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## **Lifelong Learning and the Legacy of Social Purpose**

**paper presented at British Educational Research Association Conference, University of Leeds, Sept 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> 2001**

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*'All serious educational movements have, in England, been also social movements. They have been the expression in one sphere – the training of mind and character – of some distinctive conception of the life proper to man and the kind of society in which he can best live it.'* (Tawney, 1964, p88)

### **Introduction and summary**

This paper explores the implications for current lifelong learning research and practice of the historically privileged relationship claimed for radical adult education and movements for social change rooted in class, gender, anti-racist and community politics. The trajectory this relationship follows, in research, policy and practice, is complex, with phases of expansion and retrenchment, in the social movements and adult education, which do not always map straightforwardly against each other. The traditions, for they are importantly distinct within themselves, are also always found in relation to other traditions and purposes for adult education. "Complex and contested", as Richard Taylor describes them (Taylor 2000, p.69), but there is nevertheless a clearly identifiable, if historically varied, set of values, sites and practices which share a commitment to an educational pedagogy and purpose rooted in social and transformative, rather than individual and conformist, aspirations. This tradition, like the social movements and political cultures with which it has been aligned, has foundered in the last decade under the combined impact and discontents of the radical right, de-industrialisation and globalisation. In Britain, especially in Scotland, in recent years there are signs of a revived interest in questions of social purpose, popular social movements and their relation to lifelong learning. Some commentators have explored and debated the extent of the tradition's radicalism, less in the spirit of revisionism and more as a warning against the backward construction of a golden age against which to measure the shortcomings of the present (Chase 1995; Thompson 1996; Andrews, Keane and Thompson 1999). Others have engaged with and developed critiques of the shift from adult education to lifelong learning in terms of the opportunities and obstacles this presents radical adult educators (Foley 2001; Thompson 1997, 2000; Crowther, Martin and Shaw 1999; Field and Leicester 2000; Johnson 1999) while others have considered the debate in terms of changes within higher education as a whole (Scott 1995, 2000; Schuller 1995; Coffield and Williamson 1997; Watson and Taylor 1998).

We explore the legacy of social purpose in lifelong learning from our shared positioning as researchers, teachers and providers who were formed in the older, radical tradition of adult education and are now seeking ways to integrate its first principles in a very different social, political and educational order. The paper has four sections. We begin with an overview of how the sites and preoccupations of an earlier generation of radical adult educators fared in the new times of post thatcherism and new labour. As part of this section we track the response and implications of the "call to arms" Jane Thompson extended through her 1993 article 'Learning, liberation and

maturity: an open letter to whoever's left' in *Adults Learning* (Thompson 1993). Next, through a comparative analysis of proceedings from the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in Education and its sister organisations in North America, Canada, Australasia and Europe, we consider the extent to which these concerns have shaped and informed the research agenda for adult education. We then discuss the nature of a range of contemporary social movements, of the right as well as the left, and discuss the extent to which they engage with and utilise forms of lifelong learning. Finally, in considering the implications for teaching and research into lifelong learning, we argue for the importance of constructing and inhabiting positions within lifelong learning which are both critical and active, that is they are for, as well as against, things.

### **The legacy in the labour movement**

A strong element in the radical adult education tradition, both in Britain and elsewhere, is its links with the working class and labour movements. From the late eighteenth century onwards, as ideas of democracy, equality and 'the rights of man' began to feed the development of popular political movements, those movements engaged in educational activities through which ideas and 'really useful knowledge' could be spread and enriched. As Johnson points out, many of these activities were informal and improvisational; 'the crucial division that radicals refused ... was that between education and politics' (Johnson 1979, p18), and so educational activities were seen simply as an integral part of political action. As the nineteenth century progressed the manifestations and espoused purposes of working class and labour movement education multiplied, diversified and conflicted with each other. The Chartists, the working men's colleges, the non-conformist churches, the Co-operative movement, the Mechanics' Institutes and so on, all at various times adopted widely differing stances towards the desirable forms and direction of social change and the role of education – self-organised or state-provided – within it. The WEA and the Labour College movement argued noisily and publicly in the first half of the twentieth century over their ideological differences and political, or 'apolitical', postures (Brown, 1980). Nevertheless all of these organisations, in their different ways, wanted social and political change, and saw education as a tool for change.

If we look at educational activity within the labour movement now, it is clear that enormous changes have taken place. For example, as early as 1988, John Field lamented the way in which trade union education had developed over the 70s and 80s, 'cut off from many of the new developments in community-based adult education and from its own origins in the committed and politically alert work of the WEA and Labour College movement' (Field 1988, p237). He criticised the loss of any radical edge to TUC education work, and its focus on workplace issues and the mechanics of plant bargaining, rather than on 'the political and economic causes that underlie workplace concerns' (p229). In the intervening years, the tendency of union education to focus on organising and negotiating skills has intensified and, although there are still courses available to trade unionists on the political and socio-economic bases of work and union activity (notably through Unison and MSF), they have become the exception rather than the rule. More surprisingly perhaps, the government has become much more closely involved in trade union education activities:

'The Union Learning Fund (ULF) promotes activity by trade unions *in support of the government's objective* of creating a learning society, by influencing the increase in take up of learning in the workplace and *boosting union's [sic] capacity as learning organisations.*' (DfEE website, emphasis added)

As Field has noted much more recently the labour movement has been transformed from a site of active democracy into 'series of professionalised organisations, providing services in exchange for regular subscription payments' (Field 2001, p13).

Elsewhere in the labour movement, although purposeful educational activities are still a feature of small political groupings, such as the Socialist Workers Party, they have almost disappeared from mainstream Labour Party work. This needs to be seen, of course, in the context of a changed political culture in which there are, firstly, proportionally far fewer people joining trade unions and political parties and, secondly, greater opportunities through the mass media for information and opinion forming.

At the same time, there has been a renewed emphasis on the workplace as both the site, and purpose, of educational work. However, as part of the creation of the learning, or knowledge, society the purpose of education is redefined in the interests of the state and its focus, and motivation, driven by competitive individualism. The instrumental and competitive forms of learning which are promoted (and funded) not only seem in themselves more attractive and purposeful to people negotiating everyday life in global capitalism, promising as they do the *really* really useful knowledge of vocational skills and training, but they undermine and diminish, as merely social, the purposes of non-vocational education.

### **The feminist legacy**

Second wave feminism, which can be dated both to the first national Women's Liberation Movement conference held in 1970 at Ruskin College, Oxford and a series of strikes and political campaigns, such as that in 1970 led by Lily Bilocca against dangerous working conditions in the Hull fishing industry, was a political and campaigning movement which meshed with education, across the spectrum from nursery education through to higher education, in a variety of ways. The focus on consciousness raising, the critique of sexism and the culturalist emphasis within the movement on reclaiming women's neglected histories and cultural achievements all contributed to put a greater emphasis on education as a site for, and form of, political activity than had been the case for earlier forms of feminist organising. It is also the case for feminism, as for other late 20th century social movements, that the emphasis on education came in large part because education itself was a defining discourse of progressive social change in post-war Britain.

Adult education was an important site for feminist work in the 1970s and 80s, and in turn the emerging, distinctive, feminist pedagogy that developed there shaped the critical practice of much community-based and radical adult education. The Worker's Educational Association [WEA] in particular, and certain local education authority [LEA] adult education institutes and university extra-mural departments, provided a space for networking and curriculum development, as well as dissemination, in the newly emergent fields of women's studies and feminist theory. Courses run

under their auspices were often more akin to study groups and often published findings in, for example, women's history, women's writing, health and sociology. Post-graduate students who used them as sounding boards for their own feminist research projects often taught these courses. A scan of WEA and extra-mural course prospectuses from the late 1970s and early 1980s reveals several tutors - such as Eileen Aird, Linda Anderson, Jean Barr, Catherine Hall, Mary Kennedy, Moira Monteith, Barbara Taylor - who later went on to publish key works of feminist scholarship and/or establish women's studies courses in higher education. Reviewing the WEA Women's Studies Newsletter (first published in 1977) it is clear that during the first decade of its existence there is a seamlessness between educational and political activities. This is evidenced not only by the list of contents, in which reports of women's studies courses planned and delivered sit alongside reports on industrial action, reproductive health issues and campaigns, features based on women's writing or history and reviews of books by and about women on a wide range of topics, but also by the activist and interdisciplinary nature of the courses reported on.

Networking, through conferences, newsletters and training packs (in 1987, the WEA had 12 packs or pamphlets to support women's education in print), was an important way for women in adult education of making the connection between education, social movements and social change. It generated momentum for, and feedback between, providers and participants as the success of particular programmes in one part of the country were used to defend and introduce them elsewhere. This was especially so with the New Opportunities for Women [NOW] courses which were radical, and therefore often contested, departures for their providers. Women activists in the WEA were also often involved with LEA and extra-mural initiatives, whether as tutors, members of study groups or local women liberation groups.

NOW offered women students an opportunity to study with other women on courses taught by women who, in the main, took women's social, cultural and historical experience as the norm. Courses were intensive, often requiring attendance for one or two full days each week, and were supported with onsite childcare. They thus provided an intensive social and educational environment in which women could review past and current life experiences and prepare, academically and personally, for future changes. NOW was, for many women, a means of simultaneously institutionalising and democratising the consciousness raising which had distinguished the politics of early secondwave feminism. The provision of NOW courses grew at a considerable rate throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. They were the forerunners of a much more broadly based access movement, often community-based, which created a second chance to learn, in further and higher education, for the working class more generally.

Further Education [FE] and LEA community adult education was also a site for these initiatives as well as the source of more vocationally-led initiatives, often known as Wider Opportunities for Women [WOW], which worked with initiatives and campaigns to encourage women into less traditionally feminine areas of work and training, such as manual trades, management, engineering and science, and also migrated from the university extra-mural departments where they originated to local authority provision in community and further education settings.

The mainstreaming of university continuing education following the 1994 HEFCE Circular made problematic the continuation of NOW, and other forms of access and community education. Such provision continues, often provided in the FE and LEA sectors, and it is often a source of profound personal transformation for its participants. But has become detached from a distinctly feminist political project, part of a wider move towards credentialism and often now confirms individual rather than collective solutions and does so within a largely conformist, vocationally based approach to education.

Within higher education, there was a move from women's studies options across the curriculum to degree and, especially, post-graduate programmes in women's studies and, more recently gender studies. While these programmes continue to recruit from, and appeal to, political activists amongst their staff and students, they are often marginalised both within the wider community and the institution as a result of the fragmentation of feminist politics more generally. Throughout the secondwave, there were tensions between feminists and activists based in and outside the academy about the language, preoccupations and priorities of intellectual feminist work and, most sharply, feminist theory. During the 1980s, feminism's organising base fragmented as a result of internal tensions between radical, liberal and socialist feminists, the rise of single issue campaigns, such as Greenham and the women's peace movement, and conflicts generated by deconstruction of women as an organising concept under the pressure of differences of race, class, sexuality, age and (dis) ability. It could be argued that during this time that feminism became more powerful, because more pervasive, but equally it lacked the social force that a unified, if non-consensual, movement and set of campaigns and actions had given it. Ironically, the dissolution of the movement occurred as the ideas of sexual equality upon which it was founded began to be embedded not as radical and extreme ideas but as a new kind of common sense in various social sites and discourses, for example equal opportunity policies, local authority women's units and women's education provision. But in adopting a bland version of commitment to equal opportunities and establishing structures intended to promote it in particular, usually non-threatening, ways, governments and institutions render political activity apparently pointless and unnecessary. As women's studies and black studies have become academically respectable, their increasingly exclusive concern with theory has loosened their organic connection with the social movements from which they sprang. Even in the sphere of further education, where theory has less of a foothold, the provision of courses for specific groups has lost whatever radical association it might once have had through its location within an educational culture of *individual* opportunity and learning.

### **The legacy of anti-racism**

In Britain, unlike North America, anti-racist work has never achieved anything comparable to feminism's impact upon the educational system. During the 1970s most major towns and cities in Britain had a Campaign against Racism and Fascism which united black organisations, trade unions, including those, such as the Indian Workers' Association, which catered solely for an ethnic minority membership, and voluntary organisations in a range of political organising and activism. The campaigns were committed to forms of political education for their membership, and used some

educational methods to promote the organisation and its issues to a wider, often work-based, community, but they rarely formed partnerships with educational providers to do so.

Throughout the 1970s Teachers Centres and, in some of Britain's major cities, Centres for Multicultural Education provided an organising focus for curriculum development and campaigns to promote anti-racist teaching materials and approaches in schools. The Inner London Education Authority, for example, invested heavily in material and staff resources to support anti-sexist and anti-racist teaching and learning as did other metropolitan areas, such as Bradford, which was also heavily involved in policy-making, staff development and curriculum resources on the ILEA model. The National Association for Multi-cultural Education brought together teachers (and some parents) in schools, further and adult education. Changing its name to the National Anti-racist Movement in Education [NAME] in the mid 1980s marked a change of emphasis away from 'inclusion' towards a stance which actively challenged overt and covert racism in educational practices and curriculum. The Bradford branch was very active in supporting the parents' campaign against Ray Honeyford, a Bradford head teacher accused of racist opinions and racism in his professional behaviour. NAME was also notable for providing a mixed and politicised forum for the concerns of the increasing numbers of black teachers. NAME was, though, a small bulwark against the predominately troubled relationship with schooling experienced by black pupils, their parents and their teachers. For many, a more important positive countering of these troubles lay in the Saturday Supplementary Schools, a self-help strategy by black and other ethnic minority communities, which supplied, positive role models, encouragement and a non-eurocentric curriculum and, for those for whom English was a second language, mother tongue teaching.

LEAs, who were involved in providing basic skills education (literacy and English for speakers of other languages) were as a result often responsible for teaching the largest numbers of black and ethnic minority students in the post-compulsory education sector. Participation in continuing education and higher education was minimal and, despite a decade or more of widening participation projects geared towards encouraging greater participation from black British and other ethnic minority students, remains not only low, but also unevenly distributed across the sector.

The politics of race have remained a consistently important arena for non-party political grassroots campaigns throughout this period. Education appears to have been a less important site for these struggles than the media and the law, reflecting the extent to which racist practices are also conducted on this terrain. High profile cases, such as the Justice for Stephen Lawrence campaign, resistance to successive policies concerning nationality and immigration and the daily attrition of racist acts and attitudes demonstrate how much more starkly black British people encounter the state. However, as Heidi Safia Mirza argues, it is important to distinguish black female agency within the dominant masculinist discourse of race and social change, which are characterised by public and largely confrontational contestations of race through community action, street protests and riots (Mirza 1997). She documents and analyses the positive orientation to education found amongst many black women and evidenced both by their commitment to black supplementary schools and their own achievements in further and higher education. Citing national statistics, she shows that the percentage of black women aged 16 – 24 in full-time education is, at 52%, considerably higher than white women (28%), black men (36%) or white men (32%).

Mirza acknowledges the conformist appearance and nature of both the supplementary schools and individual black women's educational achievements but she argues that their positioning in counter hegemonic spaces renders them paradoxically radical and conservative in their aims and praxis. Following Patricia Hill Collins, she rejects the more traditional, and relational, model of community and belonging in favour of an identity, both individual and social, which subverts and claims, rather than simply resists, the mainstream.

### **The legacy of community action**

If, for the late-nineteenth century, it is the relationship with the labour movement that provides the imprimatur of radical social change for adult education, for the late-twentieth century it is the relationship with community activism. Although much of the education provided in and for working class communities served, in Freire's terms, to domesticate rather than liberate, there was also, from the late-1960s onwards a synergy between grassroots movements which developed out of anti-poverty campaigns and emergent radical professions, such as youth, community and social work and informal adult education, often linked to forms of state regulation, such as adult literacy, job creation/job search, health and citizenship. Community education supported several movements for social change in its own right, such as common ownership and co-operatives, action on child poverty, health and disability rights, rent strikes and social housing. It also provided networks that promoted feminist and anti-racist campaigns and their associated educational activities, as well as utilising and promoting cultural activities, which were most often delivered in an educational setting.

Working class communities and council housing estates were fruitful sites for the kinds of community activism supported by community educators during the late 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s, these movements for social change became much more defensive in the face of de-industrialisation and the systematic asset stripping of civil society conducted by the New Right. Richard Johnson, the cultural historian of education who conceptualised the radical tradition as the source of "really useful knowledge" (Johnson 1979), argues convincingly that the New Right is a kind of new social movement in its own right, formed in struggle with the ideas and practices of the critical social movements which developed from 1960 onwards (Johnson 1991). Following this analysis, we can see that community activism, and its attendant forms of community education, did not simply burn out, fragment or succumb to the bad management practices they were charged with by Charles Landry in *What A Way To Run a Railroad*, but were systematically captured for, and denatured by, the New Right. Cynthia Cockburn, as early as 1977, was pointing out the contradictory positioning of community activists, including educators, as part of the local state's management of change. This analysis became increasingly pertinent throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when urban regeneration became one of the few growth industries in the wastelands of Britain's former industrial heartland.

The co-option of community education's potential for transformation and critique was secured through a variety of ideological and material means. Debbie Epstein, in a discussion of the New Right's re-making of higher education, analyses the ways in which marketisation, the entitlement



culture and discourses of derision work against education's radical and transformative potential by inscribing it as a site of subversion in urgent need of control (Epstein 1995). Although the specificity is different, just as Epstein translates from schooling to higher education, it is possible to see the same forces at work in community adult education. The provision of community education is now less about local activism and more bounded by policy, linked as it is with social inclusion and regeneration agendas which put the emphasis on learners and learning rather than knowledge and criticality. At the same time, and perhaps as a result of this shift, its contradictions are starkly revealed and thus more accessible to practitioners and theorists alike (Crowther, Martin and Shaw 1999, 2000; Bamber, Ducklin and Tett 2000).

### **Is resistance useless?**

This question needs to be seen, of course, in the context of a changed political culture. In the labour and associated left-wing movements, as in the other movements described here, the oppositional force of movement activities has been diminished by (among other factors) the effective depoliticisation, usually through co-option, of some of the principal issues around which they were originally built. For example, race and sex equality, although still far from being achieved, have become taken-for-granted premises in most areas of life. This does not mean that the original inequalities that sparked the respective movements have disappeared; on the contrary, they are in some respects more deeply entrenched than ever. But in adopting a bland version of commitment to equality and establishing structures intended to promote it in particular, usually non-threatening, ways, governments and institutions render political activity apparently pointless and unnecessary. As women's studies and black studies have become academically respectable, their concern with theory has loosened their organic connection with the social movements from which they sprang. Even in the less academic sphere of further education, the provision of courses for specific groups has lost whatever radical association it might once have had through its location within an educational culture of *individual* opportunity and learning. Social inclusion and widening participation are such broad and all-encompassing aims that there is no need for any group to feel that they have been left out. Similarly, community regeneration, work-related learning and the politics of 'partnership' mean that radical education as a form of political resistance would appear meaningless; we are, after all, all on the same side.

Except, of course, that we are not. The editors of *Reclaiming Common Purpose*, a millennial publication from the NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning in England and Wales, designed to celebrate and encourage the contemporary forms of the radical tradition, puts it succinctly:

*'There is a lie at the heart of current political discourse, and it goes like this: we are all stakeholders in the best of all capitalist worlds. When we pull together we all benefit – rich and poor alike. [...] Although we are all stakeholders, some are more important than others.'* (Thompson, Shaw and Bane 2000)

The echo of George Orwell's differently equal animals is surely deliberate.

Whether or not resistance is useless, it is slowly finding its feet again. In 1993, Jane Thompson published 'Learning, liberation and maturity: an open letter to whoever's left' in *Adults Learning* (Thompson 1993). It struck a chord with adult educators who were struggling to retain integrity and situated politicised practice in the face of a massive ideological and financial restructuring of their own and related, in both the further and higher education sectors. When Jane Thompson was seconded from Ruskin College to NIACE, with a wide ranging research and development brief, she provided a focus for activism and writing on the new engagements and formulations of the radical tradition. In particular, *Stretching the Academy* provided a thorough going critique of the by then hegemonic politics and practice of widening participation in higher education which articulated clearly and forcefully why, as Jim Crowther, Ian Martin and Mae Shaw describe it, the academy is in need of turning, rather than stretching. They argue that the dominant discourse of access and participation elides questions of 'access to what; and participation in what, and on whose terms' and reminds us that there is 'no educational road to social justice' (Crowther, Martin and Shaw 2000, p.174).

### **Shaping the research agenda**

We have good evidence of the ways in which radicalism was intertwined with adult education during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In order to gauge the influence of radicalism on adult education in more recent times, we used the papers presented at the annual conference of SCUTREA, the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults as a source of information. This strategy is flawed in that it shows us the influence of radicalism on research and public writing in adult education, rather than on practice; and we are conscious that much radical educational activity has been undocumented, or recorded only outside the educational literature. It will clearly be necessary to look further than this if we wish to draw firm conclusions. Nevertheless, the 'audit' of these papers provided some interesting indications of the directions which adult educators' concerns have taken over the past thirty years.

The first SCUTREA conference took place in 1970. For the first five years, there is very little evidence of radicalism in the contributions; the history, philosophy and management of adult education, and the training of practitioners, dominate the early proceedings. The Russell Report in 1973, and the (Scottish) Alexander Report in 1974 do succeed in focusing members' attention on 'need' as an organising principle in provision, although they are largely preoccupied with the restructuring and management of new forms of community education, rather than with any explicit political purpose. It is not until 1976 that clear political links are made between the commitments and practices of adult educators and the social impact of their work.

*'Fordham made it very clear that the project had been conceived by what he called a 'group of democratising enthusiasts', who positively identified with the needs of the underdog in our society, and who explicitly recognised that they ought to be actively engaged in the business of positive educational discrimination. However, in practice the [community education] work at Leigh Park had also made the team more conscious of the wide gap which often separates theoretical commitment from practical help. In particular, they soon found that middle class intellectuals motivated by an*

*academic commitment to the working class often lack the cultural references and communicative skills to relate easily, and offer practical assistance, to those they wish to help'. (Fordham and Randle, 1976, p9)*

Community education becomes a constant, if minor, concern over the remainder of the 1970s. Interestingly, the only evidence of a focus on women's education comes from a male author who, mistakenly, terms a community education project for mothers 'parent education' (Wellings, 1977). It is apparent that political understandings of adult education are a minority concern, although the minority is keen to articulate its position:

*'Learning and the processes of learning must involve social and political consciousness. Development is not about alleviating the symptoms of poverty, with which so much traditional community and social work is concerned, and it is not about integrating people into what a minority group considers to be the 'good society' as if people are mere objects of charity and of other people's decisions and have nothing of value to offer themselves. Development is a process which involves men and women in liberating themselves economically and politically, and education has a significant part to play in this process.'* (Alexander and Steward, 1977, pp58-9)

However it is really only possible to gauge concerns among those who actually present papers; dissenting voices are sometimes heard in reports of the discussions which follow papers, and it becomes clear by 1980 that there is a politicised but quiet minority who rarely appear in the pages of the proceedings:

*'The number of female staff attending SCUTREA conferences between 1970 and 1980 inclusive has ranged between 12% and 16% of the conference participants, except for the year 1972 when it reached a nadir of 2.7%. During the conferences there have been some 114 'lead' roles, i.e. those staff either presenting a paper or report or chairing a meeting or convening or leading a discussion group. Only nine of these roles have been taken by women. When one looks at recorders (i.e. note-takers) of sessions then the female staff can take up to 50% of these places.'* (Oglesby et al 1980, p 28)

In 1980 a group of five women adult educators seized the initiative and presented a series of papers written from a feminist perspective. From this point onwards there are only occasional 'radical' papers until 1985, at which point radicalism in the form of feminism, labour education, Marxism and, occasionally, anti-racism becomes a regular feature of the conference proceedings. In the mid-1980s, much of this writing was firmly related to (emancipatory) educational practice; the 1987 conference, for example, was given over almost entirely to a discussion of the concept of praxis (Armstrong, 1987; Haffenden, 1987).

From 1990 onwards, a change can be felt. A number of factors contribute to this change: the post-modern turn has begun, and is expressed both in terms of theoretical unravelling and rewritings, and in the idea of politically 'new times', the latter borrowed from the disintegrating Communist party; feminism and anti-racism have staked out their claim to a voice in the academy; and the war of attrition waged by the Thatcher government on education is beginning to be felt more keenly in

higher education. This contributes to a move into fierce policy critique, but is also accompanied by a change of focus in adult education writing; increasingly, linguistic and deconstructionist analyses, and auto/biographical approaches to research, replace attempts to reconcile grand radical narratives with everyday educational practice. In some ways, adult education seems to become more inward looking from this point onwards.

If we look for evidence of the radical concerns of the 1970s and 1980s in current adult education writing, the distance travelled becomes apparent. The SCUTREA proceedings 2000 (REF) take the theme of 'inclusion' – a linguistic change which itself illustrates some of the political differences which have emerged. Paper titles mention social inclusion, inclusivity, diversity, (widening) participation and (community) regeneration, and some papers focus on the ways in which curriculum, assessment, teaching and 'pathways' through learning can promote these qualities. Others instead offer a critique of the discourse of inclusion from a variety of standpoints (e.g. Armstrong, 2000; Edwards and Miller, 2000). Our chosen 'radical' foci of feminism, race, labour and community do not feature strongly in relation either to practice, or to the terms in which critique is offered – although gender, ethnicity, 'difference', disability and 'learning at work' do. This is not just a change in the language used, but a move away from understanding these issues as *movements*, and towards seeing them largely as ideological constructs and aspects of identity.

In order to assess whether this is a particularly British problem, we have also looked at the proceedings of the international adult education conference for the same year (REF); this was organised by SCUTREA and sister organisations in North America, Canada, Australasia and Europe. A different picture emerges here. Feminism and anti-racism are clearly present, though their form has changed; in most cases, they are used as interpretative devices in descriptions of particular forms of educational practice (e.g. vocational education for African American women – Hayes and Way, 2000). Alternatively they may be used as aids to identity analysis: 'Using the notions of nonunitary subjectivity to analyse life history narratives, I demonstrate how multiple positionings within available discourses serve to disadvantage these women' (Clark, 2000). Writing driven by labour movement activity or commitment is replaced to a large extent by analyses of work-related learning at either the individual or organisational level (e.g. Fenwick, Xu). Community education is alive and well, though largely of a different ideological stripe to that promoted by Fordham and others in the 1970s. There is some emphasis on the individual and identity impacts of community-based education, although Tom Heaney (ref) offers a Freirian analysis focusing explicitly on social change.

### **Contemporary social movements in relation to lifelong learning**

Despite the fact that the once 'new' social movements described here have diminished as important sites of political activity, and thus receded from the theory and practice of adult education, it is clear that there are other social movements engaging those who might be described as radicals and activists. For the sake of clarity we will refer to these as contemporary social movements. These are both more diffuse and more narrowly focused than their older counterparts; more diffuse in that they are not usually built upon a clearly defined understanding of the world (or 'grand narrative'), but narrower in that they often take as their focus a quite specific area of social, economic or political activity. This focus can also be inflected to the right as well as the left, as

recent campaigns about issues as diverse as the cost of fuel and rehabilitation of sex offenders have shown. Given the small-scale nature of some of these movements it would be impossible to enumerate them all, but some current examples are:

- Anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist movements
- Campaigns against poverty and debt
- Animal rights campaigns
- The Countryside Alliance
- Movements campaigning around national or religious identity
- Fascist movements
- Environmental movements
- Campaigns on issues of sexuality and gender identity
- Health-related campaigns, e.g. on HIV/AIDS; fertility; disability; abortion

Several of these movements demonstrate a strong commitment to forms of informal political education for their membership similar to that found in the wider labour movement throughout its early years. There is information and instruction for activism, and statements of position, which are often explicitly presented for use when putting the movement's case to others. One example of this is Reclaim the Streets, which concludes this statement from its 'Ideas' pages with links to a range of papers held on media and university web sites by authors such as Gorz, Cleaver and Kropotkin.

*'Reclaim the Streets is not a send-off-the-cheque sit-in-front-of-the-spectacle organisation. It's a participatory disorganisation. The best way to make good things happen is to take part. . . get a group together to organise a street party or whatever, wherever where you live.*

*... Capitalism is a big subject, and if you've paid any attention at all to the other stuff here you'll have gathered that people around RTS are firmly opposed to totalising ideologies. (That's not to say there's much sympathy for postmodernism or anything. That's mostly an academic aberration to be kicked over on the path towards whatever really comes after modernism.)'*

(<http://www.gn.apc.org/rts/contact.htm>, accessed 11 September 2001)

All these movements are sites of learning, sometimes tacit, sometimes not. Within the context of their organisations, they are sites of both popular education and its service in social change. There is no prerogative for either to be radical, critical and emancipatory. In order to tease out the contradictions (large and small, personal and public, individual and social) of this situation it is important to look across the whole spectrum of social action and to do so having made a clear distinction, following Jim McGuigan, between critical and uncritical populism (McGuigan 1992). Some of these movements seek a direct link with formal education, although this is more often schools than adult education, as with The Countryside Alliance's production of a video and teaching pack which engages with the current debate about countryside pursuits. The production of the video itself formed part of a work scheme for year 10 pupils as part of a citizenship module ([www.countryside-alliance.org/edu/video.htm](http://www.countryside-alliance.org/edu/video.htm), accessed 14 August 2001).

Again, we can use current national and international adult education conferences as a source of evidence on the extent to which these contemporary movements' concerns are reflected in adult

education theory and practice. The two sources used here are the SCUTREA and AERC proceedings for 2000, the latter being on this occasion an international, albeit largely anglophone, event. The SCUTREA proceedings reflect the current policy preoccupation with 'inclusion', as discussed above. There is relatively little evidence in the 43 papers of *direct engagement* with the contemporary movements we have identified, that is, engagement through formal or informal educational practice. The contemporary themes of active citizenship (Benn), flexibility (Clarke and Edwards) and regeneration (Watts) are critically addressed, and issues such as age (Fleming) and disability (Dale) receive perhaps more attention than they would once have had. Several papers address, at the level of theoretical and policy critique, various themes related to globalisation and learning in social/resistance movements (Crowther; Forrester and Payne; Frost; Johnston; Martin); significantly, two of these authors have already written elsewhere on the way in which Scottish social movements have been affected by the process of devolution (Crowther et al, 1999). Davidson and Piette also look at the ways in which Welsh national identity is being influenced by the devolution process; there are, clearly, strands of adult education in the UK in which questions of national identity are entwining social movements with adult education. There is also one paper exploring spirituality and adult learning (White), which probably reflects a social movement of a different – individualised – kind from those we have discussed so far.

The AERC proceedings are more substantial, containing 98 papers as well as 36 roundtables or symposia; they are also more diverse, since they are not built around a specified conference theme. Spirituality, broadly conceived and including religious identity, seems to figure rather more prominently here than in the SCUTREA proceedings. Various papers address the theme in relation to gender (Tisdall, Rosenwasser), religious activism (Lander), ageing (Muhamad and Merriam) and 'holistic' ecology (Hill). Disability features in only two papers as a principal theme (Gorman, Rocco). Environmental or ecological issues are not prominent either, appearing once in the context of spirituality (LH Hill), and then in the more practical context of a Canadian sustainable agriculture programme (Grudens-Schuck). Sexuality appears largely in relation to health issues, specifically in Egan's paper on HIV/AIDS prevention programmes, and in a roundtable on identity formation in HIV-positive adults, although there is also an unusual contribution on feminism among transsexuals (RJ Hill). It is perhaps worth pointing out that in the 2001 proceedings of both organisations, issues related to sexuality appear rather more frequently, so this may mark a change in progress.

There is a category of contributions in the AERC proceedings which might be classed as broadly radical, and in many of which the concerns and activities of social movements are explicitly addressed. For example, symposia on the relationship between adult education and democracy in the third world, and on labour education in the context of globalisation, plus a roundtable on adult education for a civil society, suggest that these concerns are becoming increasingly prominent. A number of individual papers address specific aspects or interpretations of radicalism; one or two look at the ambiguous concepts of 'citizenship' or 'civil capital' within democracy (Tunmer, Schugurensky, Sumner), but others offer a more direct and challenging approach to social change at local and global levels (Heaney, Martin, Newman, Preece). It is notable, however, that most of these contributions cover these issues at what might be termed the macro-level – that is, in terms of broad political, economic and social change, and the policy directions which influence these changes. There is little here that parallels, for example, Fordham and Randle's practice-based but

politically framed community education contribution (1976), except perhaps Martin's call for the conscious re-politicisation of adult education. This is not to say that practice does not feature in the proceedings; on the contrary, numerous papers describe and interpret the intricacies of diverse sites of educational practice. But the analysis of practice tends to happen at the micro - individual or group - level, or alternatively, to focus on more abstract understandings of human experience and learning. The discourses of positionality, auto/biography, identity- and knowledge-construction dominate here, to an extent that would have seemed unthinkable ten years ago, when so much North American adult education research was driven by a crude scientism. What appears to be missing is the link – in terms of both understanding and practice - between the emerging macro-political analyses of global change and social movements, and the micro-level analyses of social and cultural impacts on group and individual understandings and identities ('internalised oppression', as Rosenwasser puts it). The missing link may well be attributable to the absence of adult educators from the sites of learning within contemporary social movements.

### **Implications for research and teaching**

Griff Foley suggests there are now three options open to those of us committed to critical and emancipatory adult learning and education.

*' We can capitulate and become more efficient managers of learning for capitalism. We can nostalgically and ineffectually bemoan the decline and death of earlier traditions. Or we can fight on the new terrain. The third alternative is the only one viable for radical educators.'* (Foley 2001, p.84)

What will it mean to fight on the new terrain? First, it will mean fighting our own inertia and depression, and perhaps, too, our own internalised individual competitiveness. We will need to relearn the power of organising for activism, and to find ways of building alliances which challenge and subvert the provider competition which has been so successfully engineered into, and co-opted by, our local lifelong learning partnerships. In order to do this, we will need to draw on 'honest brokers', such as NIACE, whose situated disinterest can create a framework for genuine collaboration between local players. Second, we will need to contest and critique the dominant ideologies and practices of the educational provision we make, at the macro and the micro level. This may take the form of more attention to the content, as well as form, of what we teach, re-engaging with the critical and emancipatory power of curriculum analysis and development. It will also involve re-focussing the widening participation and mass higher education agendas towards questions of changing the mainstream, in terms of funding, access, pedagogy and curriculum content. Third, it will mean embracing a new research agenda, despite (or, perhaps, because) it sits at a tangent to the new politics of research and research funding. Such a research agenda will map new spaces, including virtual communities, as well as new times in its focus on the new embodiments of the old-new social movements, charting the commonalties and differences they share with contemporary social movements in relation to education.

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