for, and enhancement of, work which includes literacy, numeracy, ICT and other core skills;
- \* **Social participation:** empowering the individual to engage effectively with others in society and in their communities. (1999: 8)

This encouragement to participate in social, economic, political and educational life is highly selective and framed by a liberal-pluralist ideology. Participation in politics, for example, is seen to involve regular voting and making use of formal political processes as distinct from activity in the ‘new politics’ of social movements or collectivities in struggle. ‘Good works’ such as volunteering are acceptable and to be encouraged whereas collective social action against the status quo is not.

An example of practice that stretches the dominant discourse on citizenship has been the ‘democracy debates’ in Edinburgh, inspired by the founding of the new Scottish Parliament. The community educators responsible for these have used their position as ‘managers’ of the day and evening programme of adult education classes, to create a space where the meaning

of citizenship and democracy can be discussed. The work involves a network of community-based educators, who have encouraged and organised local people to attend and bring their experiences and issues into the curriculum. This organisation, with a number of high profile, celebrity chairpersons, combined with academic inputs and active audience participation, has successfully attracted large numbers of people to attend e.g. 100 plus to most events.

The democracy debates introduce critical analysis and everyday experience into the question of what being a citizen in Scotland means. The fee paying adult class programme is *stretched* to fund a free, city-wide public debate, concerned with critically interrogating citizenship and stimulating demands in communities that can influence the new Parliament. The initiative is informing people about the new state but also, crucially, widening the debate about what people want it to achieve and how they might act on it (see Pountain and Brechin, forthcoming).

Stretching the discourse of adult literacy work is also a theme examined by Heyward et al (1995) and Crowther and Tett (2001) who argue that there are possibilities for challenging the dominant discourse on literacy to create a broader and richer curriculum. The ideology of 'meeting needs' creates abundant opportunities for tailoring the curriculum to meet a wide variety of objectives and a social purpose. The type of functional life skills curriculum

which is pervasive in policy can be opened up to include a literacy curriculum for critical intelligence.

Turning the discourse of citizenship, however, involves making alliances with movements that embody more politically active struggles. The struggles discussed in chapter six over jobs, housing and the poll tax are examples of the type of community-based movements which adult education has to be turned towards. Scandrett (1999), for example, documents how an environmental campaign against pollution from a local gas plant, which occurred in North Edinburgh amongst housing tenants, created the context for a process of popular education which allied education to social action. Another example of turning the discourse, not from a Scottish context, is the Black Literacy Campaign. Gurnah (1992) documents the restructuring of literacy opportunities that was necessary to build on the cultural resources of the people it was intended for. To achieve this, a root and branch reorganisation of literacy provision was necessary which made resources available to these communities, drew on their experiences, knowledge and skills, and enabled them to control the learning opportunities and processes that the campaign aimed to foster.

Popular struggles activate people in direct forms of action that are not confined to procedural forms of democracy. The distinction in policy between an acceptable education for 'active citizenship' and an unacceptable

form of 'activating citizens' through collective community or social action, assumes a liberal ideology of representative democracy as self-evidently correct. It takes as axiomatic that learning to be a citizen is basically a question of working within formal democratic procedures that are sacrosanct. The challenge to these by social movements would constitute an infringement of democracy from this perspective, rather than an arena in which a legitimate politics and active citizenship is carried out.

Oliver (1996: 146) remarks that, 'when the relationship between the state and its population is in crisis, citizenship becomes the device whereby such a crisis is talked about and mediated'. However, the terms of the relationship between the private interests and activities of individuals and the public sphere of power and politics cannot be prescribed in policy. These must be part of a democratic process, the outcome of which is always uncertain.

Informing the above has to involve a consideration of moral and historical themes which are relevant for understanding citizenship. The context in which citizens have to exercise duties is an important issue. We need to ask why those who benefit least from society should be expected to offer the same as those who benefit most? If duties have to be set in context, so too does our appreciation of where rights have come from. Who fought and struggled for them? Where did these struggles take place? Can we assume

governments will always look after our rights? Do rights have to be continually defended? Assuming we have not reached the end of history, where will the pressure for new rights come from? Education which is not alert to the forces that infringe rights, and examines ways in which they can be protected and extended, is likely to sell people short.

The problem which is implicitly the focus of the policy discourse is that of ‘under active’ and ‘over active’ citizens: too much active citizenship can lead to a more politicised populace whereas too little can result in an apathetic one. Either way the legitimacy of democratic institutions of the state are called into question. Adult education with a social purpose has to operate in the space between these two terms and how they are regulated in policy. This will involve *stretching* policy to accommodate a wider range of educational activity and *turning it* towards the interests and concerns of popular struggles.

The wider context of democratic renewal and popular struggles in Scotland will set the parameters within which the above strategies have to be embedded. The challenge is to channel the rich experience and cultural politics of community life in a way that impacts on the political culture of the state. Activating citizens involves education and politics coming together in order to build policy from the experiences and concerns of communities. As Shaw and Martin (2000) put it:

...it is essential to recognise that the democratic state needs civil society. In a profound sense, it is in civil society that people learn to be the active citizens they become in the democratic state - as many community workers have long understood. Consequently, it is in the relationship between civil society and the state that the process of reconstructing citizenship and democracy must begin. This will require community workers not only to work 'in and against the state' but also, and critically, for the state - in the sense of constructing a new kind of settlement between the cultural politics of communities and the political culture of the state. (2000: 409)

In Bauman's (1999) terms, what has to be done is to 'reinvent politics', the space where people meet together to talk, learn and transform their private worries into public concerns and issues. The shared and common experiences of people is no longer being used as a means of making 'common causes'. The central task according to Martin, is to begin the process of questioning ourselves in order to build a vigorous and robust democratic community. "Lifelong learning for democracy must help to 'bind the solitary (and frightened) beings into a solidary (and confident) community'" (2000: 247).

### **The wider context of democratic renewal in Scotland**

In Scotland, the process of democratic renewal came out of the experience of a democratic deficit. Since the mid 1950s Scotland has been developing a distinct political identity as the voting patterns of the Scottish electorate drifted apart from British trends (see McCrone, 1992). During the 1980s and 1990s this pattern reached a peak and resulted in a highly visible democratic deficit as Scotland consistently voted against the party in power at Westminster. In addition, Martin (1999b) argues, the democratic deficit is also a useful metaphor for highlighting the way many people have come to feel excluded from the internal political process in Scotland, particularly in the long-dominated Labour Party areas of the industrialised central belt. The experience of a democratic deficit in relation to Conservative politics was also an expression of something else - a more positive image of an 'imagined community' with an egalitarian tradition.

Historically, Scotland has always maintained a significant degree of civic and cultural autonomy which has infused an important tradition of civic politics (see Brown, McCrone and Paterson, 1996; Hearn, 2000). The national question in Scottish politics has been predominantly civic, rather than ethnic, building on well established institutions in society which have grown incrementally over two centuries. The process of democratic renewal has not been based on a narrow 'blood and soil' nationalism which has characterised

the experiences of nation-state reformation in some parts of Eastern Europe. Despite assertions of Scottish identity with the kitsch of the kailyard, Rob Roy, Braveheart, tartan and heather, on the whole these have had little widespread political resonance. Scottish politics has developed a high level of sensitivity to naive expressions of ethnicity as a differentiating factor in determining Scottish political identity.

The process of democratic renewal opens a narrow 'window of opportunity' to create a more genuinely inclusive, egalitarian and democratic society which can generate solidarities out of, rather than by subsuming, differences. However, the politics of the state will have an important part to play in this process.

Perhaps the crucial point is that the new politics of the state needs to be constructed in ways which strengthen civil society and political life *outside* the state. Indeed, the democratic state must learn how to foster the civic autonomy of communities - rather than seek, as all too often in the past, to co-opt and incorporate them. (Martin, 1999c: 19)

The task therefore is, to develop outside of the state strong and vocal communities which are sensitive to differences and diversity - a pluralistic civil society - but are also able to identify and assert their common political

interests to influence the state and its programmes and policies.

### **The new Scottish Parliament**

The new Scottish Parliament generated expectations that were never likely to be adequately fulfilled. The idealised vision of Scotland, as McMillan (*The Scotsman*, 2000) argues, of a nation ‘somehow free of the moral blots of Thatcherism and its prejudices, untainted by racism, intolerance, ungenerosity or reactionary attitudes’ was part of a ‘fantasy Scotland’. Moreover, the Scottish press have undoubtedly given the parliament a critical reception with repeated attention on seemingly prolifigate and divisive issues (such as, expenditure on the new Parliament building, the payment of MSPs, the fiasco over examination results etc). The subsequent disappointment, Paterson (2000) argues, also reflects a general downturn in the optimism of reforming policy associated with how New Labour has been perceived.

Whilst the new Scottish Parliament is designed to be more open, participatory and democratic, achieving this in practice is problematic. Its composition, however, reflects a wider cross section in society in terms of gender representation; forty-eight of the one hundred and twenty-nine MSPs are women, which is a solid and unique base of representation for women in political elites in Scotland. This in itself is important, but how it has influenced policy is not yet very evident. Moreover, other significant

groups in society (such as black and ethnic minorities) are not directly represented. The forming of a new institution does not necessarily reduce the barriers to creating a more democratic and open political culture. Party organisation has not changed and the powerful role of the civil service in the policy process is much the same as it has been. (Brown, 2001 forthcoming)

Paterson (2000) argues that the new Union is clearly preferable to the democratic deficit that characterised the Thatcher-Major decades of political power. The return to a consensual policy consultation process mirrors the old Union politics of the 1940s and 1950s rather than something radically new. Whilst this has not incited the imagination it is not a trivial achievement. It may have contributed towards some notable and important differences of policy between the Scottish Parliament and Westminster (for example, tuition fees; the repeal of section 28, 2 (a) Local Government Act, financing care for the elderly), however, the opening up of the democratic process to a wide range of interests has been limited. Despite some democratisation taking place within important civic organisations, its significance has yet to be demonstrated. The new Union politics essentially reasserts the traditional place of 'respectable' civic organisations and their role in the policy making process. The usual suspects of the churches, unions and other socially recognised interests have been able to remake their influence, but the impact of the wider community has been less obvious.

The financing, by the Scottish Parliament, of an independent Civic Forum is an interesting and potentially important development in the process of valorising the political culture of the state with the cultural politics of communities. The Civic Forum is open to all non-party political groups and organisations across Scotland that have an interest in issues that are relevant to their lives. When it was launched in March 1999 over 500 organisations signed up; many of these included the traditional civic institutions of Scottish society (Crowther, Tett and Galloway, 1999). The Civic Forum's aim, however, is to widen the debate into civil society and to create a more participatory political culture that will impact on the legislative process. Whilst it seeks to influence policy outcomes, its broad aim is educational in the sense of developing a critical awareness that will influence policy and policy making processes. Its impact in these terms will depend on the extent to which it actually engages with those groups and interests (not simply the respectable organisations of civic society) that traditionally have not had a voice in the policy making process.

### **Contradictions of 'the popular'**

There is a big gulf between the 'respectable' civic organisations that constitute the wider policy community and the more wide-ranging interests and activities of community-based organisations and groups that are generally outside the public sphere of influence. Activating groups and movements in communities is, however, a legitimate and integral feature of a

democratic society. A genuinely pluralistic political culture needs to support and strengthen the role of popular struggles in finding a voice.

In relation to the popular action incited by elements of the press naming ‘known’ paedophiles during the summer of 2000, Thompson argues the lesson for adult learning is that:

education cannot cancel outrage but it can confront ignorance. If educators are not prepared to struggle alongside learners to create useful and democratic knowledge based on reason and emotion, shaped in the context of ethical and political considerations, which link personal troubles to public issues; the local to the bigger picture; and in which every one of us has something to learn and something to teach, then the field is left clear for the *News of the World* and their like to do their worst.  
(2000a: 24)

We need to take this seriously, particularly as the movements that have had a wide populist appeal since the formation of the new Parliament have been ‘moral movements’ associated with the agenda of the political right: anti-abortion campaigns (such as Precious Life); action against asylum seekers; the campaign against the repeal of Section 28 (2A) of the Local Government

Act 1988, not to mention the more materially focussed movement of opposition to fuel taxes.

Perhaps the most controversial of the above was opposition to the removal of Section 28 (2A), which made it illegal for local authorities to ‘promote’ homosexuality. The *Keep the Clause* campaign was bankrolled by a prominent businessman and brought together various religious interests and school organisations in a high profile public advertising campaign that attracted a good deal of popular support. To its credit, the Scottish Parliament overwhelmingly repealed this section of the Act - whereas at Westminster a similar aim was sidelined.

The above campaign was of broader significance in that it raised the question of inclusive citizenship. As Rowbotham (*Independent on Sunday*, 2000) argues, ‘making out clear divisions between normal and deviant sex is not just about protecting vulnerable groups such as children. It has a less rational core - the urge to declare some people as outside the walls and thus unacceptable.’ It is also about the right to knowledge and the need to understand sexual feelings and desires. In repealing Section 28, the Scottish Parliament has reasserted an inclusive notion of citizenship that can embrace difference rather than outlaw it as ‘the other’.

Popular reactions against asylum seekers in Scotland have also revealed

ingrained attitudes and beliefs that need to be critically engaged with in order to build a more pluralistic and inclusive citizenship. Nussbaum (1997) argues that 'world citizenship' means that our real commitment has to be to a wider moral and human community, rather than a specific place or government. To take this position, however, means that we have to have principles which are universal but flexible enough to juggle the demands of what is rightfully autonomous behaviour and what infringes those rights people possess because of their ontological status. This does not deny the strength of local feelings and attachments, but nor does it unnecessarily privilege them.

Instead of labelling asylum seekers as 'problems' to be got rid of, a critical discourse has to be broadened to include the issue of who is a citizen in Scotland and the conditions necessary for it to be a reality. Attacks on asylum seekers and the murder of a Turkish kurd refugee in the Sighhill area of Glasgow (August 2001) has helped to expose the inadequacy and divisiveness of government policy. Locating refugees in hard-to-let estates exacerbated tensions between those living there, who have little in the way of services, and the incoming refugees. Residents accused of racism in Sighhill have responded with joint action, between local tenants and refugee organisations, in a campaign for better living conditions for both groups. The material struggle against poverty, linked with an analysis of racism, has resulted in a broad and popular campaign of opposition. In addressing the

material context the potential of the unfamiliar to be interesting in itself, as well as a resource for mirroring back what is relative and historically constructed in our own culture, can occur. We can find some wider cultural resonance for this in Scotland - not because it is a more racially tolerant society - but because ethnic and divisive ideas of citizenship have not received strong political and ideological support. The new Scots happen to live here and their claims for citizenship rest on this basis. Fundamental to education for 'world citizenship' has to be the idea that particularity can be understood, and is enriching, but also that material interests and concerns in common can be negotiated and made universal.

The contradictory nature of popular culture contains elements of more progressive ideologies that should not be undervalued. For example, in opposition to the *Keep the Clause* campaign (referred to above) the national organisation of Parent Teacher Associations provided some excellent campaign resources that were full of educational content for work with parents. This was a popular education of resistance, working at the grass roots, against the high profile 'top down' publicity machine used by the pro-clause campaign.

The 1997 Referendum for the Parliament popularly supported tax-varying powers and this was largely interpreted, at the time, as evidence of Scotland's commitment to a more redistributive role for government and

more broadly held egalitarian values. Moreover, mass opposition to the poll tax was seen as an example of a popular culture concerned with issues of fairness, social justice and material inequality which also informed opposition to Conservative policies when it came to the ballot box. Since the formation of the Scottish Parliament, there has also been the emergence of networks of anti-poverty groups which have begun to articulate and make visible the material inequalities of life in Scotland. The growth of self-advocacy, linked with the disability movement, has also been prominent, asserting the demand for an inclusive citizenship.

## **Conclusion**

Johnston (1999: 175) is right to state in relation to lifelong learning that 'adult educators should welcome this: for the international debate it has engendered; for the emphasis it places on adult learning; for the opportunity it offers all educators to 'name the world' or, perhaps better stated, to rename their world.' But there are problems with this too. The current enthusiasm of policy makers for lifelong learning, active citizenship and social inclusion has to be approached dialectically and creatively. Spaces have to be opened up - in communities - that workers need to occupy in order to link policy with the aspirations and interests of communities of endurance and struggle.

In making policy genuinely serve the interests and needs of progressive communities, the policy discourse needs to be stretched and turned from its limited aspirations as they are currently framed. The flurry of policy positions on the theme of citizenship have not yet been fixed in cement; there is much to be argued out and debated before that point is reached. Ultimately, if policy is to be of real value it will have to make resources available to people so that groups in communities can exercise a good deal of control over what is done in their name.

Perhaps what is needed is to reinvent ways of ensuring resources are democratically controlled by those who want to use them. Community learning strategies, as they are currently understood, appear to be managerial and bureaucratic devices in order to deliver policy, however, it may well be that they create opportunities in some measure for more genuine control and participation to occur in making resources available to communities. The contradictions of the popular should make us aware that these may not always lead us in an ideologically progressive direction. However, change has to begin somewhere and the role of popular education has to be in confronting ignorance and prejudice where necessary. There is much to do in terms of working against, as well as with, the grain of popular attitudes and beliefs; it can never simply be about ‘educating’ and ‘politicising’ the converted.

The situation is not all bleak, however, and the popular contains seeds of progressive as well as regressive ideological tendencies. There are also various networks of socially committed educators and activists which are seeking to connect the policy and educational resources of the state with the struggles of communities. The successful series of Edinburgh Biennial Adult Education Conferences, which brings together a wide variety of adult and community educators interested in social purpose, is a case in point. The process of democratic renewal has also clearly inspired a number of popular educators (see Crowther, Martin and Shaw, 1999). The emergence of a *Popular Education Forum For Scotland*, that is committed to working with the material and cultural struggles of marginalised communities, is a small step in creating a base for the experiences and voices of such groups to be heard (see Martin et al, 1999). However, more needs to be done, and the opportunities are there to be taken if engaged with dialectically.

Policy may incorporate potential points of dissent but it can also involve contradictions too - potential sites for resistance to dominant interests. The important task is to make an analysis that helps to create opportunities out of the constraints by asserting our own relative autonomy (see Shaw and Crowther, 1995). The more closely scrutinised policies are, the more limited the autonomy workers will have. As adult education (as lifelong learning) moves to the centre of policy from its margins, the less likely are we to create some degree of freedom in interpreting policy.

Marginality can have a positive side if we can think, as Hall (1990) would put it, 'dialectically enough'. It can be a space where workers are given some licence to be critical and creative in how they approach their work. Steele's (1997) excavation of the early pioneers of cultural studies is a good example of how, in the margins of education, a new subject and focus for study emerged which was rooted in a political project and an educational task. The eventual incorporation of this project within the academy estranged it from its roots and purposes. As Keith Jackson (1995) states, the creativity of popular education has historically been because it has always operated on the margins. In operating on the cracks of the system, however, we should not lose sight of the wider picture and the powerful, global, capitalist forces which shape our own world. If education is to make a difference it will have to confront inevitably, issues of power and politics and the dilemmas these pose for the role of the worker. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Popular struggles: the worker's role**

#### **Introduction**

Adult education can be an essential tool for social movements which are central to the democratic struggle: every social action group should at the same time be an adult education group, and I go even so far as to believe that all successful adult education groups sooner or later become social action groups. (E Lindeman cited in Taylor et al 1985: 205)

Whilst I would like to agree with Lindeman's sentiments (above) the reality is that neither of his two claims about adult education and social action seem to be common in practice. Few educational groups become social action groups and social action groups are seldom seen as a resource and opportunity for adult learning - the interest of this thesis. In the dominant policy discourse the 'problem of participation' is one of attracting recalcitrant adults back to education whilst implicitly, if not explicitly,

blaming them for their reluctance to participate. The objective of the worker, crudely, is to deliver adults to policy rather than use adult education as a resource for people to collectively effect some transformation in their lives. It is the difference between these purposes that helps clarify the role for popular education.

In this chapter, barriers to critical educational practice are identified, the principles informing it are elaborated upon and the community adult educator's role is contrasted with that of the popular educator. They two may often interconnect so it is important to identify areas of overlap, in relation to context, approach and methodologies, and points of divergence, in particular, the relationship between politics and pedagogy. Central to the role of popular education is that of adopting a political position as distinct from assuming a professional identity (see Crowther, Martin and Shaw, 2000). In making this link, participation in struggle as a site of adult learning can be developed and the work of the educator is to make a contribution to it.

In Collins' (1991) term, critical adult education should involve a 'sense of vocation' that involves thoughtful, self-reflective and ethical practice. Of course, there is a need to avoid rhetorical over claiming and an inflated opinion of standing on the moral high ground. To counteract the potential zeal it implies, a sense of vocation has to be infused with a healthy dose of

reflexivity, scepticism and doubt, but not to the extent that it disables the worker from taking a position and developing principles for action. This kind of normative orientation to work is embodied in the person. It is not theory that is put into practice, it is ourselves (Collins, 1991: 47). Contrary to the current fashion for self-directed learning, and a diminished role for the adult educator, the argument made is that the agency of the educator is critically important.

The dilemma for the worker between the demands for professional distance and neutrality and the needs of communities in struggle for political commitment and solidarity cannot be easily resolved. If we are to assert a political commitment and a social purpose we can perhaps best achieve this by creating the networks which enable us to service the activities of movements in struggle. In this chapter I bring together aspects and insights that have been argued earlier in the thesis in relation to the worker's role.

### **Barriers to radical practice**

Reconceptualising the discourse of participation can lead to a different way of thinking about and undertaking adult education practice - the alternative may be to remain locked into a discourse of diminishing returns. But breaking free from this straight jacket is by no means easy, in that the policy and professional context of popular education are not sympathetic. Whilst there is currently a great deal of interest in participation, it is within the

constraints previously identified (see chapter three). Despite all the evidence about the limits of formal learning situations the emphasis in policy is, nevertheless, invariably on its development (Coffield, 2000).

The following quote is long but captures the essence of the difficulties inherent in pursuing the radical project of adult education today, in ways that separate it off from popular struggles:

1. We are increasingly exposed - and expected to conform - to the *hegemony of technical rationality* and narrowly conceived and economistic forms of vocationalism and competence.
2. To a greater or lesser extent, we are forced to operate in an *educational market place* in which knowledge becomes commodified (often in customised packages of 'continuing education') and educational institutions and agencies exist in relationships of competition rather than co-operation or collaboration with one another.
3. This market place - and, in particular, its workers - are subjected to the rigours of the *new managerialism*, enforcing an accountant's world in which we know the cost of everything and the value of nothing.
4. The construction of the '*self-directed learner*' as

consumer or customer puts the emphasis on the non-directive 'facilitation' of individual and individualised learning - as distinct from purposeful educational intervention (and our own agency as educators).

5. There is a growing and seductive tendency to celebrate the authenticity of *personal experience* rather than test its social and educational significance.

6. The '*post modern turn*' in the current theory of much European and North American adult education seems all too often to cut it off from its historical roots in social purpose, political struggle and the vision of a better world.

7. Rhetorical assertions about the importance of 'active citizenship' and 'social capital' in the '*learning society*' take little or no account of the material realities of context, contingency and differentials of power.

8. Despite its undoubted potential, the growing enthusiasm for *information technology* as the medium of instruction in adult education/learning raises crucial, if widely neglected, questions about the authority of the text, the privatisation of knowledge, the control of learning and the autonomy of the learner. (Crowther, Martin and Shaw, 1998: 2).

In the previous chapters we have touched on a number of these points.

However, points one and two, need to be explored further in terms of their implications for the worker's role.

The primary role given to a 'technical rationality' in the professional preparation of adult and community educators was augmented in the 1990s with the growth of competency-based education and training. Coupled with a functional analysis of the role of the community educator - which is assumed to be a relatively unproblematic and uncontested activity- the focus of training was seen as addressing questions of 'how' to perform various tasks over 'why' such activities were seen as important in the first place. This involved the dominance of a particularly narrow way of thinking about educational purpose and processes (see Shaw and Crowther, 1995; Alexander and Martin, 1995):

in the technicist approach, the purpose of community education is immediately locked into an adaptive one where 'useful knowledge' is disseminated in order to enable people to adapt to the 'reality' of their experience. A radical approach to education which deals with 'really useful knowledge' begins with the practical and collective possibilities for 'acting on' the world...competency-based training...has not only fulfilled a significant function in the professionalising of community education, but it also

renders power invisible behind the ‘rationality of administrative or organisational procedures’. (Shaw and Crowther, 1995: 211)

The dominant way of thinking about professional practice reinforces a facilitative and technical role for the worker and, consequently, minimises their role in addressing moral and political issues. Debate about the purpose of the worker’s role is ruled out by an emphasis on how things are done rather than what is performed and why. The excessive narrowing of focus impoverishes what is seen to constitute the purpose of community education. One outcome, is that adult and community workers are likely to perceive their role as agents and instruments of government policy, rather than adopting a more critical and independent spirit. This connects with Collins’ (1991) argument, that technical rationality involves teachers surrendering their agency which, in turn, reinforces their role as brokers of a commodified educational experience. The idea of education as a social relation is replaced with the idea that ‘learners’ are customers in an educational market place. The worker becomes an adjunct to the service of selling and managing a commodity rather than an integral element in the learning process.

The commodification of education as an exchange relationship, and not a social relation, is part of the reconfiguring of educational institutions in line

with market principles. The creation of quasi education markets with students as customers has established a competition between providers for student enrolments. As Tett (1993) argues, a market-place model is seriously inadequate in that it discourages collaboration, discourages providers to attract resource intensive students and is based on a false premise that ‘customers’ are able to make rational choices. Processes of marketisation have severe consequences for the curriculum; more providers scramble to offer courses that seem to connect with current interests (for example, using the internet) whereas minority and specialist areas are potentially neglected and underfunded. Not surprisingly, what is in the ascendancy are forms of knowledge that are more easily marketable and reflect consumer demand.

..in all the political debates, it is the economic rationale for increasing participation in education that has been paramount. Prosperity depends upon there being a vibrant economy, but an economy which regards its own success as the highest good is a dangerous one. Justice and equity must also have their claim upon the arguments for educational growth. In a social landscape where there is a growing gulf between those who have and those who have not, the importance of social cohesion cannot be ignored. (Kennedy Report, 1997: 5-6)

The issue of emancipation could be added to that of social cohesion!

However, Kennedy's warning falls on deaf ears in a system where knowledge that can be accredited and that has a value in the labour market is particularly powerful. It is not, of course, that vocational knowledges are irrelevant but that they push out other ways of thinking about progression, values, education and learning (see Jackson and Whitwell, 2000).

The dominant discourse of participation reflects the crisis identified above. It has been preoccupied with a professional and institutional agenda that has been tied to an uncritical response to the policy context. The role of the worker as a resource for groups to assert their voice and to act collectively is diminished as a consequence. By rethinking the dominant discourse we can begin to see adult learning in a way that reinvigorates and reasserts the social purpose of adult education and, in turn, reasserts the agency of the adult educator.

If we are to avoid becoming more than mere technicians we will need to start from a principled and politicised alternative standpoint to the dominant view of the worker's role. In the current climate, with its emphasis on market values, the 'new managerialism' and a narrow understanding of professionalism, the possibility of engaging in popular education seems an activity of a few dinosaurs (see Martin, 2000a). Yet it is precisely in this

context where new possibilities need to be explored.

### **Praxis for a vocation**

Praxis involves a dialectic between theory (understood in terms of clarifying and making explicit purposes, values and context) and practice (understood in terms of the experience of groups and collectivities and the worker's engagement with this). This process is one that produces knowledge which can then be harnessed to common and collective purposes. Intellectual analysis is the starting point for this dialectic to work; based on the preceding account six principles are elucidated.

#### *(i) principle one: standing for something*

Education is never neutral. It is always implicated, one way or another, in relations of power in wider society and is never above or outside it. It can either sustain and reinforce patterns of inequality or it can help unravel them and subject them to critical scrutiny, contestation and challenge. Of course, whilst this is self-evidently true it is also systematically evaded in practice. If we are to build productive alliances with popular struggles then we will need to recognise that our commitments have to derive from a political commitment and not merely a professional one that claims to be detached and neutral. To proclaim the neutrality of education is to be partisan for the status quo.

In Freire's (1972) often used phrase, education either contributes to processes of 'liberation or domestication'. We do not have to agree fully with this dichotomy to realise there is a good deal of truth in his claim - as well as to realise that much can occur between the two poles he presents. Postmodernist ideas help us to think more about the complexity of identity than any simple characterisation of oppressors and the oppressed. We need to be more open about the broad politics of the curriculum and the ideological values informing it and more sceptical and reflexive about our approach to these. However, unless we stand *for* something, we may *fall* for anything.

*(ii) principle two: making the educational political*

One of the more contentious, but ubiquitous, claims made in adult and community education is that it is 'empowering' and, therefore, links education and politics. However, as O'Hagan (1991) argues, before we can 'test' whether this is the case the first step is to theorise power. Also we need to avoid deluding ourselves with an inflationary rhetoric about what adult education can achieve. (Johnston, 1999) Adult education can only contribute towards a process of change rather than being at the centre of it. In thinking systematically about power, we should perhaps be less ambitious in claiming to 'empower' people and develop a more modest and realistic curriculum that enables people to make visible the role of power in daily life.

‘Power that is not visible is non negotiable’ (Melucci: 1988) is a statement that is self-evidently true and simple but, nevertheless, profound for radical educators. In making power visible we begin the process of renegotiating it where necessary and challenging it if required. Moreover, this has to involve making connections between the personal and political dimension of everyday life. Giddens (1991), for example, points to the role of power inscribed in routines of daily life and work which he refers to as ‘life politics’. As Thompson points out it involves, ‘... the range of circumstances, conditions, struggles and commitments which affects people’s everyday existence at home, at work, in their communities.’ (2000b: 137) Whereas many of these decisions may have occurred in the private sphere of life there is a role for social purpose adult education to engage with the interface between it and a wider public sphere. (Johnston, 1999)

*(iii) principle three: making the political educational*

If popular struggles are to be sites of educational intervention then the learning opportunities they generate need to be made explicit. Adult educators with a social purpose will have to take a proactive stance in order to make things happen. Few movements will necessarily look to adult and community educators for their support. A great deal depends on the willingness of the worker to identify the opportunities and make the effort

to connect their role to that of the movement.

Working too overtly 'against' the state whilst being employed 'in' it (even from the arms length of the voluntary sector) may involve penalties. The Community Development Projects in the 1970s are a case in point. Originally set up by central government in areas of 'deprivation' the analysis informing the project was based on a pathological view of deficit communities. Local solutions were to be devised for structural problems. In opposition to this, an alternative class analysis of poverty by workers in these projects was developed which favoured building alliances with the trade union and labour movements - that is, struggle at the point of production - as the way forward. Whilst this challenged the cosy fiction that community work was a neutral process of responding and meeting community needs it failed also to create any sustained or substantial alliances. (Cooke, 1996) The end result was a loss of purpose in relation to other sites of struggle and the eventual closure of the projects.

If we are to be less 'in' and more 'against' the state we will need to develop an understanding and strategic analysis that creates scope for asserting the agency of people in communities and the action of workers to assist this. The scope for active human intervention can be de-emphasised by too much structural determination or, it may be over emphasised by too little account of contextual constraints. The important point is to develop a dialectic

between the two. We can create artificial limits through a process of self-censure, by ruling out some forms of work as too politically sensitive and likely to end in adverse managerial reaction, withdrawal of funding or the loss of jobs, well before the boundaries are reached.

Myles Horton (cited in Adams, 1980) points out that without knowing the limits of what people know, and why this might be the case, then teaching cannot begin. Therefore, building relationships with movements is an essential first step. This will require careful consideration of purpose and role and how to legitimate both. To merely provoke managerial censure reinforces the belief that little can be done and that we are merely tools of social control with no room for effective agency. It is the opposite which needs to be fostered.

*(iv) principle four: building the curriculum from lived experience*

Popular education is a 'bottom up' process rather than a 'top down' one in relation to the curriculum which is derived primarily from the interests, aspirations and lived experience of its students rather than from the expertise of the teacher, the demands of a discipline or the imperatives of policy. It is dialogical, in the Freirian sense of generating new knowledge from the interaction between the educator and the experience of oppressed groups, and seeks to negotiate into the curriculum that which the 'selective tradition' (see chapter four) systematically excludes or dilutes. This

connects with the demand for ‘really useful knowledge’ which is essentially concerned with questions of who defines knowledge and for what purpose.

Creating opportunities for knowledge to be constructed ‘from below’ opens a space for the ‘voices’ of marginalised and subordinate groups to be articulated and heard. This space is a subversive one in that it creates the possibility for common interests to be formed that are potentially in opposition to the canons of policy and established orthodoxies. In this process, the narratives of individuals and collectivities can be legitimated and interrogated. As Aronowitz and Giroux argue:

voice provides a critical referent for analysing how people are made voiceless in particular settings by not being allowed to speak, or being allowed to say what has already been spoken, and how they learn to silence themselves...voices forged in opposition and struggle provide the crucial conditions by which subordinate individuals and groups reclaim their own memories, stories and histories as part of an on-going attempt to challenge those power structures that attempt to silence them.  
(Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991: 101)

*(v) Principle five: working with old and new social movements*

We need to recognise the importance of old and new social movements for a cultural politics committed to social change. This involves an understanding of the politics of identity as well as the politics of class. Feminist and anti-racist debates about identity, as well as those in the field of disability, have highlighted the complexity of subjectivity which cannot simply be 'read off' structural position (see Brah, 1992; Oliver, 1996).

Personal development is not, and should not be seen as, the antithesis of collective change (Coleman, 2000). In taking the issue of difference and diversity forward, Brah's imperative is important:

... that we do not compartmentalise oppressions, but  
instead formulate strategies for challenging all oppressions  
on the basis of an understanding of how they interconnect  
and articulate. (Brah, 1993:144)

Moreover, in the Scottish context, making the connections between old and new movements can be linked with the reduction of the democratic deficit between the cultural politics of communities and the political culture of the state (see Crowther, Martin and Shaw, 1999). Adult education has an important role in terms of supporting and resourcing, that is in 'activating citizens', to defend, assert and potentially extend their rights.

*(vi) principle six: developing the unintended outcomes of policy*

The policy context for adult and community work has to be interpreted and translated into practice. In this process, there are intended outcomes of policy and, potentially, unintended ones that can be developed by workers who are able to interpret their jobs in critical and creative ways (see Allen and Martin, 1993).

Stretching and turning the policy discourse can be strategic responses by adult and community educators seeking to promote a social purpose in a context which is at best indifferent and, at worst hostile, to this purpose. What this requires, is a principled opportunism that can be applied critically and creatively to the policy context.

To summarise, the above principles reinforce the following: the political nature of educational activity and the educational nature of politics; the strategic acumen that is required for working in a hostile policy context; the determined and proactive role that is needed for the popular educator to develop a praxis. To look more closely at what this may mean, the distinction between the role of the popular educator and the role of the community-based adult educator is the focus for the remainder of this chapter. Making connections and distinctions between these two roles is helpful in that the former is seen as an important means of developing

lifelong learning in policy and its location outside of institutions and in communities is the natural territory for popular education.

### **The role of the community-based adult educator**

One important way of distinguishing community adult education from mainstream adult provision has been the priority given to 'needs' rather than market demand. (Johnston, 2000) In this attempt to link education more closely with needs articulated in communities a potentially more open dialogue can be created between educators and their constituencies. It is important, however, to make the distinction between community-based adult education and outreach education.

In more recent policy developments, outreach is seen as part of a strategic response by institutions to make contact with 'non-participants' as part of a target-led, managerial agenda (McGivney, 2000). On the other hand, it has had a long association with education for 'the needy' by a process of transferring the curriculum from institutional settings into more accessible locations close to where people live. In contrast to both of these, outreach, that is understood as the development of community-based adult education, focuses on how the curriculum is built in relation to the interests and concerns of communities.

The pioneering work of Tom Lovett (1975) in the Educational Priority Area

Projects (EPAs) in the early 1970s has been particularly influential in understanding the role of the community-based adult educator. The target groups for his work were people who had little involvement in previous non-statutory education and were not necessarily leaders or activists in community organisations.

Lovett argues that the ‘hidden curriculum’ of adult education, the values and beliefs inscribed in its provision, management and administration, alienates the working class from participation. The dominant forms of adult education are saturated with a middle class value system (assumed to be largely negative) which is only attractive to a minority of working people. His work went some way to demonstrate that, when education is on the right terms for working people, that is, when they are in control of it and it is relevant to their interests and needs then people do participate.

It should be noted that Lovett’s argument for a more *people-centred* approach was not endorsing the type of *person-centred* learning associated with the influence of humanistic psychology of Rogers and Maslow that has subsequently become identified with self-directed learning. The people, in Lovett’s work, possess a collective identity, as women for example, and as members of the working class, who have been deprived of power and resources. His approach attempts to shift the curriculum away from the traditional subject-centred focus, towards a more ‘relevant curriculum’ that

can be built around everyday concerns and interests of people. It is not, however, a rejection of subject-centred learning taught in the right way and on the right terms. Rather, from this perspective, such an approach is not an appropriate starting point for working class people in 'communities at a disadvantage' (as distinct from 'disadvantaged communities').

Lovett's networking model involves a reversal of the traditional power relations between educational providers and communities. In a centre-periphery model, professional adult educators decide what people need and then offer it to them. The important decisions are taken within institutions and by professionals who seek to attract adults to their courses. In contrast, the network model aims to embed adult education in the activities and groups of working class communities in order to build a curriculum based on their everyday interests and concerns. The emphasis, therefore, shifts to involvement in local networks which can act as a conduit and resource for developing a wide range of adult learning opportunities. In the network model the adult educator's role includes in the following order:

- (i) network agent: this aspect of the adult educator's role involves a period of investigation (such as making contact with key people through informal contacts and getting a sense of important issues) that would then lead to a period of identification of interests that can be addressed

educationally and then a process of consolidation whereby educational provision, in a form acceptable to groups in communities, is undertaken. Developing a network also involves establishing close personal and professional relationships based on solidarity and sympathy for the concerns and values of the people.

(ii) resources agent: this involves attempting to redress the relationship between educational institutions and communities by recognising educational resources within the community as well as the necessity of using and controlling educational resources outwith the community.

(iii) educational guide: this includes activities such as advising and guiding people to useful resources in prior group learning situations including formal and informal educational work / short courses and guidance work in terms of providing people with appropriate information about formal courses of study.

(iv) teacher: the emphasis is on dialogue, an idea which owed much to Freire's influence on the relationship between teacher/learner working with learner/teachers in a

community setting.

Whilst Lovett's analysis reveals the complexity and variety of roles required of the community-based adult educator, much of the subsequent experience of this type of work fell short of Lovett's pioneering efforts.

One main criticism of the community-based adult education approach is that it can easily fall into a parochial and trivial educational experience which ultimately reinforces inequalities. Whilst it might not be true of Lovett's work, it can compound the view that the problems and concerns of people in communities are resolvable at a community level. It can obscure a structural critique of issues that needs to be addressed by social action, rather than by action at a community level. The key issue depends on how 'relevance' is interpreted in practice because it can serve a variety of ideological purposes. Officially, the EPAs were based on a 'rediscovery of poverty' which was the result of individual, family and community lifestyles that perpetuated a 'cycle of deprivation'. Wider structural problems associated with poverty and urban blight were hidden behind an emphasis on local diagnosis and local prescriptions for change.

Eric Midwinter, the project director of the EPAs, argued an 'actualist position' which involved recognising that most people would only experience some incremental improvement in their communities, whereas

wider and more substantial change was unlikely. The 'actualist', therefore, was a hardheaded reformer who would have more beneficial impact on people's lives.

A 'relevant' curriculum from Midwinter's perspective, is that which can help people to participate in processes that will sort out local problems. As Martin points out:

In Midwinter's view, parental involvement in their children's schooling was necessary to both ensure active educational support within the home and family and to harmonise what was learnt in the school with what was learnt outside it...Moreover, the community curriculum, whereby learning was related to the immediate local environment, would support both aims. It would enable parents to contribute with authority and enthusiasm to the education of their children as well as to help them to gain the motivation and confidence to become involved in the wider community development process. (1996:122)

Linked with a focus on the role of the community primary school, and the adult parent as a mother, the approach involved a 'relevant' programme of women's education, 'predicated on an ideology of unproblematic

domesticity and familiarism' (Martin, 1996: 123). A form of education that would make women dissatisfied with their lot would not help. The focus on relevance, therefore, could contribute to maintaining wider systems of inequality. Thompson's (1983) development of a feminist alternative helped to realise a more critical model for women's education.

In addition to the ideological question of purpose (referred to above), the development of the community-based adult educator's role involves key debates about the educational process. In particular, the minimising of the teaching role, and the emphasis on a facilitative and non-directive one, has been the subject of some controversy. The debate focussed on the 'invisibility' of the worker's educational role hidden behind a 'soft and cosy' approach that could be manipulative, because it avoided a democratically organised curriculum (see Barr, 1987). Jane Thompson is critical about 'education by stealth' which can end up offering people third rate curricula which does not help working class women and men to develop critical intelligence.

Kirkwood (1991) criticised the abnegation of the educator's role to build the curriculum because of the emphasis on facilitation. She argued the rejection of *authoritarianism* associated with schooling had to be checked by maintaining the *authority* of the teaching role. This was not an argument for the reassertion of traditional didactic teaching but a case for democratic

education. To reject the authority of the teacher was tantamount to 'throwing the baby out with the bath water'. In Scotland, these issues were attached to the emergence of a generic role for the community education worker in a policy process designed, ostensibly, to further adult education (Martin, 1996). The focus of the debate was the loss of a clear educational role submerged beneath the idea that community educators are 'process specialists'. (Kirkwood, 1990)

In discussing the limits of community-based adult education, Jackson (1974) argues that the purpose of educational work is to develop 'conscientization' so that people are better able to grasp their situation and act on it, that is, purposeful social action replaces the self-help characteristic of 'community solutions to community problems'. This distinctively political analysis invokes a discourse of people as citizens with equal ontological and political rights, rather than simply 'as students' or, even worse, 'the needy'. The task of the educator is to develop a relationship of mutuality and equality with people so that a two-way process of learning and acting takes place. He goes on to say that community is the starting point, rather than the end point, for radical practice and involves posing different questions from those made by policy makers. Instead of seeing community interventions as solutions to poverty, the question that had to be asked first is why poverty exists in the first place?

In seeking to resuscitate Lovett's model in the contemporary circumstances of a 'risk society', Johnston (1998) argues that some updating has to be done and some of the certainties that characterised socially purposeful adult education need questioning. For example, in the context of a growing bidding and contract culture, educators with a social purpose may be able to deploy their expertise to move resources towards marginalised groups. Another resource role can be linked to the development of collaborative and participatory research that avoids colonising and exploiting local communities. Educators may be able to aid research required by community groups. Johnston also suggests a distinctive teaching role in terms of resourcing and illuminating public debates on contemporary issues. An example of this are the public seminars, referred to in the previous chapter, which aim to widen and deepen the debate about the Scottish Parliament.

It is useful to be clear about the distinction and relationship between community-based adult education and popular education; the former is people-centred, 'relevant' and participatory, however, it is not necessarily ideologically committed in the same sense as popular education. The approaches are similar but informed by a different purpose. In order to recast Lovett's approach in the contemporary context the question of purpose, as distinct from process, has to be explicit.

## **The role of the popular adult educator**

Popular education...begins from a conception of human beings which, while recognising differences of intelligence, of speed in learning and of the desire to learn, which is clearly affected by differences of environment, nevertheless insists that no man can judge for another man, that every man has a right to the facts and skills on which real education is based, and that in this sense all education depends on the acknowledgement of an ultimate human equality. (Williams, 1959: 185-6)

Williams' quote is a useful reminder that popular education is based on an essentially ontological claim. However, it is often associated with its use of a range of impressive participatory methods of working (see Arnold et al, 1998; Kane, 2001). Popular education has also inspired participatory approaches to research as well as to evaluation (see, Hall, 1991; Richards, 1985). Nevertheless, it is important to make a distinction between, on the one hand, aspects of educational methodology and technique and, on the other, purpose and principles that inform a worker's role and approach. The key issue in this is the approach to dialogue.

The pedagogy associated with popular education has tended to involve an

array of participatory techniques to facilitate dialogue in the educational setting. However, this can lead to the erroneous conclusion that participatory approaches equal popular education or define it without its philosophy. As one of my colleagues said, in discussing lesson planning, ‘we will do a Freirian bit and let them discuss the material’! The error is to mistake an epistemological claim about dialogue to generate knowledge ‘from below’, with a methodological technique of involving people actively in a learning process. Participative methodologies can be used to meet a wide range of ideological objectives. Kane (1999) reports that one of the biggest buyers of popular education handbooks has been the American security services - the CIA - because they recognise their value as techniques to involve people; techniques which could be stripped of their philosophical basis. A fetish for participative approaches divorced from the philosophy of popular education can be seen as part of a ‘selective tradition’ that filters out and dilutes its radical content.

The explicit ideological affinities of popular education can provide a basis for forming alliances with movements as well as other educators. For example, in Scotland the emergence of a Popular Education Forum based on an explicit ideological position provides the basis for a network of community educators and activists to develop some common areas of work. The Forum understands popular education in the following terms:

Popular education is understood to be popular, as distinct from merely populist, in the sense that:

- \* it is rooted in the real interests and struggles of ordinary people
- \* it is overtly political and critical of the status quo
- \* it is committed to progressive social and political change

Popular education is based on a clear analysis of the nature of inequality, exploitation and oppression and is informed by an equally clear political purpose. This has nothing to do with helping the 'disadvantaged' or the management of poverty; it has everything to do with the struggle for a more just and egalitarian social order.

The process of popular education has the following general characteristics:

- \* its curriculum comes out of the concrete experience and material interests of people in communities of resistance and struggle
- \* its pedagogy is collective, focused primarily on groups as distinct from individual learning and development

\* it attempts, wherever possible, to forge a direct link between education and social and political action. (Martin, 1999c: 4-5)

The above claim is explicit in its rejection of the role of ‘managing the disadvantaged’ to avoid incorporation into the objectives of policy makers. In a context where community level policy initiatives are flourishing, it is imperative that the adult educator does not simply become an agent of policy.

Gramscian analysis has been a source of some inspiration for radical education committed to social change. His interest in the educational nature of politics led him to develop an analysis of the role of the intellectual in the process of stabilising or destabilising society (see Mayo, 1999). Gramsci makes the distinction between the role of the ‘traditional intellectual’ and the ‘organic intellectual’. Every social class has its organic intellectuals, that is, a group which would be able to articulate its interests, concerns, values and beliefs:

a human mass does not ‘distinguish’ itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders.

(Gramsci, 1971: 3)

Whereas organic intellectuals support an explicit social base, the traditional intellectual, that is, a broad stratum of people engaged in intellectual work such as engineers, technicians, teachers, doctors, artists, journalists, professional groups of a mixed kind, as well as grand theorists, often appear to be detached from specific social groups. In practice, however, they support dominant interests and values which would become explicit in times of crisis. Some traditional intellectuals may side with subordinate groups but they would be small in number and could never be relied upon. The urgent task, therefore, was to create 'worker intellectuals' rooted in the concerns of their class.

Popple (1994) argues that adult and community workers are a subordinate branch of the dominant 'traditional intellectuals' yet at the same time they also constitute a vital 'middle stratum' of workers who do not necessarily acquiesce to the dominant system. To the extent that they can play a part in enabling groups to articulate, and act on their contradictory experiences of the world, they may contribute to a wider project of social change.

The focus on the role of the intellectual in Gramsci's analysis is attractive, not least because it elevates the significance of education in the process of social change, but it too creates some difficulties that are not easily resolved.

The educator cannot simply adopt the *dirigiste* role of Gramsci's organic intellectual of subordinate social groups. The postmodern condition of doubt and scepticism is a necessary corrective to the certainties that went with such views.

In Gramsci's analysis, a dialectic between intellectuals and the wider social class is important. However, the intellectual can be positioned in an elitist way as a leader and organiser of the wider social group. The processes that generate a dialectic between the two might easily be lost by a discourse that downgrades the experience of the wider social group. Moreover, what we need to keep in mind is that Gramsci was thinking about this role in relation to a political party that had to build a counter-hegemony. Its purpose may not be directly transferable to the role of the educator allied to a social movement.

It is useful to maintain Gramsci's insistence on the role of the organic intellectual in creating the conditions for social change, but to focus it specifically on the role of forming intellectual and moral leadership rather than a political one. The issue of political leadership is rightfully one for activists and members of a movement to organise. However, Gramsci's recognition that a political party has a decisive role to play in generalising and widening out struggles is a salutary reminder about the role of popular struggles in the process of change. Unless they ultimately connect to a wider

and more focussed demand for systemic and systematic change they are at best likely to achieve only piecemeal reform - but that also should not be ignored as insignificant.

In important respects, the role of the activist in a movement has to be different from that of the educator. It might be better to see the role of adult education in this context as an agent of the dialectic which is concerned with the moral and intellectual arguments necessary for a struggle to engage with, if it is to have a chance of success. In this sense, perhaps Foucault's view of the role of the intellectual, combined with Gramsci's objective for creating organic intellectuals, hits the mark better. He suggests that:

The role of the intellectual does not consist in telling others what they must do. What right would they have to do that?...The job of an intellectual does not consist in moulding the political will of others. It is a matter of performing analysis in his or her own fields of interrogating anew the evidence and shaking up habits, ways of acting and thinking, of dispelling commonplace beliefs, of taking a new measure of rules and institutions...it is a matter of participating in the formation of a political will...(quoted in Oliver, 1996: 169-170)

In working with collectivities in struggle, the role of the popular educator has to be clear and differentiated from that of the activist. The blurring of the two creates difficulties; one, because the worker may be employed by an agency which is opposed to overt political allegiance and two, because the educator's purpose differs from that of the activist. The boundaries between the role of activist and educator are important to clarify although probably never secure; whereas activists speak for a movement, the role of the educator is to help reveal and communicate structures and processes of oppression. The activist and educator may both share a political commitment but they fulfil different roles in relation to the movement.

Alinsky (1969) argues, 'Peoples' Organisations' involve a popular education that stems from the role of activists and leaders in organisations. In his view the activist is an educator. Whilst this may be true, the reverse is not necessarily the case, that is, the educator does not need to be an activist in the direct sense of the term. Indeed, the educator is there as a resource to assist organisations to think about their activity. The activists role is to implement, through organisation and strategic planning, the aims of the movement; the educator is primarily a resource for considering the questions such aims pose and how they may be realised. Whereas the goal of the activist is to develop a momentum for action the role of the educator is to open up problems as a precursor for action. These are not mutually incompatible roles but they differ in emphasis. Newman (2000) suggests the

educator is an activist in terms of the type of learning that he or she encourages which is anything but neutral. In this sense, as an act of solidarity and support, the role of the educator is committed to action.

As the cases described in chapter six demonstrate, popular struggles are against an enemy of one sort or another. To be of use to those in struggle the social purpose educator has to be committed to the broad goals of those in struggle. It is highly unlikely that they would make much headway without this type of commitment. (Of course, in the context of challenging a reactionary popular struggle this would not have to be the case!) The issue raises, therefore, to what extent educators are in this context propagandists?

In some respects there is a role for the educator to play as a propagandist if by this we mean the organised dissemination of information. Because popular struggles are generally in opposition to official wisdom there is an argument to be made that 'knowledge from below' acts as a counter weight to the dominant line portrayed by governments, authorities and the media. The role of the educator is to help a movement achieve a degree of ballast against the forces that generally outflank them by providing and disseminating supportive information, literature and ideas which further their struggle. But does this mean that the educator is simply a propagandist for a movement?

Education and propaganda are commonly thought of as the antithesis of each other. Propaganda represents particular interests whereas education, by contrast, is open, neutral and disinterested. This view is far from tenable. As Fieldhouse (2000) points out, 'propaganda is not all prejudice and lies: nor is education simply the presentation of "objective truth".' Rather than see them as two entirely conflicting activities, he suggests it might be better to pose them as ends of an information continuum. What differentiates them is the degree of openness to questioning that they permit. Unlike propaganda which projects 'closed truths', the educational process is characterised by the setting of questions that have to be studied in an open ended way, rather than through the provision of pre-formed answers.

Lovett (1975) makes the point that the need for equality and solidarity between the professional adult educator and the activist is at variance with the teacher-taught relationship. However, participation in structured educational work often enables the worker to make a specific contribution that is more clearly defined in people's eyes.

To summarise, popular education involves an ontological and political commitment to equality and social justice. Therefore, the relationship between educator, activists and participants in a movement needs to be developed as a two-way dialogue. Learning through struggle is a context for educational engagement but is not synonymous with it; the educator's task is

to connect the two.

## **Conclusion**

...the end view [is] the creation of a very broad class of popular intellectuals, capable of leading generous, fulfilling lives, actively contributing to just and stable democracies and local communities at many levels and with the ability to do the necessary work to provide the goods for these societies to flourish. (Steele, 2000: 66)

The dilemma of being both 'in and against' the state cannot be easily resolved for the adult educator. The tensions of working in an agency which is not sympathetic to a radical social purpose are always likely to exist to one degree or another. The routine demands of work may, in addition, create little opportunity for more critical and creative activity. However, where it is possible adult educators with this commitment to popular struggles have to steer a course which enables them to maintain a political alignment and an educational purpose.

Instead of reducing the role of the adult educator the imperative is to restore his or her agency, to enable workers to gain confidence (and reflexivity) in their social purpose and to be determined and proactive in their approach. Rethinking the meaning of participation involves repositioning the role of

the educator and the recognition that collectivities and movements in struggle have always been concerned with education, and in highly effective ways too. If we can begin to see this, we may be able to create spaces for working with struggles in order to develop knowledge 'from below'.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **The collective learning iceberg: a journey of hope**

#### **Introduction**

The dynamic moment is...in the difficult business of gaining confidence in our own energies and capacities. It is only in a shared belief and insistence that there are practical alternatives that the balance of forces and chances begin to alter. Once the inevitabilities are challenged, we begin gathering our resources for a journey of hope. If there are no easy answers there are still available and discoverable hard answers, and it is these we can now learn to make and share. (Raymond Williams, 1985: 268)

The ‘problem of participation’ will continue to attract adult educators and researchers earnestly seeking to extend and widen access into adult education. Worthy as such efforts are, we need to recognise that, ‘the problem of

participation' is unlikely be resolved through more research and more accessible provision, whilst at the same time it limits our thinking about the interests and purposes adult education serves.

An important point to acknowledge is that adult education is problematic and open to contestation. It can legitimately be associated with a wide range of ideological projects from, at one extreme, domesticating people to adjust to society and, at the other extreme, to that of challenging oppression and seeking to help groups and communities to achieve some form of liberation. The issue, as Raymond Williams suggests, is that we have to start challenging some of the inevitabilities which in this case has focussed on how problems such as participation in adult education are posed. This, in turn, involves wider and deeper questions about the relationship between living and learning.

One of our resources for a journey of hope, therefore, should be in resuscitating the role of adult education as a force in assisting the process of social change. This will require refusing to treat what is a political and ethical problem about what type of society we live in and what we want to promote in terms of the 'good life', as a technical problem. In the radical and social purpose traditions this involves struggles for social justice, democracy and equality which adult education aims to promote. In order to do this effectively adult education has to

engage with social movements. As Fieldhouse (1996b) notes:

Institutionalised adult education has, in the past, been more of a barrier than a facilitator to the involvement of social movements, with the partial exception of the trade union movement. (1996b: 19)

If change is going to happen it will more likely arrive amongst those whose locus for adult education is based in communities. The marginal space they occupy can create greater opportunities for critical and creative work. However, the current direction of policy does not inspire such an approach, indeed, it effectively narrows down the legitimate concerns of adult educators in a way which excludes involvement in popular struggles as potential sites of learning. One of the arguments of this thesis is that these struggles can, broadly speaking, be the driving force for a better, more just, and more democratic society.

### **Summary of the argument**

The account has explored the potential learning processes, that is, the implicit praxis of learning and doing, which can occur in popular struggles. Historically, this has been an important tradition in adult education practice which is systematically ignored by the dominant discourse of participation. In reframing

participation the educational challenges that struggles present for adult and community educators is opened up.

Whilst it may not be always true, popular struggles can involve sustained learning processes which are in many respects unique. The role of conflict, the 'lived experience' of struggle, the link between learning and collective action, involve conditions unfamiliar to the dominant discourse of adults learning. Tough (1983) used the arbitrary measure of seven hours to define a learning effort. The type of experiences documented in chapter six were far more consuming and demanding for those involved. People lived in struggle and learned in the process - as one of the activists in the housing dampness campaign states, 'it took over our lives'!

The emphasis in this account has been on developing the argument and a critique of the current policy discourse as well as the need for socially purposeful educators to engage with the current context critically and dialectically. The case studies of learning processes in struggle have helped to illuminate the argument and ground it empirically. More qualitative research material is needed. In addition, to increase our understanding in-depth and quantitative analyses of learning in struggle would be useful and could provide a focus for further research. The relationship between learning processes generated in struggle and

the learning that occurs through more systematic and formal educational activity would also be an interesting direction for future research.

The hypothesis 'tested' has been 'that popular struggles offer opportunities for informal learning in a collective and politicised context which may lead to significant changes in understanding or capability'. The overwhelming evidence is that they are important sources of social motivation which drive people to act and learn; at best people learn skills and competencies and can begin to make sense of their world and the meanings which are dominant and critically grasp the interests that shape these meanings. Struggles can be a fertile ground for learning to occur even without recognisably systematic educational activity. However, the learning that occurs is not automatic or self-evident and adult and community educators are often discouraged in policy from work with such communities. On a more cautious note, popular struggles can involve people reaffirming prejudice, exclusion and oppression. A good deal depends on the context and wider circumstances in which they occur. The contradictions of 'the popular' are, nevertheless, a resource and challenge for adult education.

Another challenge which adult and community educators face is the demands of professional detachment in circumstances which require political commitment and solidarity with the interests of the poor and oppressed. There is no easy

resolution to this dilemma. Workers with a social purpose have to maintain and develop a 'sense of vocation' in a context where being too 'against' the state is always problematic and being too 'in' it removes their activity from popular struggles. The important point is that the dynamic for change arises from the struggles people wage, the problems and issues that connect living and learning in people's everyday lives, which is the source of the curriculum. The curriculum, in other words, has to engage with the 'voices' of groups which are normally unheard in order to strengthen them.

Barr (1999b) points out that these voices are not 'truer and more accurate accounts of the world' simply because they have emerged 'from below', 'but because, in identifying and making available spaces where alternative ways of thinking and being can be worked up, such practices increase the possibilities of knowledge - that is, knowledge which is useful to those who generate it.' (1999b: 35)

A commitment to building the curriculum 'from below' also suggests workers need a reflexive understanding of their role. Unless they do so, they may further contribute to the problems people experience in communities, for example, by acting as unwitting agents of government policy in ways that seek to deliver people as passive objects of intervention. In this case, the worker may be more

of a hindrance than an asset in the process of people identifying and constructing different interpretations of their interests and how these can be met. Unless there is an understanding of how educational work can be part of the problem, then adult and community work can never be part of the solution.

In the current context, where the type of social purpose described in this text runs against the dominant trends in policy, the task of the educator has to be one of principled opportunism, that is, to make the connections where they can, to seize the opportunities as they arise, and to do so in a way that maintains a balance between the contingencies of policy and the principles of a popular education committed to social change. In the future, if more systematic change in adult education is to be achieved it will, more than likely, have to be organised quite differently. As Fieldhouse suggests, adult education organisations for the future ‘will need to be informal but also professionally knowledgeable and supported by access to political funding which is not too closely tied to immediate political whims and fancies’. (1996b: 19)

The democratic deficit in Western capitalist societies has to be confronted as an issue for adult education and it requires a committed and proactive response. The momentum in the profession is, unfortunately, driven towards a technical-rationality and competencies with a loss of faith in the role of the educator to be

more than a facilitator of learning. The debate is not about counter posing facilitation with a teaching role; the two do not have to be mutually exclusive. What is needed is an understanding of the importance of learning in communities and that the educator has something to offer in supporting and systematising it.

To make connections with popular struggles, workers have to assert their relative autonomy in order to maximise the space between the constraints and imperatives of policy, and their ability to interpret and act on these in the interests of communities. This is first an intellectual exercise before it can become a practical challenge. Without a conscious and critical assessment of purpose, values and context, adult community education initiatives may simply amount to the management of the disadvantaged through the incorporation of people into a range of programmes - in the current context mostly of a vocational and instrumental kind - rather than attempt to build the curriculum from the issues, problems and concerns arising 'from below'.

The emergence of a new policy context may, however, create interesting opportunities for adult and community educators to develop links with struggles. Policy initiatives can be *stretched* and *turned*, towards the interests of communities in ways which policy never intended. This is legitimate terrain for adult learning. Whilst aspects of learning in struggle have been highlighted much

more of this kind of work needs to be done. We also need to know more about approaching the policy context in a creative and dialectical way. Without this, the dominance of a technical view of the worker's role is difficult to challenge and, in turn, limits the possibility of developing a popular education in the current context.

The enduring realities of inequality should be an important reminder that the politics of class have not gone away. More than half of humanity lives in a state of poverty (Hobsbawm, 1992). In the UK fourteen million adults in households earn less than half the average income, that is, over one million more than in 1980 (*Guardian* 11 December, 2000). Social class is still one of the best indicators of health and educational opportunity. More than 750,000 pensioners live in homes cold enough to put them at risk of hypothermia (*Observer* 13 April, 1997). Scotland has some of the most materially deprived communities in Europe. Almost one quarter of Scotland's population live on incomes lower than half the average (Witcher, 2001, forthcoming).

In deconstructing all claims for privileged knowledge the ludic playfulness of post modernists can look lame against the material realities where the game played is not so light hearted. Discussing the aftermath of a fire in a North Carolina chicken factory where many black female workers died, Harvey points

out that:

The effect of the postmodern critique of universalism has been to render any application of the concept of social justice problematic. And there is an obvious sense in which the questioning of the concept is not only proper but imperative - too many colonial peoples have suffered at the hands of Western imperialism's particular justice, too many African-Americans have suffered at the hands of the white man's justice, too many women from the justice imposed by a patriarchal order and too many workers from the justice imposed by capitalists to make the concept anything other than problematic. (1992: 95)

Abandoning universal principles of social justice as a response to the type of problem identified above can, at the end of the day, be tantamount to taking the side of the powerful on an highly uneven playing field. It can lead to a loss of confidence in collective action. It can lead to the type of collective paralysis that typified the response to the North Carolina accident, that is, no response at all!

Whilst the emergence of urban and new social movements generates possibilities for participation in politics, it is important to reconcile, or where possible build

alliances, with old movements for any chance of serious, structural, reform to occur. The negotiation of potentially common interests is an urgent political and educational task. Postmodernism can certainly help us see the project of social change more problematically than a reductionist Marxian analysis which reduces change to a rather mechanical vision of class struggle. However, this critique misses the concern for issues of diversity and pluralism that enabled the first new left to reposition the Marxian project without abandoning an interest in structural reform.

The struggle over cultural politics, informed by a structural and material analysis, is still relevant for a popular education today. Rather than query structural analysis as problematic we need, on the contrary, to see it as axiomatic. Without this grounding, the culturalist strand of New Times can get in the way of thinking about change that can make a real difference to people's lives. The emphasis on differences in lifestyle or culture can obscure forging common material interests that can unify people to act. On the other hand, postmodernism does recognise the importance of developing a more reflexive and modest sense of the possibilities for change. The misplaced practice of the educator carrying a 'message in a bottle' should not, however, be substituted by a debilitating attitude that they have nothing to offer.

## **Conclusion**

If we invert the learning iceberg and take our gaze away from the activity that goes on at the tip and, instead, look at the living and learning that occurs in popular struggles we have an opportunity to rethink the meaning of participation and the role of adult education in fostering it. Adult education needs to marshal its resources for ‘a journey of hope’ and align itself with popular struggles for change.

Making connections with popular struggles as sites of learning creates, therefore, an opportunity for adult education to catalyse the relationship between old and new movements and reach a wider constituency of agents for social change. This would involve reaching beyond the usual suspects who benefit from adult education. It also poses challenges about what counts as knowledge, who it is distributed to, what purpose education serves and what this implies for the worker’s role. Reframing participation along the lines indicated in this account has important and wider implications for what we mean by adult education.

The frequent inability of adult education to make the connection with popular struggles is, therefore, revealing of a wider malaise in the profession. If adult education is to make a serious challenge to the ‘learning divide’ it will need to

make connections between where people live, struggle and learn and what adult education has to offer such activity. The reality is that this is seldom encouraged and rarely happens. To turn this around will mean inverting dominant conceptions of learning, to discover what people are moved to know, so that once again, adult education can become an active force in history.

Working with popular struggles may seem like a suggestion to locate ourselves 'between a rock and a hard place'. However, in one sense there is no other place to be if we are interested in making a difference.

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