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## ABSTRACT

The following conference papers cover a wide spectrum of issues in continuing education: "Introduction" (Katherine Leni Oglesby); "Footprints in the Sand?--The Legacy of the University Funding Council's Support for Research in Continuing Education" (Chris Duke); "Thinking Fragments: Learning, Life Histories and the Self" (Linden West); "Group Research Projects in Adult Continuing Education" (Joan Unwin); "Adult Self-Directed Learning in the Community and Its Implications" (Keith Percy); "Creativity Training for Design Engineers in Heavy Plant Industries" (Graham Thompson, Martina Lordan); "The Leeds Adult Learners at Work Project: Knowledge and Control in Employee Development Schemes" (John Payne, Keith Forester); "'Personal Troubles and Public Issues': University Researchers, Adult Educators and Adult Learners in Rural Areas" (John Payne); "Voluntary Organisations. Citizenship, Learning and Change" (Konrad Elsdon); "Inside Perspectives: Ex-Prisoners' Views on Prison Education" (Sally Malin, Ina J. Kell); "Mainstreaming, Critical Histories and Cultural Identities" (Tom Steele); "Responding to Language Shift among Young People" (Heini Gruffudd); "Accessing the Imagination: Creative Writing in Community Education" (Rebecca O'Rourke); "Learning from Working Together: Experiencing Collaborative Research as Education" (Sue Shuttleworth et al.); "The Challenge of Linking Research and Practice: Ways of Learning in Adult Basic Education" (Mary Hamilton, Wendy Moss); "Disability Voice" (Mal Leicester); "Returners, Mathematics and Targeting" (Roseanne Benn); and "Access of Adult to the University: A Comparative UK/Belgian Study" (Barbara Merrill, Jean-Luc Guyot). Many papers contain substantial bibliographies. (MN)



Papers from

**Innovation in Continuing Education Provision,**

**Teaching and Learning: Research Perspectives**

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Dee Daghish has supported this project from the start, first by providing administrative help for the conference and later by standardising the diverse papers into a coherent layout for publication. Lucy Hunter designed the cover and took care of production and printing.

The Departments of Continuing Education and Educational Research at Lancaster both sponsored these activities and we were pleased to be invited to run the original conference under the umbrella of the UACE/SCUTREA/SRHE Seminar series.

Finally, thanks are due to all the contributors who made the conference such a success and produced their papers so promptly.

Mary Hamilton

Alex Withnall

## INTRODUCTION

I am delighted to write the introduction to this publication of papers on Innovation in Continuing Education Provision, Teaching and Learning: Research Perspectives presented originally as part of the UACE/SCUTREA/SRHE seminar series.

The earmarked UFC/HEFCE Continuing Education research funding dates from 1990 and the projects which were granted funding have been many and various. This research initiative funding has now ended and it seems highly appropriate to celebrate what has been achieved through it.

The original intention behind this targeted research funding was that it should serve the practical purposes of:

- supporting a relatively new field of research in universities which was being held back by a lack of recognition from research councils and other funding agencies
- pump-priming a field in order to assist in raising its profile to the point where it stood a better chance of gaining such recognition from funding agencies
- freeing staff from teaching duties in order to enable them to make their particular contributions to the existing body of research knowledge.

It was also the intention that the outcomes of the research projects should be disseminated as widely as possible in order to inform not only the body of research but also to support good practice in the field.

The range of papers included in this publication illustrate admirably the breadth of the research work undertaken with the funding and the value that it has had and will continue to have for the Continuing Education field.

I am sure that the projects outlined, the issues raised and analyses discussed within the book will promote and stimulate further research projects and build on the valuable work included here.

Katherine Leni Oglesby  
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# Footprints in the Sand? - The Legacy of the University Funding Council's Support for Research in Continuing Education

Chris Duke  
University of Warwick

## Introduction - the UFC Continuing Education Research Funding Episode

The United Kingdom's short-lived Universities Funding Council (UFC) succeeded an earlier, more gentlemanly, Universities Grants Committee at the end of the 1980s and took the British university system into the era of 'contracting'. That word offers a nice double entendre: making contracts to deliver services in a semi-privatised UK Inc. Higher Education enterprise; and the contraction or shrinking of resources for the work of universities.

In fact the brief UFC era was one of very rapid expansion of the university (and a larger higher education) sector as a whole, with less, though still marked, expansion of public resources to support growth. For university continuing education it was a quite unexpected Indian Summer of special-purpose ear-marked funding on a scale and across a spectrum larger and broader than ever before. Only with the successor Higher Education Funding Councils (HEFCs) has long-awaited 'mainstreaming' become a more thoroughly tangible, financial reality.

At the end of 1992 the UFC and its sister body, the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC), gave way to three HEFCs for England, Scotland and Wales. This marked the transition from a binary and elite to a nominally unitary and mass higher education system. Among its last acts, the UFC orchestrated the third (1992) Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), following those of 1986 and 1989. The English Funding Council (HEFCE) inherited the RAE system, for which all universities were preparing themselves in 1995.

The HEFCs inherited much else from their predecessor Councils, including two funding methodologies. The creation of a single, merged methodology has dominated much of the life of university administrators in the short space since the HEFCs were created. In 1995 university continuing educators were wrestling with the consequences of the new methodology for all of their educational provision - a methodology which reflected horse-trading as the different polytechnic and university Continuing Education traditions were pressed closer together.

Until the merger, Continuing Education research, insofar as it existed and was recognised at all, belonged formally in the university sector, but its existence, identity (in the multidisciplinary extramural tradition), rationale and legitimacy were ambiguous and disputed. The UFC supported University Continuing Education in three ways. The first two represented continuity and rationalisation, as the Department of Education and Science (DES) drew back from direct involvement in Higher Education. They were, first, by continuing the tradition of 'PICKUP' (continuing vocational education) development funding initiated by the DES in the early eighties; and second by providing, surprisingly adequately, for liberal adult education (LAE) in the extramural tradition, taking over from the Responsible Body (RB) tradition also of the DES. This was under threat of demolition by a more interventionist regime within DES in the late eighties.

If the level of support for LAE from Lord Chilver's free-market 'contracting Council' was surprising, still more remarkable was the third strand of UFC Continuing Education funding: the creation, for what proved to be the four years of the UFC's existence, of a cycle of funding for research in continuing education (CE.R). It remains a matter for rumour and speculation just why and how this line was written in to the UFC's small-change discretionary budget, but it was almost certainly a matter of a bright idea and a right word at the right time by a well regarded innovative officer.

If there were ever prospects for the continuation and perpetuation of CE.R funding as a recurrent line, these dissolved with the dissolution of the UFC and the rationalisations between PCFC and UFC funding methodologies which followed. Funding for Continuing Education research was in future to be managed through the quality (Q) rating provided by periodic research quality assessment exercises. The UFC funding 'episode', as it must now be seen to have been, with the benefit of some slight historical perspective, was more clearly rationalised as a one-off developmental bonus, even though it was not explicitly presented, or received, as such when it began in academic year 1990-91.

### **The Impact and Output of UFC CE.R Funding**

All UK universities (as they were in 1989-90) were eligible to bid for Continuing Education research funds, whether or not they had Continuing Education (or Adult, Adult and Continuing Education, Extramural or Extension) Departments. It was probably assumed among those with an interest that the funds were meant for and would go to specialised ACE departments. That assumption was strong in the UFC's Panel which advised on the disbursement of research funds by competitive bidding.

In the event the majority of grants went for work in ACE departments. The period of funding was not specified. A common starting assumption was that it was annual, though some proposals were for two or even three years. When the success of some of these became known, other two year proposals came forward in later years. In the event, this slightly accidental element secured the continuation of CE.R funding on a reduced and terminal basis under the HEFCE: projects planned to run for two years which had been supported in 1992-93 (the academic year that UFC was disbanded) were funded by HEFCE on a run-out basis in 1993-94.

A question central to this review paper was raised at the very outset of the UFC episode: continuity of funding. There was muted criticism that annual one-year project funding, as most applicants read the relevant circular to imply, restricted or trivialised research, which required a longer timescale. Less obvious was the question whether such a funding mode would foster the creation of a research infrastructure and research culture in ACE departments. What was clear was that the funds were for research in Continuing Education, however broadly defined, and not for other research by 'subject specialists' in extramural departments. The initiative was intended to foster research in Continuing Education, how and where ever each university chose to promote it.

Not surprisingly, the initiative attracted much interest and effort, mainly on the part of ACE departments. For 1990-91 36 universities made bids totalling 2,695k. These resulted in an allocation of 504k to 14 universities, which received between 10% and 100% of what they had sought. The total bids of these fourteen amounted to over 1,200k. Twenty-two unsuccessful universities' bids amounted to 1,494k.

Funding was thus quite competitive and also quite focussed. Because of the high demand and perhaps the impression that much good work was waiting to be supported, in the second year, as



in the third (the last full year), a higher allocation was made and the benefit extended wider. In 1991-92 41 universities bid for 4,887k (at 89-90 prices). The advisers recommended a higher proportion of total funding in view of the quality and range of proposals. The total allocated was 1,715k, and in all something of the order of 4.5m went to Continuing Education research over the four years.

Thus in the first year less than 1/5 of the total funding sought was awarded, compared with just over 1/3 in the second year. Twenty-six universities were successful on this occasion, including 13 of the original 14 which shared 1,103k, often on the basis of continuation of projects into a second year. Thirteen universities were successful for the first time, sharing 612k, and fifteen were disappointed.

This meant that, while the number of participating universities all but doubled, funding remained relatively concentrated, in line indeed with the principle of research selectivity and concentration into centres of excellence. The question addressed in the rest of this paper is the following: how far has this half-acknowledged strategy been successful in developing Continuing Education research foci or centres? It is too early to know definitively, but accounts from a number of beneficiary departments provided in preparation for this paper take us some way to suggesting an answer.

It is also too soon to be able to weigh and measure the product, or output, of the several millions of pounds worth of Continuing Education research funded over the four years, using the most conventional indicator of publications. We may assume that most of the weight, and institutional benefit, will show up in the HEFCE 1996 RAE, though the extent of that benefit may depend in part on fine details of the RAE methodology (and personalia) yet to be determined. UCACE, now UACE, was awarded a small UFC grant to create a 'Research Register' documenting the published output of the UFC funding episode. That period and grant are now exhausted, but the Register remains in an unavoidably incomplete state: much of the publication effort is still flowing through, and will continue to be added to for perhaps two further years. This paper addresses not the quantity or quality of output financed by the UFC but the less obvious benefits that might have accrued.

### **The Significance of UFC Funding Within Departments' Research Efforts**

Footprints in the sand are washed away with each new tide. UFC Research funding ran for only three years, with a fourth run-out year under HEFCE. Yet the pressure for research and to publish is relentless; and the pressure to transform or dismantle extramural departments is no less fierce. It might be reasonable to expect at least some extramural ACE departments to raise their research performance to a new plateau through UFC.R funding, enabling them to build from this new level in subsequent years. Already it is evident that much has been washed away; but there are more than traces of a continuing legacy, new platforms, in some places.

In preparation for this paper, the more visible and successful recipients of UFC.R funding were asked what proportion of identifiable research income and effort these funds represented for their departments through the period, and what legacy could now be identified.

Replies were received from twenty departments. What follows is largely based on an analysis of those replies. Two universities received a volume of research funding high enough to set them somewhat apart from others in the field and are looked at in a little more detail.

## Relative Proportions of Research Funding From the UFC

The proportion of research funds which came from the UFC during this period varied between an estimated 13% and 100% of all of a department's research funds (excluding income from taking research students etc). The amount of effort was sometimes lower, eg. 20% instead of 30%, since "a good deal of research... is undertaken without external funding". The distinction between income and effort resonated with some respondents, who noted the greater effort that some other projects attracted. It also drew out the distinction between funded Continuing Education Research (CE.R) and unfunded 'personal' research in areas other than Continuing Education. In one extramural operation it was "the vast bulk of our external Continuing Education Research funding... the majority of research... is still in other subject areas, funded by R-funding".

In a number of departments CE.R thus represented (and may still represent) only a small element within a highly heterogeneous mix of subject-specific research. In one it was the greater proportion of research income, but only a small part of staff effort put into research, some of it funded by small grants from within the institution or elsewhere. The range of universities replying also encompassed other kinds of variation; and additional points were made which bear repeating below.

Another university recorded a decline from 100% to 60% in UFC as a proportion of all R income over the period. The UFC grant went up, but the foundations thus created enabled the department simultaneously to obtain more R funds from other sources. A third respondent recorded a shift from nearly 100% UFC R funding at the outset, declining as a proportion because specific niche markets in terms of research were opened up.

Some respondents added information about R income as a proportion of all income from the UFC. The fraction each year was quite small, yet varied markedly depending how the overhead or indirect cost element was shown. Values between <1% and >11% were returned. None the less, given the paucity of other separate sources of R income, UFC funds represented the bulk (eg. 90%) of identifiable research monies. Some replies noted that all academic staff were considered to be research-funded through the regular Funding Council channel, so a proportion of all such salaries ought logically to be included. In one instance the position was sufficiently opaque that the university and department were not absolutely clear whether, a research project having been funded, the funds had been allocated appropriately, leaving scope for some internal financial leverage. We are reminded again of ambiguities about the traditional extramural provider context within which some of these funds were netted and deployed.

The significance of Continuing Education-specific research funds within the university for an extramural department seeking to manage the transition to a new-style Continuing Education research-focussed enterprise was exemplified in a reply which found the 30% of total R funding over three years to be "a highly significant amount. Outside money of this kind proved critical in intra-University politics, in persuading people to take a continuing education research unit seriously." Another respondent referred to the funds as a "keyhole element in opening up the topics concerned for more general testing of ideas which have originated from a number of commercial contracts". Here the stress was on operational development incorporating some action research rather than on building a research culture or Continuing Education research centre as such.

Local arrangements and internal politics added to the complexity in several cases. At by far the most successful university from the point of view of UFC Continuing Education research income, while the funds all went to identifiable Continuing Education enterprises (units, groups or departments) rather than leach away into other subject departments as happened in a few

universities, they were actually split three ways. Thus a response specific to the effect and legacy in the main department related to only nine out of a total of sixteen year-grants to adult continuing education groups in the university, omitting nine large research year-grants used elsewhere. This touches on a wider strategic and political question about internal arrangements, distinctions within 'Continuing Education' and critical mass. These go beyond what this paper can address, but of necessity we return to the point in the next section.

This and one other detailed reply also raised the question, familiar to the practitioner-researchers who are common in ACE: what is properly described as Continuing Education research, and what is more correctly called consultancy, or, frequently, development funding? In the first of these two cases, omitting consultancy but including some research contracts with a developmental intent, eight of the twenty-one projects over the three years (no funds for extension into 1993-94) were UFC.R funded, attracting 250k in a three-year total of 600k, or just over 40%.

The university which ranked second in overall UFC.R income saw all the funds go to the ACE department (there were one or two unsuccessful bids from elsewhere in the university). That department's total 'earned income' from research and development contracts over the four years was 1,255k, 524k of this from UFC R projects. On the face of it, only 42% of R income was from the UFC. If however one takes out what was clearly Development rather than strictly Research funding, and also mixed-purpose grants having both R and D outcomes, the total falls to 800k and the UFC proportion rises from two fifths to almost two thirds.

It is evident: (a) that for many universities, especially some in the extramural tradition with little if any initial CE.R focus, UFC.R funding represented a very small amount of money in terms of total operating budget, but a significant political element - a signal to colleagues in the department and beyond - in seeking to fashion a Continuing Education research identity; (b) that in several instances, by extramural and ACE standards quite substantial amounts of dedicated CE.R funds found their way to a university and possibly to a particular department.

### The Legacy of UFC.R Funding

Less important than volume, or even output, in the longer term, may be the extent to which the short-lived UFC CE.R funding opportunity was used to create an infrastructure, whether cultural or in a staffing and other resource sense, to enable departments to continue to be research-active, and to generate CE.R income from other sources. This section summarises what respondents suggested about infrastructure and continuity.

In justice it should first be acknowledged that the longevity and intent of UFC.R funding was far from clear: some hoped that it would become a regular feature of recurrent funding; a few argued that it was a unique opportunity to create a research base; others predicted a short-lived unreliable opportunity to do some specific research projects but no more than that. CER.R funding was annual within a notional four-year frame, whereas other UFC CE funds were at least pencilled in for the full four year UFC planning cycle. We should not be too harsh, then, on those who did what they could on a project base but may then have allowed the footprints to be washed away.

In several universities the opportunity was taken to create a Continuing Education research centre, and to profile, nationally and internally, commitment to and competence in Continuing Education research. Sometimes this was important in internal university politics, as we have seen. It may also have been important still more 'internally', in establishing a departmental commitment to Continuing Education as distinct from heterogeneous subject-specific research'.

Certainly, it was reported by some to have succeeded in attracting other research grants and contracts from elsewhere, on the basis of a research identity.

Among research indicators in the 1992 RAE, along with research income (and numbers of research students, something not explored in this inquiry), is the number of research assistants or associates (RAs). Classically, single short-term one-off research projects such as the UFC.R programme funded are used to buy a research assistant, full- or part-time, for a year or maybe two; these then leave when the project ceases. For the sake of continuity, accumulating expertise, and as a form of 'human resource' investment, holding together a team of increasingly experienced RAs looks a good management strategy. It was therefore of interest to learn how far staff recruited through using UFC.R funds had been retained for other projects.

Reading through reviews of the CE.R legacy from different departments one is struck again and again by the importance of particular institutional histories and contexts. In some cases there has been major restructuring, even involving completely disbanding the extramural or extension department. Almost inevitably in these instances, any legacy of CE.R funding is reported as being limited to the particular products (publications) of the research. In one such case the RA was retained for a while, but dismantling of the operation prevented building on the start the UFC had provided, and thwarted the hope of 'slowly but surely' developing a Continuing Education research culture at that university.

In some cases the product took the form of ongoing activity as well as published results and reports, as several responses make clear. One university credits validation of arts for disabled people to the research, including winning the cost of running and staffing a new building, the dissemination of modes of teaching and the provision of training courses and other support for work with the disabled, and ongoing research partnerships funded from other sources. Another institution records virtually no trace from one research project, but development and action implications with a local Asian community from another. These are departments where the extramural provider tradition is much stronger than any commitment to research specifically in Continuing Education.

In another department similarly strong in the extramural tradition, the various research projects are tracked through separately, rather than being part of any collective larger effort or shift of culture. Much depends on the chance of individuals' mobility or continuity of employment from other financial sources. Several examples are given however of the research finding practical expression, for instance through CPD development and new modular courses. Here as in other cases one finds examples of individual research staff, or the research and development they undertook, spilling over to involve work in other departments - a form of research or provider linkage or 'mainstreaming'. Again the tapping of other funds, including for example other UFC/HEFCE development monies, proved important. There was some feeling that such short-term ad hoc appointments should not be repeated, with a 'sub-text' that "attitudes haven't changed in respect of doing research into Continuing Education - it is still a pretty low priority and is indeed a very small fraction of our total income" - more bother than it is worth, perhaps. At another strong traditional extramural department however "at least three people who started off on UFC funded research are still here - one on the teaching staff, and two continuing on other research programmes... There is now a large and active educational research group... its development has depended on many things, but there is no doubt that the UFC research funding helped."

Another historic liberal provider "took the view that Continuing Education Research was very project-based and thus there was little impact on infrastructure or attitude". This response found little evidence of research partnerships resulting, but it did produce new partnerships in provision.

The response which gave this paper its title in noting how soon the footsteps were washed away recorded the impression that the income was spent 'classically' on a short-term RA who left once the project funds ran out. On the other hand the ear-marking gave a significant message within the university; and the substantive issues raised by the research were widely considered within the university and beyond.

A different kind of university from those referred to above also revealed the importance of institutional character and context: "[this] as you are aware is a small university and our Continuing Education provision is nearly all in CVE and mainstreamed where possible. As such the impact of UFC funded Continuing Education research was always likely to be more marginal than in the large extramural Universities. However, I do think that it impacted on our thinking... and has given us a research profile..." The perceived change in attitude, infrastructure and partnerships is however credited more to coincident changes and new research opportunities elsewhere (Europe, TEED, RAE) than to UFC CE.R funding. A similar university saw the influence of its several small funded research projects as being to build research in more integrally to its Continuing Education operations, with the key worker, though retired, being bought back for further such work.

The examples cited so far reveal several common themes: the pull of eclectic extramural traditions, an inclination towards the practical and the developmental, but also some infusion of a Continuing Education research culture where the soil is not too sterile, or where reinforcing opportunities coincide. A number of other responses suggested more substantial gains, changes, albeit sometimes modest and tenuous, to do with research culture and/or infrastructure.

One Scottish university saw a researcher move to a more regular, hopefully permanent, post and the launch of an occasional paper series, though the bulk of the funding did not lead to new work. Nearby another university also retained the RA through and for other new research, sustained new research partnerships leading in to a nascent European network, generated other research income and income targets, and saw findings feed into other research. A third Scottish university recorded an 'extremely positive' impact "out of all proportion to the amount of funding involved. It has high visibility both within the Department and in the University and has led to spin off activities" with both RAs retained for other research work.

Several universities used the opportunity of the UFC CE.R to set up identifiable research units, symbolising and enhancing the department's research identity and commitment. The only one to have such a Centre already none the less discerned a "significant shift in the attitudes of staff towards research and publications". Another traditional department thus "contributed significantly to enhancing the research ethos of the department and, more importantly, orientating it more towards CE research rather than subject-based research", helping to formulate a new research policy with pride of place to Continuing Education research. On the other hand, the Research Centre was not sufficient to enable retention of any of the RAs as projects finished, nor did the changed research ethos penetrate all parts of the department - "some of them are pretty unreachable!".

The Head of another Continuing Education Research Unit notes that it would not have been established without this pump-priming funding; two RAs had been retained and were now involved in teaching as well as on-going research. The department was in several international partnerships with joint research and writing projects. Clearly here the funding had enabled a small extramural department to win a vigorous new identity: "research now established as an important part of the work of the department and all staff now have a greater interest in and more active, positive attitude to Continuing Education research".

A fourth university created a Continuing Education research and development unit, led by a Lecturer in Continuing Education R&D who was initially engaged as a researcher on a UFC.R project in 1990-91. There has been a conscious effort to develop a Continuing Education research culture. Activities include creating a database, library and bursary scheme, and a Continuing Education research forum; organising Continuing Education research conferences; raising funds for and administering other CE.R activities; representing the university in outside CE.R networks and creating links with other researchers within the university; and developing graduate teaching and supervision in the Continuing Education field.

In another, strongly research-led, university quite significant UFC.R funds were the basis for a new research centre engaging on average five full-time RAs through most of the period. The centre provided a focus and identity partly balancing the department's more visible extramural profile, and served as a vehicle to attract increasing numbers of research students and visiting research fellows, as well as housing a publications series for inhouse and other research. The strategy was quite explicitly to build up an infrastructure for present and future research.

To some extent the research centre, and the resources and personnel whom it both contained and represented, allowed this quite new department to build a credible identity within the university, although this did not fully compensate for the ambiguous and historically low status of (continuing) education. Five of the RAs were retained for some time on other contracts and funds; in 1995 three were still in the department, and a fourth was in another research centre at the same university. The UFC.R funds were crucial in creating an infrastructure and reinforcing an already favourable Continuing Education research culture.

A similar but less bullish situation was found in another new research unit where UFC funding gave research in Continuing Education credibility for the first time. Here the future depends very much on winning new and reputable research income such as ESRC Learning Society funds. Much hangs on success in this arena, given the limited political clout within the university. Also "I cannot in all honesty say that there has been a great change in attitude or new well established infrastructures as a result of the funding. All remains fragile..." This and other responses bring home how short-lived was the UFC R funding episode: far too short to allow new infrastructures to be built, much less for deeply entrenched attitudes to change, when most even of the luckier universities received such funds for just two or three years.

The most successful university in the UFC CE.R stakes has set up a Research and Postgraduate Unit. It was able greatly to enhance and widen its Continuing Education research profile, with quite diverse funding, so that Continuing Education became well grounded in the mixed research profile of the continuing extramural tradition. Various of the RAs were moved to continuing (rolling) academic positions. "Undoubtedly, the Continuing Education funding for specific projects has had a profound impact on the development of our Continuing Education research, both in this Department and in the University as a whole", hard though it is to quantify. It was timely, in that it served to underpin a central part of a larger policy reorientation, a strategic shift already determined. Unlike some of the cases cited earlier, where Continuing Education had no education faculty or school to link with, this university has a strong (research five-rated) education enterprise, and the UFC CE.R funds assisted the department to nest in with the university's new Education Research School, with post-compulsory education and training as one key element.

### **Conclusion - Defining and Protecting the Legacy**

This survey shows a variable outcome: footprints erased at one extreme, with never an aspiration beyond one-off research when the funds were there; an apparently solid administrative and even

cultural deposit at the other, with new research programmes; and purposes and outcomes, such as seeding programme planning and provision with an R&D dimension in between. A reasonable judgement is that 11 or 12 of the 20 universities examined here can claim a solid, surviving institutional legacy - structural and/or cultural. Certainly several new C.E.R units were created and launched using the U.F.C.R episode, which are still lively and productive in 1995.

The context and the timing in terms of the changing status and treatment of ACE within the parent university was important. U.F.C.R funding was sometimes functional in creating and conveying messages within universities and within departments, at a time of change, uncertainty, and the refashioning of identities. On the other hand in some universities with great or once-great ACE traditions, internal perturbation prevented any serious attempt even to bid for U.F.C.R funds; in others subsequent changes swept away the new effort to create a research profile and programme before roots had grown.

This assessment is at the level of ACE units in individual universities. Another level and kind of appraisal is of the aggregated and cumulative impact on and for the UK ACE research community. An obvious conventional measure will be the final UACE 'Research Register' of publications arising from the different projects. This will demonstrate contribution, output and perhaps value-for-money in conventional academic terms.

Another measure of the impact of U.F.C.R could be the quality, strength and productivity of national ACE research networking and professional development, especially via UACE, SCUTREA and SRHE. The third of these suggests another dimension: the links between ACE and other educational research, as ACE becomes increasingly integrated into mainstream university programmes and its research into education faculty enterprises and units of assessment. A third measure would be the standing of UK ACE research beyond these shores. UK participation and leadership in the European society ESRFA and its networks, and its share of European Community funding for ACE research, would be important indicators of this. A participant impression, albeit subjective, is that U.F.C.R funding has significantly strengthened the national ACE research community and its level of activity, confidence, competence and international standing.

Another task, not attempted in this paper, would be to analyse all the bids, and the projects funded, according to broad subject categories and possibly research styles and traditions, and to use this to draw a map of research fields and interests, as well as research expertise and research production in the early nineties. Such an exercise could tell us something about aspiration and attainment within ACE research, and perhaps identify the need for particular expertise and resources not currently exercised or available. In other words, it would suggest a research agenda, and perhaps an agenda for training and development, to be addressed by bodies like SCUTREA and UACE.

Another way of asking about impact and contribution nationally rather than just institutionally is by examining what new funds are flowing to ACE research following the U.F.C.R episode. In particular we should monitor and assess which ESRC Learning Society research proposals are funded, and which kinds of departments and groups are the beneficiaries. Alongside that, a study of other (ESRC, charitable foundation, European and government department) ACE research funding over a longer period, perhaps from 1985, would help to show the extent to which ACE is becoming academically professionalised (or 'academicised'?) through the research assessment era which commenced with the 1986 RAE. Within such a quantitative account of U.F.C.R funding the significance of the U.F.C.R episode will become more clear.

There is other unfinished business. One suggestion is that every UFC-funded research project should be summarised by means of a one page abstract which UACE might publish. Another empirical research task could be to track the subsequent fortunes and roles of all the individuals funded as RAs through UFC.R projects, and see what legacy is represented by their personal gains and subsequent activities. A year or so hence it may be fruitful to examine how far ACE has promoted its cause (or the reverse) in the 1996 Research Assessment Exercise, compared with the rather doleful saga of its identity and rating in 1989 and 1992. The UFC.R input ought to have made a measurable difference; but other competitive pressures, and pressures particular to Education and Continuing Education (notably the impact of the Teacher Training Agency and of accreditation of liberal adult education on ACE departments) may mask the gains.

Time permitting, I would attempt to trace other aspects of change in ACE research affected by the UFC episode. One would be the extent to which operational research (including market research) may have been enhanced. Although the UFC advisory panel favoured (different modes of) academic rather than operational or narrowly applied research, there is no doubt that an 'applied research culture' or 'reflective practitioner culture' is identified by some recipients as a gain from the projects: new clienteles, new packaging and configuration of courses, new ways of operating as a provider.

Another sub-inquiry might revolve around partnerships: both Continuing Education provider partnerships (with other providers, or with regular client organisations as users of Continuing Education programmes), as a sub-system of the operational changes mentioned above; and research partnerships, local, national and international, which several respondents identified as a gain from some of their UFC-funded work.

Meanwhile the rules of the game change almost by the week. My university Promotions Committee has acquired a new, very modern and numerate member who volunteers a citation count on the publications of every candidate whose name appears before the Committee (notwithstanding cautionary tales about citations including one told for us by John Field in 1991). Renegade professors and other whistle-blowers challenge the basis of the RAE methodology (Bowbrick 1995, Kingston 1995). One is taken back also to Peter Jarvis' periodic reflections on adult education as an academic and professional arena, and a field of study (see for example Jarvis 1991).

At the conclusion of the 1992 RAE Education Panel's arduous deliberations one member allowed himself a note of weary scepticism: what, he ruminated, had the many-metre-deep pile of publications represented by the many Unit 71 (Education) submissions added to the sum of human happiness or wisdom? That question remains to be answered too for the practitioner field of ACE; maybe the Lancaster Conference will provide a fragment of the answer.

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# Learning and Learners

# Thinking Fragments: Learning, Life Histories and the Self.

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*I am not yet born: O fill me with strength against those who would freeze my humanity*  
(Louis MacNeice, Prayer Before Birth)

This is a paper about what motivates adults to enter higher education and what makes it possible for them to become effective learners, to take risks with identity, to be open to radical possibilities and to become active agents in composing a life. The paper draws on autobiographical, longitudinal, interdisciplinary research into motivation in the lives of adult learners. The research was financed from the UFC Continuing Education Research Budget. The project has been crucial in the development of my own thinking and of continuing education research more generally at Kent: the resources meant time, space and people to establish a body of work.

For the motivational study 30 adult learners were interviewed up to 7 times, in depth and at length, over a period of three years. Many of these adults have found the resources to learn and construct more authentic lives, selves and personal histories through education. Their progress was far from linear however and there can sometimes be as many problems as solutions. I want to use a case study to illustrate some of the themes from the research, most of all the central paradox of the material: the struggle for learning and, in the process, a more authentic, secure, determining self is intimately dependent on others.

The recurring metaphor of the study is fragments: of lives torn or falling apart and of education as one potential means to reconstruct; of the radical but also disintegrative possibilities within late modernity as individuals must negotiate more of their own meanings and find the psychological strength to exploit new possibilities as tradition breaks down. And of theories of learning, motivation and the self which are fragmented between socio-cultural and psychological explanations. It is time to mind the gaps.

## Psychological and Socio-historical Fragments

There is a problem in researching the subjective as well as social bases of learning. Sociologists and psychologists have followed quite separate paths in conceptualising why adults learn, reflecting, perhaps, wider fragmentations between the disciplines (Courtney, 1990; Thompson, 1981). Moreover, mainstream psychology has eschewed notions of subjectivity and self and tends towards essentialist and acultural ontological assumptions (Bruner, 1990). Even worse, from the perspective of many adult educators, the subjective experiences of people, the stories they tell about their lives and their learning, including the concept of subjectivity itself, are seen as outside the scope and procedures of empirical science (Frosh, 1989). On the other hand, radical sociology tends to be weak in theorising how the socio-cultural is internalised into particular mental states, structures and behaviours; and how general cultural trends are transformed into individual personalities with complex, idiosyncratic stories to tell.

Relational psychoanalysis can help bridge the gap. This places the study of individual actions, the meanings given to them and the subjective conditions which underlie them, at its core. In the work of object relations theorists (defining this broadly to include Winnicott and self psychologists such as Kohut), stress has been placed on the importance of good enough relationships in creating an environment in which selves can flourish, potentially reconnecting the socio-cultural, including wider relationships of class, gender and power, with subjectivity.

## Marginality, Change and Late Modernity

It is the work of sociologists like Hopper and Osborn (1975) and Courtney (1990) which indicates the need for new inter-disciplinary perspectives in thinking about motives and successful learning. Adult learners in accredited programmes, according to Hopper and Osborn, are socially marginalised, torn between competing affiliations, not really belonging anywhere. They look to education to resolve the tensions which are generated. Courtney stresses education's role in managing change when lives fragment. Questions of self and identity are strongest, he suggests, when the normal business of getting through the day collapses or becomes intolerable. He relates learners' motives to the condition of the self and suggests that individuals are engaged in a struggle, no less, to reconstitute themselves. And 'significant others' are crucial to the venture. But we are left with little understanding of the processes by which the support and approval of others is translated into a subjective capacity to manage change and transcend some of the margins effectively.

Stephen Frosh's ideas are helpful in this context. He suggests that modern states of mind are forged in cultural instability of a 'cataclysmic kind' (Frosh, 1991). There are two potential responses: a positive, liberatory, fluid and generative creativity as tradition breaks down or a pathological defensiveness against change and uncertainty of every kind. The option 'chosen' depends on the condition, more specifically, the strength of self, a self which, as indicated, is always contingent being constructed within relationships. Intrasubjective structures are shaped by inter-subjective processes. The response of others - love, warmth, unconditional regard and empathy - or their opposites - provides the basis of self. Experience in relationship is translated into internal relationships, the building blocks of personality. If an environment is persecutory, internal elements become that too. In a culture of change and dislocation, the struggle for self is perpetual, even for those with relatively secure starts in life. We are constantly made, or broken, in relationship.

### Educating Paul: a Case Study

It would be useful, at this stage, to illustrate some of these themes via a case study. Paul is a young middle aged, working class man from the Medway Towns who enrolled on an Access course nearly three years ago. His narrative illuminates a complex struggle for self and the role of significant others in the process. The struggle is conducted against a backdrop of working class insecurity, violent family relationships and unhappy schooling. In recent times, economic recession forced Paul, as he perceived it, to work even harder to maintain a standard of living, a pattern which was eventually disrupted by illness. The decision to enter the Access programme was a response to change and crisis at a variety of inter-connected levels: in work, in close relationships and in the most intimate inner experience.

Paul's story is about marginality and managing change as old identities break down or frustrate. But it is also about a longer term crisis and a powerful desire to remake a self in more meaningful, substantial ways. These emotional and subjective dimensions of Paul's story are as central to the text as other more social themes.

### Personal and Vocational Motives

The early material focused on his wife and family and a sense of marginalisation between family and work but the story gradually encompassed early emotional life too. The scope, inclusivity and aesthetics of the narrative developed over time:

*....I'd been very ill, I'd been working 14, 15 hours a day, 7 days a week. I collapsed at work and went to see the doctor, well my wife made me go to the doctor and I had high cholesterol, very high cholesterol which is hereditary and the doctor said to me "If you don't slow down, you will be dead within 10 years". I went home and was absolutely*

*shocked....I was absolutely terrified and we thought well, there must be something else to do and my wife said "You enjoyed taking those kids, why don't you do something like that?" I thought "Yes, what a ..." I'd thought about it, she said to me "You enjoyed it, why don't you teach?" I laughed, I said "No, I couldn't teach". I could teach people how to set up their own company probably and I could teach them how to plaster and how to line floors but not teach. There's a lot more behind you than you think, so I went down to....there's a place....had a chat with them....*

Paul's wife was promoted in her job as a teacher at roughly the same time as his own world was crumbling. While he continued to make money, despite recession, his dissatisfaction grew about who and what he was. His wife was more powerful and successful than he, someone who got results while he was weak and ineffectual:

*Yes, strong willed, pushy, arrogant but she gets results. In her A level asses - she also teaches A level. Last year she didn't get one failure, purely and simply that they might absolutely hate her, but she gets results and she's such a powerful person, she's got an aura about her and if she says you'll do it, you'll do it and you'd better do it. Support, she's given me so much support. Yes, I can earn 3, 4 times more amount of money than her but that's not the important thing and she's just a powerful person, not physically, she's 5ft 2 ins but mentally, the strength is incredible. If you want motivation, there's my motivation! Certainly one part of it.*

The need for constant encouragement dominates the material. When his wife is positive Paul feels good, when critical his world feels fragile. Her opinion matters because, from Paul's perspective, she embodies a world from which he has felt excluded and to which he desperately wishes to belong. She represents everything he feels he is not: she went to Grammar School, he didn't. She was educated, he was not; she is middle class, he working class. Wider cultural scripts infuse the text, patterns of culturally induced superiority and inferiority merging into and shaping inter and intra subjective worlds.

Work was becoming a source of growing dissatisfaction within these relational dynamics. He contrasted the time spent there with its inherent meaninglessness, despite success at holding his business together in difficult times:

*It doesn't mean anything at all (ie work).... It means nothing. In the end it means nothing....what you're doing is taking and in the end you feel a bit guilty. Well, I certainly did, felt a bit guilty about how much money I was making off these buil....I didn't even need to go to work but I went to work....I wanted more money, I wanted more money and then it became pointless. How much money can you spend? There comes a time when you cannot spend the amount of money that you earn....That was one of the things I wanted to do. I wanted to buy a Rolls Royce. Went up and saw Rolls Royce and thought "My God, this is ridiculous, this is money that's been thrown away". So I put in the bank. It's so bloody pointless, it's..*

He felt on a treadmill, going faster without purpose, and disconcertingly, like his father before him, never being there for his family, always working when needed at home. Paradoxically, work also offered an escape from inadequacy, from being reminded of his own shortcomings in comparison with his wife and child. Paul lived in his own private, divided hell.

The development of his narrative over the course of two years illustrates how previous experience is reconstructed in the light of a present objective, ie the decision to train as a teacher. His wife had asked him to help in taking a group of special needs pupils to France and he discovered, as he put it, an

empathy for the children including the most unruly. Public and private worlds merge at this juncture. He was concerned about their welfare, their lack of opportunity, coming as they were from backgrounds like his own. They were neglected in much the same way he had been. The kids are outsiders, like him; in helping them, 'my roughnecks', as he calls them, he could help himself:

*Well, my wife, she teaches A level, she also teaches remedial and she had 8 or 9 roughnecks, I call them roughnecks, but they were my roughnecks. And she said we have got some problem children and would you like to come over to France with us and I thought, "well, how long is it for?" And I think it was four days and I thought, "no, I don't really want to do this" and in the end, I was talked into it and we took these...And at the end of it, the best thing of all was at the end of the holiday, they had their little test and I think we must have had eight in the top twelve and that was, no money can buy that. It gives me such a thrill when they still ask about me now and say, "Look, is Paul going to come up?"....It is nice to know that people still think about you....it was good. They done well. It was such a thrill. For once, you was giving something back and wasn't taking.*

Paul directly linked his attachment to the roughnecks to his father and his own schooling. He gradually became more explicit about aspects of the relationship with his father, the latter's destructive behaviour and its subjective ramifications. Paul began to share more of his intimate world: of family and school, of little or no space and encouragement, of disregard, of violence and hate, of an unstable environment in which a self could never feel secure or take risks.

### **Families and How to Survive Them**

His father's destructive role became more central in our conversations as the research became a means to recover some painful personal history. The feelings generated were mixed: evoking guilt and pain as well as relief. The guilt was partly fuelled by the fact that his father had recently become seriously ill and vulnerable in contrast to a violent, aggressive past:

*....if I was ever confronted by an adult, because I had been so frightened of my dad,...you cowered down, you had to cower down. I can actually remember at one stage in my life actually turning around, waiting, I just wanted to grow up just so I could fight back....I wouldn't say we were beaten but it probably would have been classed as abuse now....All the washing used to be washed and put in the bath and one day my older brother turned on the taps in the bath, which seems quite trivial nowadays and dad come home and we actually got strapped, we got strapped - a two year old boy, my younger brother was two years old and dad strapped him for ...he wanted to know who had done it obviously, we wasn't going to tell who had done it, we all knew it was the older brother and he strapped a 2 year old boy. What's the point!*

This is a private world of family violence and abuse, of beatings and a struggle to cope, of fragile selves desperate to hold on to what little they may have. Such worlds are only now being revealed in autobiographical and biographical writing as the genre is transformed by feminist and psychoanalytical perspectives. Like sexual abuse, physical abuse and its consequences have been largely absent from the stories people have told about themselves and others. Paul's father is becoming a more familiar figure as the history of family violence is recovered: as more stories of people trapped in neglect and abuse are told. And the most damaged and abused of people often strike out at those more vulnerable than themselves, at the people who need them most (Miller, 1987). Except in this case the problems connected to Paul's father link to the wider culture; he was injured at work and unemployed for a long period. Unemployment, poverty and powerlessness can have a corrosive effect on self.

We talked about the psychology of these experiences and Paul mentioned for the first time the hole, the immense emptiness at his core:

*There was a massive... hole there, wasn't there? I'm not complete. You're not a complete person. And this, this was a thing... I want my daughter to look at me and think 'Yea, he's okay, this bloke.' You see I didn't have a childhood as... in, in the... I didn't have the childhood that I want my daughter to have, okay? .... Well, you see I've got this... I have this big hole and yes, I can work, I can work as hard as anyone. But that's not.. that's not it, is it?*

Work, as noted, failed to fill the space, to compensate for earlier devastation. Being robbed of childhood, never feeling valued, may be, as Miller and others have shown, (Miller, 1987; Winnicott, 1965) the root cause of an emptiness which can envelop a life.

### **Significant Others in Sport and Access**

Sport has been the great love and of success of Paul's life. He is a physically tall and strong man which renders the story of inner weakness and personal insignificance particularly poignant. Peter, a sports coach, had time for Paul offering a relationship in which he felt worthwhile. The Access course tutors fulfilled a similar function. Sarah, a Maths tutor, talked to him at length outside the classroom offering the patience, reassurance and personal space he needed. She made him feel confident and that the risk was worth taking:

*There are people prepared to listen to you. I mean Sarah who takes the maths, sat me down and had a chat and said "You can do this" and they instil confidence in you. Really, and yes, you can do it. I mean, my last test I got 74-75% in a maths test. I suppose at school if I was lucky to average 15%, 15% for my homework, purely and simply because I didn't think I could do it. So it just goes to show that your teachers, your class of teachers, really dictates how well you're going to do. Obviously you've got to put input in yourself, but they're brilliant teachers, absolutely fantastic....*

The other Access students helped too. Close relationships were forged in the group which remained important to Paul as he began his training course at the College:

*We are great mates. We all went out for a meal last week and we were all sitting around. They have all been round my house. We know. Yes, as I was saying to them, Tuesday was the last lesson and one thing I would hate, I would hate everyone to go away and never see each other again. They are really a nice bunch of good people. But as I said, everyone is looking for something.*

There is also Paul's wife as a crucially significant other. She both encourages and discourages him. For Paul, the more their conversations felt equal, the more he was able to understand her other world, and contribute to it, the better he felt. Perhaps there is a need to acknowledge the importance of challenge, alongside love and empathy, in relationships.

### **Higher Education and Fragmentations of Identity**

Paul has survived in higher education because of the support and help of others, and the subjective strengthening these relationships may have brought in their train. Yet the ambivalent feelings towards education, the fear of failure, and uncertainty over his identity persist. He decided to study part rather than full-time at the College, as a way of hedging his bets. A fear of failure had temporarily gained the upper hand. In fact initial experiences at College confirmed his view that he might have been right in

hesitating: this was a world of people and languages quite different to his own, and even to the Access course. Paul offered a graphic illustration of negotiating these different worlds, of trying to straddle the culture of the building site and that of a College of Higher Education:

*I cannot discuss the Fairy Queen with another plasterer on a building site. They wouldn't know what you were talking about. In fact, well, I was at work and I had to finish this...well, you don't finish it, it goes on and on forever and a chap turned round and said "What are you reading Paul?" and I said "Oh, the Fairy Queen", oh God, I should not have said that!" And I was just abused, they firmly abused me for about...well, about two weeks afterwards! But it's done...it's done in a way, I think in a way that they admire me for doing this because we're all trapped in this financial...um...in the job that I do, you can earn a lot of money and once you're in there it's very, very difficult to get out.*

These are new fractures in the struggle for self and learning. Negotiating different worlds is difficult and painful to him. He lacks the kind of cultural capital which enables more easy progress in higher education for the children of the middle class. Yet he also feels increasingly ill at ease on the building site. Six months later there were signs of transition and being better able to negotiate these different worlds.

### **The Role of Narrative; Research and Therapy**

It is impossible to prize apart the reconstitutive and representational functions of narrative in Paul's account but there is evidence of both in the material. He seems to be experimenting in story telling as the narrative develops aesthetically over time. Experimental success depends in part on its reception by significant others. It seems that their responses provide the psychological means which make it possible to experiment further: they create the emotional base from which to take more risks. The revised versions are narrated to new audiences: tutors, researchers, students at College and his wife, a process which itself embodies a new reality. As the story becomes more self constructed and experientially authentic, the self is changed. If we are our stories, in Rosen's words (Rosen 1990), Paul is becoming transformed.

I shared aspects of my own experiences as Paul's narrative resonated with themes in my own life. Our relationship grew stronger as we shared experience, and the research prospered as a result. The pain in some of his material was immense. Revisiting aspects of a violent childhood brought mixed emotions including guilt at talking about parents in the way that he had. We discussed the ethics of the process, about whether this was an appropriate space in which to unpack some of this pain. The therapeutic/research boundary seemed blurred and I wondered if I might have transgressed it. Fundamentally, Paul felt the research, like higher education, provided an opportunity to piece together a life in a supportive, empathic environment. If it had not been, he remarked, he would have said so and simply not come back.

### **Beyond Fragments**

There is a thread which connects the wider culture to subjectivity in Paul's account. Poverty and unemployment are corrosive of inner stability; a world of economic insecurity disrupts families, intimate relationships and the construction of selves. There is also a culture in which some stories are valued and others are not. Stories construct meaning out of experience, without them there is meaninglessness. People like Paul have been conditioned to feel, like many people I suspect, that they and their stories are unimportant, of no interest to a wider world. Paul sought solutions to his problems in different ways: via religion and higher education. He took risks and began to think and feel about

himself differently in relationship with other people. The main finding and paradox of the research, as suggested, is that the struggle for self and story is intimately dependent on others.

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# Group Research Projects in Adult Continuing Education

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*'The method of using group projects in adult classes has advantages in certain circumstances both as a teaching technique and as a way of discovering new information and evaluating it. By 'group project' I mean the opportunity for groups (either the class as a whole or groups within it) to focus their attention on a specific topic and undertake enquiries and work in connection with it. Students are thus able to participate in the overall planning and formulation of an enquiry, its execution, the processing of material and the assessment of what is being achieved.'*<sup>1</sup>

## Aim of the Research

The research proposal to the University Funding Council was made in 1990 by Mr Geoffrey Mitchell, Director; Dr Nicollette Hallett, Assistant Registrar; Dr (now Professor) David Hey, Reader and Mr David Crossley, Reader at the Division of Adult Continuing Education, University of Sheffield. The aim was to investigate the role and potential of adult groups in adult continuing education, particularly those which conduct research projects. The two-year inquiry included a comprehensive survey on past and current group research projects in all subject areas. The aspects of group project work which were investigated, included the reasons why such projects were carried out, how they were organised and what were the results in terms of student development and their research contribution. On the basis of this information, the strengths, the weaknesses, the problems and potential value of such work were assessed.

## Methods of Research

All the adult education departments in the 'old' universities were asked if they had, now or in the past, any classes which operated as research groups. At the time of the bid, there were several group research projects in the Division at Sheffield, some were coming to an end but new ones were beginning. The tutors and students of these groups were interviewed and classes visited on several occasions to observe the way their work was organised. A questionnaire was devised based on the points raised in discussions with Sheffield tutors, and was sent to tutors in other departments. Many tutors responded and many were also willing to be interviewed. These interviews were free-ranging, roughly following the points in the questionnaire, but tutors tended to concentrate on the question of why a project was being done and the many organisational problems faced by tutor and students. Having listened to tutors' descriptions of the pleasures and trials of group project work, I began my own group in 1991 to research the information in the records of the Cutlers' Company in Sheffield.

As well as compiling information from tutors, students' views were collected during class visits and from questionnaires. To discover details about projects which had run in the past, librarians were asked for lists of any printed material arising from research groups in their departments.

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<sup>1</sup> E Butterworth, 'Group projects' *Adult Education*, Vol.XXXIX, 1966-67, pp.166-73.

Journals were searched, not only for articles on group projects and results of group activity, but for reviews of publications. The results of this two-year investigation were presented at a conference held at Sheffield in September, 1992 and a report has been published.<sup>2</sup>

### Results of the Research

The responses from adult continuing education departments were good, with information on group projects being found in all subject areas except foreign languages. Information came from ninety staff - tutors, librarians and administrators. Forty-two people were tutors of current courses, the majority being full-time lecturers in their department. A summary of the informants is given below.

	<b>numbers</b>	<b>comment</b>
Departments replying to initial inquiry	34 out of 36	
positive (had or having group projects)	26	
negative (not doing this type of course)	8	
Universities visited	18	3 depts. more than once
	<b>numbers</b>	<b>comment</b>
Staff contributing information	90	
Tutors contributing information	75	including 24 p/time staff
Librarians contributing information	10	
Administrators and archivists contributing information	5	
Staff interviewed	50	
Tutor questionnaires	41 out of 60	
Classes visited in session	10	
Groups represented at group discussions	4	
No. of student questionnaires returned	74 out of 200	it is not known how many were actually distributed
Groups returning student questionnaires	16 out of 18	
Subject areas represented by tutors	8	
Subject areas represented by students	5	

**Figure One** Summary table of the number of contacts made in the course of the UFC-funded research

Approximately 380 publications resulting from group research projected have been identified dating from the early 1950s. It is acknowledged that this figure represents an unknown percentage of the total output from group projects, since publications are not necessarily the preferred outcome. Videos and transitory events such as exhibitions and performances have all been used by groups to present their results.

Although this was a comprehensive survey of all adult continuing education departments and covering all subject areas, it was found that local history projects dominated. More local history tutors and groups responded to the inquiry and the number of publications found in journals and

<sup>2</sup> J Uwin Group Research Projects in Adult Education (Sheffield, 1994)

the titles given by librarians confirms the subject's leading role in this form of teaching and learning.

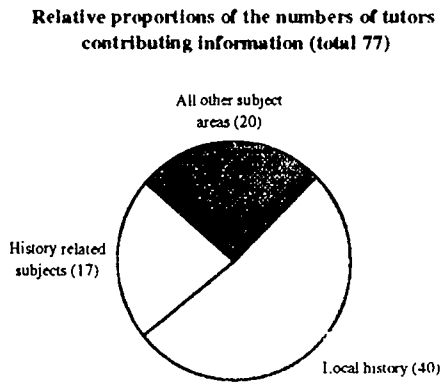


Figure Two Chart showing the number of tutors (including two archivists), divided into subject areas. History-related subjects include vernacular architecture; archaeology; labour history and landscape history.

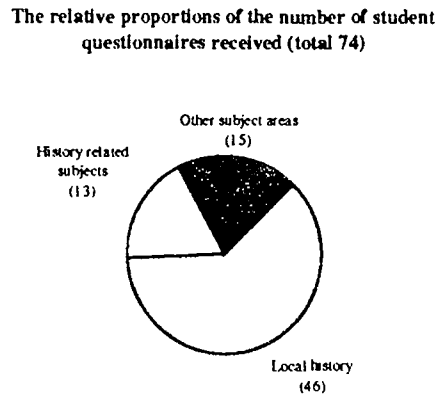


Figure Three Number of student questionnaires in different subject areas, divided in the same way as Figure Two

The relative proportions of the numbers of publications  
arising from research groups (total 359)

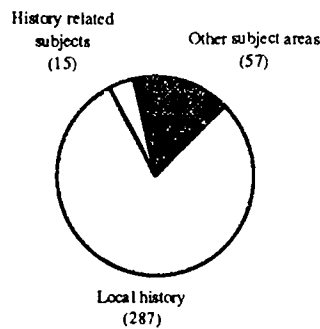


Figure Four Chart showing the number of publications in local history and other subject areas. (The subject matter of 21 publications was not clear from their titles - they are not included in this count) It is acknowledged that this is by no means the total output of research groups.

This dominance of local history perhaps explains why the only other survey of group project work found so far was in this subject area.<sup>3</sup> The issues raised in this 1979 report were still being discussed in 1990 and centred on the 'how' and the 'why' of conducting such courses for adults. The questionnaires, discussions and interviews identified a wide range of different views which will be expanded below, but almost everyone involved in these projects - tutors and students were enthusiastic about this method of teaching and learning. The reasons for organising research groups ranged across the whole spectrum from their encouragement of participative learning to their providing a highly motivated and skilled research team. The group organisation varied from formal weekly meetings to irregular group sessions to co-ordinate and consolidate individual student efforts. The source material used by groups varied from documents to sites and artefacts, which had a significant impact on the organisation of the group work and the skills required by the students. The outcome of these projects was usually a publication, but sometimes the results contributed to national surveys or to privately commissioned reports.

### Discussion of the Results

*'In the best practice the students' learning experience benefits from group work which creates a sense of direction and purpose, mutual support and joint responsibility for what is achieved.'*<sup>4</sup>

### Reasons for Doing Group Research Projects

Discussion with tutors revealed seemingly divergent views in the reasons given for undertaking a research project with a group of adults. Some tutors saw the project in terms of the educational experience offered to students, with the opportunity for 'hands-on' experience using original source material. This teaching method placed skills into a broader setting and gave new

<sup>3</sup> L. Munby, The Planning and Organisation of Research-based Courses in Local History. A paper presented to UKAE at Keele, 1979

<sup>4</sup> Education for Adults, a Review by HMI. (HMSO, 1991) p.8

knowledge a greater relevance. At the other end of the spectrum, tutors sought to capitalise on having a highly-skilled team, acknowledging the prior experiential learning of students. Many projects were a progression from taught courses where students had enjoyed one another's company and wished to continue. Most projects have aspects of both these views - the participative educational experience combined with a high level of research contribution. Almost all the group projects have some local aspect to their research and this feature is a great attraction to many students, who hope to be able to provide valuable information as well as learn new information. There is tremendous research potential by adults undertaking projects not easily contemplated by usual research programmes, because adult students and their tutor can design large-scale, lengthy projects, which benefit from the varied skills members will bring.

### **Organisation of a Research Group**

Many of the organisational features of the group and course are dictated by the source material. Because local history groups dominated the survey, the majority of group projects used documentary sources mostly as photocopies. This allows groups to have an almost unlimited supply of material (subject to finance) and to meet in any suitable indoor venue. Groups working with artefacts, original documents or sites will be constrained to meet where and when access is available. It often happens that groups working outdoors on sites, require students to do far more work on their own than those working on documents. Group meetings are necessary to give skills training, to co-ordinate and encourage the students in their work and they are also necessary to reinforce people's wish to combine their efforts in a stimulating and non-competitive way. It must be remembered that students strongly expressed their views on undertaking research with guidance and with other like-minded enthusiasts. The group ethos was an important feature for the students.

*'The great justification for group work is that it helps to overcome the isolation of much historical research ..... and harnesses the energies and abilities of those who may not have produced written history by themselves'<sup>5</sup>*

The position and role of the tutor is one of leader, trainer and facilitator. He/she will be required to acquire or identify the source material; train the students in the relevant skills and co-ordinate the individual efforts to produce a combined result. The stance taken by the tutor can be one of a leader retaining careful hold over the group in order to maintain standards or the tutor can, after the group has established itself, take on a more consultative role. Many of the students will become highly capable and can assume organisational responsibilities.

### **The Outcome of Group Research Projects**

Most groups saw the logical outcome of their work as some sort of publication. Many early groups were able to publish substantial books, but lack of finance often limited later groups to reporting their results in society newsletters or as duplicated sheets in the departmental library. However, publications, exhibitions and performances bring the groups' work to the general public and provide an interface with the local community. These are the tangible outcomes. Group projects also maintain a core of committed students, providing a progression from introductory skills-training courses and award-bearing courses to research groups giving students increased responsibility. Group research projects capitalise on students varied skills and prior experiential learning and allow a department to co-ordinate large-scale research programmes of an inter-disciplinary nature.

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<sup>5</sup> D Dymond Writing Local History (London, 1981) p.11.

## Update

Since the end of the UFC-funded research, Sheffield has increased the number and variety of its project groups. One group is researching Sheffield's theatrical past and post-certificate archaeology students are undertaking survey work for the Peak Park authorities. One group, which is surveying local vernacular architecture, is working on an imminent publication. My own group has mounted an exhibition of their work at the Cutlers' Hall, Sheffield and several students visited Solingen, Germany to compare the cutlers' records there.

In 1993, the Division at Sheffield moved to new premises, allowing a dedicated Research Room to be established. This now provides a focus for the research groups with its teaching area, storage for research material and allows students access at most times for individual work. The existence of two groups at Sheffield - the Cutlers' Company records group and Fairbank group working on a large collection of surveyors papers - contributed to the successful bids in consecutive years by the Division for funding from The British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust.

A major issue facing adult continuing education departments today is the accreditation of Liberal Adult courses. Tutors will find it easy to encourage students on group projects to produce written work or material for assessment, unlike students used to the lecture course or discussion group. Sheffield has begun by accrediting group research projects at Level 1 with 20 credits for a 24 session course. Many students in adult continuing education are not concerned with credit accumulation, but research diaries, reports, presentations are all part of group project work and can easily be accommodated within the framework for assessing students' work. Departments may find that research groups, always a minor part of the total liberal programme, can be encouraged to become accredited courses and in fact, this may be the only way for them to survive. Accreditation and research projects can go hand-in-hand as far as the enthusiastic, committed group project student is concerned.

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Joan Unwin is currently Research Associate at the Division of Adult Continuing Education, University of Sheffield, on a project to produce a computerised catalogue and guide to the Fairbank Archive of surveyors papers. This research is funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

# Adult Self-Directed Learning in the Community and its Implications

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## Preamble

This research project, funded at Lancaster University for one year between October 1992 and September 1993 was conducted by Keith Percy and Alexandra Withnall with the assistance of one full-time research officer, Dawn Burton. Dawn left the project after eleven months to take up a lectureship at another University. The original title of the project included the terminology of "independent" rather than "self-directed" learning among adults. The semantic change during the period of research indicates the elusiveness of the concepts which were being addressed.

Interest in the phenomenon of adult self-directed learning had begun in the case of the writer in the late 1970s on reading some of Allen Tough's works (e.g. Tough 1967, 1971, 1978). In some of the major Lancaster empirical research projects of the 1980s (e.g. Percy, Butters, Powell and Willett 1983 and Percy, Barnes, Machell and Graddon 1988) somewhat unsatisfactory attempts had been made to touch upon independent adult learning in the research design. Moreover, it became *de rigueur* for the writer, when writing reflective pieces about policy, practice or research in British continuing education to mention independent or self-directed learning as an under-researched area and one with considerable policy potential (see, for example, Percy 1982 and 1990). However, the research funding available to Lancaster normally derived from government agencies with their sights set firmly on participation in formal continuing education provision. The UFC / HEFCE research funding gave Lancaster a more open-ended opportunity to write its own research agenda. Thus, it was, that among the Lancaster portfolio of research projects in 1992-93 the writer chose to confront a set of conceptual and methodological challenges that had been troubling him for a decade.

## Objectives and Scope

The ambitious objectives of the project, as set out at its inception were to:

- (i) examine the prevalence and conditions of adult self-directed learning among UK adults in different life-situations;
- (ii) explore inter-relationships between adult self-directed learning and learning in formal and non-formal settings;
- (iii) identify implications of findings for formal providers of continuing education.

The project was strictly timetabled, given its twelve months duration. The first three months were allocated to a substantial literature review. The following seven months were dedicated to the design, conduct and analysis of empirical fieldwork. There were three empirical investigations (one a questionnaire study; the other two being interview studies). The two remaining months were available for further analysis and report-writing. The latter period was, in effect, foreshortened by the departure of the research officer to her promotion elsewhere. Nevertheless, four substantial internal reports were produced in the period - one of a literature review, the other three being reports on the empirical studies. The two published outcomes of the project to date (Percy, Burton and Withnall 1995a and 1995b) were based on the four internal reports.



## Definitions of Adult Self-Directed Learning; the North American Literature; the focus of the Lancaster Project

It is impossible not to be struck by the abundance during the past twenty-five years of research and theoretical literature on self-directed and independent learning in North America and by the almost complete dearth of it in the United Kingdom. There appear to be at least two kinds of explanation for this contrast. One is structural; continuing education research in the United Kingdom has not reached the kind of critical mass and level of activity that would allow for concentration upon a particular broad theme which then gives endless scope for replication, refinement, dialogue and dispute. The other explanation relates to the pragmatism of British continuing education, and to the narrow purposes for which research funding is available. British continuing education is concerned with survival, with enrolling sufficient students on formal classes and courses. Research into learning which adults may be doing on their own is not seen to be a contribution to this concern.

The review of literature undertaken at the start of the UFC / HEFCE project made it immediately clear that self-directed learning among adults is a confused and confusing phenomenon or set of phenomena and that is partly why the North American literature is so voluminous. Oddi (1986, 1987) identifies ten terms which appear to be in usage; they are variations around the themes of self-directed, independent, individual and autonomous learning or study and self teaching. As a starting point, the Lancaster review of literature (Percy, Burton and Withnall 1995a) argues that there is a major bifurcation in the North American theorising about self-direction in learning. On the one hand, much of it is about the nature of adulthood and the kind of learning and learning environment which is both appropriate to adults and desired by them. In other words it shares intellectual roots with Knowles and his 'technology' of 'andragogy' (Knowles 1970). It is a reaction to mass situations of teaching and learning in American colleges and is concerned with the creation of learning environments in which adults take responsibility for their own learning, define their own learning goals and the conditions of their learning and are treated as adults.

On the other hand, and logically connected, is the question of what adults, as adults, do for themselves without benefit of colleges and continuing educators. Andragogy begins from the point that autonomous individuals want to, and do, act for themselves. So, contemporaneously with the writing of Knowles, Allen Tough was publishing in the late 1960s and 1970 major research-based books and reports (Tough 1967, 1971, 1978) exploring the deliberate, planned intentional learning projects which adults undertake for themselves without necessary connection with formal classes and courses. Tough found, through a probing, projective kind of interview methodology, that an inherent feature of adult life was the undertaking of learning projects made up of intentional learning episodes. The episodes might occur in different contexts over a long period of time; they might involve television, reading, asking someone, watching others, being in a group, being with an instructor or mentor, transferring skills used in one sphere (e.g. work) to another. Anything might be the object of a learning project: the concern was not confined to what educators call 'subjects'.

Hundreds of replication studies across the world were stimulated by Tough, and within the confines of what he was researching - intentional learning projects - his work has been widely confirmed (see, for example, Brockett and Hiemstra 1991, Candy 1991 and Caffarella and O'Donnell 1991 for recent reviews of this corpus of research). However, the can of worms of adult self-directed learning once opened cannot easily be closed. Subsequent commentators have observed that adults may learn effectively and independently of educators without the intention of being learners. Spear and Mocker (1984) for example - from a piece of research which significantly influenced the Lancaster project - concluded that circumstances, not learning, could cause (indeed require) learning. The concept of the 'organising circumstance' was used in the

design of the Lancaster fieldwork. Other scholars have come close to arguing that 'self-directedness' is, in effect, a personality characteristic (Oddi 1986) which can be measured (Guglielmino 1977).

The focus of the Lancaster research became clear during the literature review. It was to be on adults in the community and on the self-directed learning which they undertook there; it was not concerned with the amelioration of the learning environment in formal learning programmes. The research would not necessarily focus on intentional and planned learning activity among adults in the community. It would be more open-ended; it would at least hold open the possibility that learning activity could be not only unintentional but not consciously defined as learning by the learner. At these extremes of the empirical field, of course, one is cut loose and in peril - aware that, sooner or later, one must float back to a harbour and tie up with current psychological perspectives and philosophical clarifications of adult learning.

Among the key questions which were identified from the literature review and which shaped the Project's empirical work were:

- (i) Why do adults choose to learn on their own and how do they start? To what extent is self-directed learning planned?
- (ii) What are the processes of adult self-directed learning? What resources do adults use and how do they locate them?
- (iii) How does one evaluate the quality of adult self-directed learning? Is self-directed learning successful - and by what criteria?

### **The Project's Empirical Work**

One of the project's rationales was to undertake what would, in effect, be the first substantial piece of empirical work into adult self-directed learning in the community in the United Kingdom for years (since, perhaps, Strong 1977 and Brookfield 1980). As indicated in section 1, the project had only modest resources and a limited timescale. The challenge was to abstract from the full range of the adult population and the social contexts in which adults are located a research population which would be manageable and which would allow for the objectives of the project, and the key questions identified from the literature review, to be addressed.

It was decided to research two groups of adults in the community. Both of these groups had, hypothetically, limited access to formal educational opportunities because of their situation in society. The two groups were informal carers (who, hypothetically, would have little time and opportunity for participation in formal continuing education) and homebound disabled adults. The enquiry, therefore, consisted of three empirical studies:

- (i) A semi-structured questionnaire to informal carers distributed through carers' organisations in Lancaster, Blackpool and surrounding districts. 117 useable returns were received.
- (ii) Tape-recorded interviews, using semi-structured schedule, with 8 of the carers who returned the questionnaire and volunteered to be interviewed.
- (iii) Tape-recorded interviews with 10 disabled adults, using a semi-structured schedule. The interviewees were contacted through support groups and through professionals in the social and health services.

The 117 informal carers were largely female (72%) and predominantly identified themselves - in terms of current or lost paid employment - with clerical, semi-skilled or unskilled occupations. Only 25% identified themselves with a professional occupation. 68% of the carers were over 50;

79% lived in towns or their suburbs; 32% of care receivers were over 70 years, 62% were over 50 years. Almost without exception carers were caring for a relative.

7 of the 10 disabled adults interviewed were men; most of them were middle aged, between 38 and 53 years. The disabilities were mainly severe, including both congenital conditions and the long-term results of traumatic accidents.

It is important to note that in all of the empirical studies we asked respondents both about learning in relation to their social situation (i.e. being a carer, being a disabled adult) and about learning in relation to what we called their 'spare-time' activities and interests, if they had any.

### **Outcomes of the Empirical Work**

The description of the outcomes of the project contained in the project report is substantial (see Percy, Burton and Withnall 1995b). It is only possible in this short paper to present a selection. For clarity's sake, what is reported here is organised around the three key questions identified at the end of section 3 above.

#### ***Why do adults choose to learn on their own?; How do they start?; Is their self-directed learning planned?***

We came to be in little doubt from our empirical work that both groups of adults were, in the main, self-directed learners. The carers were placed in circumstances in which they had to learn about the condition of the person for whom they were caring and about the implications of actions they might take. Often their circumstances required that they learn new ancillary skills such as homecare or managing domestic finances. The notion that they would join courses, or even make time to read a book (if there were a suitable one available) was largely remote from their situation.

We were impressed by the range and quantity of 'spare-time activities' among informal carers, given the demands upon their time and energies. Of course they reported that they had less time than formerly for such activities, and the activities tended to be of a kind which were centred upon the home. They were in themselves a respite and a reaffirmation of the carer's individuality. It is notable that 70% of the carers believed that their knowledge and skills in relation to the chosen activity had developed over time.

The picture is less clear for disabled adults. Some deliberately set out to learn about their condition and its prognosis. Others preferred not to know; a fatalism or lack of confidence encouraged ignorance. With regard to 'spare-time' activities we, again, derived no homogeneous picture. It depended upon the nature and origin of the disability, the daily routine and the ebb and flow of health and energy, optimism and confidence.

What was certain throughout all of the enquiries was that we found little evidence of deliberately and intentionally planned learning projects of the sort which Tough researched. On reflection, our respondents could identify sometimes complex processes of learning in which they had been engaged over time, but it was not true that they had planned them. Nor that they had 'started' them, or could identify a starting point. The learning had emerged from the situation or, in the case of 'spare-time' activities, as far as they could tell they 'had always been interested'.

We found the notion of Spear and Mocker (1984) of the 'organising circumstance' useful in our interpretation of the situation. That is this notion that circumstance both calls forth the learning from the adult and provides the resources from which the learning takes place. However, we

found it necessary to move beyond this notion. In one part of the study of informal carers we tested respondents' knowledge of their care-receivers eligibility for five relevant welfare benefits. That knowledge was poor; 46% of the total possible responses for all five benefits were 'no response' or 'don't know'. Yet we were asking about essential financial basics of the caring situation in our society. The 'circumstance' had not, as it were, 'organised' or required the necessary learning, and the necessary resources, for these carers. In our report we referred to 'circumstances' as 'triggers' rather than 'organisers' and proposed the 'particularity of conditions' as an important explanatory variable in the relationship between changing circumstances and adult self-directed learning.

### *Learning resources and the processes of adult self-directed learning*

In the study of informal carers we paid close attention to the learning resources used and the sources to which or to whom carers turned for advice or authority. The clear conclusion is that such self-directed learners use resources which are close at hand, which are part of their environment. For example, we queried where, or from whom carers found out about the various kinds of welfare benefit. The responses were wide-ranging. 32% referred to social workers (and yet we discovered that contact with social workers was relatively infrequent). We noted earlier that carers' knowledge of five key types of welfare benefit was poor. 16% referred to carers' groups with which they were in touch. 24%, interestingly, turned to friends for advice in this, official and technical, field.

We asked a similar question of carers in relation to 'spare time' activities - to whom or to what did they turn for advice. 41% mentioned 'magazines and books'; 33% drew attention to the existence of mentoring in the community by referring to 'someone you regard as an expert'. 36% reported that they would turn to friends or a member of the family.

We concluded, however, that analysis of the sources used by self-directed learners without consideration of how various learning resources interact together over time misses the point. This is as true for disabled adults as for informal carers. The process of self-directed learning appeared not to be rational or predictable. The learner might not be able to remember the origins of a learning interest; or, if s/he could, it was as likely as not to be serendipitous. A chance, an accident, something seen, something someone said, 'curiosity' - that is to say, an idea or experience presented itself to the adult and was taken on board. Thereafter, planning, objective-setting, decision-making appeared to have little part. Things read, things seen, visits, information from friends, memories and just occasionally a formal learning experience coalesced to constitute a significant learning experience over time. We found Spear's later concept of the 'learning cluster' (Spear 1988) useful in thinking about the phenomenon we observed. Learners engaged in consciously discontinuous learning episodes over time; at intermittent points a key learning episode triggered a mental connection with the outcomes of other past learning episodes. The resulting knowledge and skills coalesced together into a 'learning cluster'.

We asked informal carers to describe 'the ways in which you have learned to look after somebody'. They rated most highly by the far the statement 'on your own through a process of trial and error'. It was not only that the answers they needed were not necessarily accurately to hand; it was the fact that in their position they would not always know the questions to ask.

### *The evaluation of adult self-directed learning*

It was not the case that self-directed learners among the informal carers and disabled adults normally stopped to evaluate this largely serendipitous and unplanned process of learning which we have described. Nevertheless we conclude that ongoing evaluation was a part of the process

of self-directed learning for many of them. With regard to 'spare-time activities', a notable proportion of the informal carers in the questionnaire sample referred to external criteria. 31% noted that 'other people ask my advice'; 13% gave talks or exhibited; 11% earned money from the activities and 10% reported that they had gained awards or certificates. The carers had an interesting, unique method of evaluating the efficacy of their learning as carers. Many of them were able to put the care receiver into residential respite care for a week or two each year. Universally they evaluated respite care by paid professionals as being inferior to that provided by themselves.

However, these forms of evaluation are subjectively interpreted and not necessarily conclusive. We noted earlier doubts about the effectiveness of carers' self-directed learning on welfare benefits. The interviews with disabled adults also indicated the difficulties which several of the respondents experienced even with regard to the informal and intermittent kinds of learning activity of which we have been writing. Physical incapacity, social isolation, diffidence, lack of relevant skills, frustration and bitterness could all act as inhibitors. The problem is, of course, that to ask 'is adult self-directed learning successful?' invites the holding response 'by whose criteria?' In the sense that self-directed learning exists in the community, appears to be prevalent and to be a meaningful part of the lives of adults, then it works. An American study into family caregiving in Wisconsin (which in some ways mirrors the Lancaster study) reports that analysis of the data gathered caused the investigators to refine their definition of the learning processes involved from that of accumulation of 'knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights' to that of a 'process of reflection-in-action ... by which every person makes meaning out of their experiences and life situations'. (Hasselkus and Ray, 1988).

Nevertheless, to the extent that outsiders, educators perhaps, using their own standards, can import meanings and judge that outcomes fall short of what they could be, then some adult self-directed learning is unsuccessful.

### **The Implications and the Impact of the Project**

In the two publications to have emerged from the project to date (Percy, Burton and Withnall 1995a and 1995b) we have attempted to grapple with the implications of the phenomenon of adult self-directed learning in the community for the formal system of continuing education and for professional continuing educators. We discard immediately any notion of simple substitution. That is to say, there is no sense in which we can argue that the formal system is supernumary, redundant, because of the larger unrecognised hinterland of self-directed learning which involves, we propose, a higher proportion of the adult population than do courses, classes and programmes of provision. However, we do think that our research (and that of others, and that which must follow) has implications for the formal system. We believe that formal continuing education and self-directed learning can feed off each other. We try to say in the two publications cited above that it should fall to professional continuing educators to mediate the emergence of the learning society at the start of the next millennium, in which formal provision takes account of the learning perceptions and learning processes of the majority of adults. We say that the developments of television and computer technology, brought into the home, will make this redefinition of the role of continuing educator both more necessary and more possible.

In the empirical studies, we were most struck by the immediacy of the learning environment of most self-directed learners. They used as resources what was to hand; they asked relatives and friends for advice. The challenge, then, for the continuing educator is to relate to that environment. We noted the incidence of ineffective learning about welfare benefits by informal carers. The information they needed was not immediately available and carers in the main (despite the financial importance of the information) did not act effectively to seek it out. We

argue that there is an opportunity here for professional continuing educators. The focus of their activity in the future should not be the college and the adult centre but the home and the neighbourhood community. Current developments in open and distance learning are relevant, but in their present form they may be too structured, word-based, logical and sequenced to relate wholly to the phenomenon which we have begun to describe.

As for Lancaster, we shall undertake further research into adult self-directed learning. Planned immediate extensions of this research, relating to other Lancaster research areas, are adult self-directed learning in the workplace and self-directed learning among older adults. We anticipate that the programmes of the Lancaster University Department of Continuing Education - and, more immediately, those of its distance learning unit - will experiment to take account of the conclusions sketched out above. The Department historically has emphasised a continuum between research, development and practice. As for the writer, this paper began by indicating that notions of self-directed learning among adults began to intrigue him intellectually fifteen years ago. The UFC/HEFCE research funding allowed to take place a small, but possibly significant in British terms, attempt to contribute to understanding a largely unknown phenomenon. Intellectual curiosity is now replaced by intellectual frustration and professional uncertainty. There is something there, but what is it? How can we think about it? and what follows?

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# Contexts: The Workplace



# Creativity Training for Design Engineers in Heavy Plant Industries

Graham Thompson and Martina Lordan  
UMIST

## Introduction: Design Practice in Heavy Plant Industries

The paper reports research carried out into methods of delivery, and the content of, CET courses in creativity for designers of heavy engineering plant. The nature of design in heavy industries is frequently perceived as not being conducive to creative design. The courses show how all designers can make effective, creative contributions to plant design according to their creative style. The approach given to CET delivery has changed significantly as a result of this research. Rather than present research results to an audience, the courses are designed to appeal to the specific abilities and circumstances of all participants. The success of the research has relied greatly on a combination of engineering design and human resource management disciplines.

Engineering design practice in the heavy plant industries differs significantly from design practice in many branches of engineering. Consider the cases of the design of a large glass making plant and the design of a motor cycle. Both involve considerable engineering ability. A glass making plant requires a very high capital investment, it will be expected to operate for fifteen years or longer with one refurbishment of furnace linings and no general replacement of line equipment other than that required due to component failure. A new glass making plant may not be designed before an interval of many years from the last exercise. The performance of a new plant should be a significant improvement on previous designs, but designers will be reluctant to undertake a radical re-design of facilities. There is too much at stake. The plant must operate well on first start up with little modification allowed during commissioning. There is no scope for rethinking the design and a risk-avoiding culture tends to develop. To this must be added the 'Design by Code' attitude which prevails in many process and heavy industries. Pressure vessels, pipe flanges, pumps, valves etc. are all covered by standards. The designer must have a very good reason to deviate from the standards or for not using proprietary products and also be able to design alternatives which are demonstrably as safe and cost effective. It is not surprising that plant design is often described as bolting together standard items in an uninspiring manner.

Contrast this with the design of a motor cycle. The product life is far shorter and designers have to be creative to find the performance edge over rivals. In any one product class there are alternatives: two stroke and four stroke engines, number of cylinders, type of suspension etc. All these are hard engineering matters, not styling, and they all contribute to product competitiveness. Unless the designers adopt a risk seeking attitude to design then their company will fail.

If one reviews engineering design practice, then the contrast between design as practised in heavy industries and the engineering design practised in consumer products becomes stark. The former is characterised by a 'play it safe' mentality and the latter by a search for new ideas. That is not to criticize these attitudes. Careful analysis of the industry requirements point to these being correct. However, it would be quite wrong to conclude that creativity is not required in the plant industries.

In order to devise a creativity training programme which would be both useful and acceptable to industry, research was first carried out with respect to creativity theory and the practice of engineering design in the heavy plant industries. The following factors were found to be significant:

- \* opportunities for creative design,
- \* creative style and engineering design,
- \* relevance of courses to each participant,
- \* individual and group activity in engineering design, and
- \* course duration.

The research findings will be described next, leading to a brief overview of the courses designed. (Each course is based on the same principles, but the plural is used because each course is tailored to the client company.) The changes the research has brought to CET delivery and the impact of the work on the researchers who carried out the project will then be discussed.

### **Creative Opportunities**

It is important to recognize the vital role of competitiveness in plant industries and that creative design is required. Competitiveness takes the form of fast design and construction times and low construction and manufacturing costs. There must be a good, well justified reason for adopting step changes in design but there is great cope for incremental change. At all stages of design, from concept to detail, there exist opportunities for designers to make improvements. Indeed, research has suggested that more improvements are made through evolutionary change than by large step changes, ref.1.

Therefore, recognizing the need for creativity in the plant industries, it is useful to contrast this with perceptions of creativity. Often creative people are said to have 'wild ideas' and 'funny ways of looking at problems'. Also they 'jump from idea to idea'. Thus there is an apparent mis-match between the world of creativity and the world of the plant designer. This perception of creativity is far from correct and has led to some engineers, especially in the design office, to consider their subject as not requiring much creative thought.

The designer of plant equipment needs to approach every problem as an opportunity: Can subtle changes be made to improve performance at no increase in cost? Can the construction method be simplified? Can standard components be combined differently to good effect? Such problems are demanding.

Creative design may mean doing something differently rather than doing something revolutionary and new.

### **Creativity and Creative Style**

Creativity and creative style are often confused. The person with 'wild ideas' may be perceived to be creative but in practice this may be far from the case. It may be that they are uncreative.

Creative style is described clearly by Kirton, ref.2. Briefly, creative style varies continuously between two extremes called adaptive and innovative. The creative style of most people lies between the extremes. Adaptors are people who tend to make incremental improvements, perhaps by modifying an existing solution. They will take ideas and select the best, sometimes making favourable combinations of alternative sub-solutions. Innovators have a different style. They suggest many ideas of varying character which are usually very different from the status quo. They skip between problems and are comfortable when faced with a number of problems simultaneously.

To be adaptive or innovative is not to be more or less creative. It is the creative style that is being described. Some people have a mixture of adaptive and innovative characteristics and flex between styles.

Innovators and adaptors have a role in plant design.

It is considered important that course participants have an understanding of creative style and how this differs from creative ability.

The measurement of creative ability is not attempted in the CET courses developed. It would be counter productive and negative to consider the measurement of creative ability. The objective is to improve the creative ability of all not to label winners and losers.

### **Commitment to the Course**

Too often CET course participants can become alienated towards a course. 'This is not for me', 'I cannot see how to use this material' are typical of some comments expressed. It is vitally important in a creativity course, and especially so in a course which is directed towards an industry where the course theme is not seen as a mainstream activity, that each course participant believes that the course is relevant to them and has something to offer.

Therefore, at the start of the creativity courses developed in this research, the theoretical basis of the creativity and its applicability to plant design is explained. The personal nature of creative style is brought home to participants in the following way.

First of all, each person is given a KAI (Kirton Adaptor-Innovator) questionnaire and asked to complete it immediately. Upon completion of the questionnaire, an explanation of creative style is then given to the group. The nature of plant design is then discussed and the importance of all styles is stressed. Examples of creative adaptors and innovators are given as are examples of uncreative adaptors and innovators.

Each participant is given back their KAI score and further discussion of their approach to design takes place. Individual scores are not discussed. The importance of contributions from all creative styles is emphasised and examples from the workplace discussed. A positive approach is taken always, stressing the contributions that individuals can make. Assessment of ability is ruled out firmly.

In summary, the following points are made early in the course.

- \* The importance of each member of the course is emphasised. Each person has a creative contribution to make.
- \* The basic principles of creative style are described and the industrial relevance of creativity to plant industries is established and given credibility.
- \* The need for adaptive and innovative solutions to plant design problems is established.
- \* Each member learns to appreciate the creative contribution their colleagues might make, albeit in a different style.

## Individual and Group Activity

Most creativity workshops concentrate on group activities to stimulate creative thought. As part of the research, an analysis was undertaken of the type of design work carried out in plant industries. It was found that, at the start of a project, the contribution of group work is more important but as the project develops, the individual contribution takes on the greater importance, see fig.1. Throughout the a project then, and in the latter stages particularly, much work is undertaken on an individual basis and design engineers have a great need of creative skills when working alone. Therefore, concentration on group skills alone will lead to the poor reputation of creativity courses for 'hard engineering design'. Group work is still important in design however, and individual and group work should be covered.

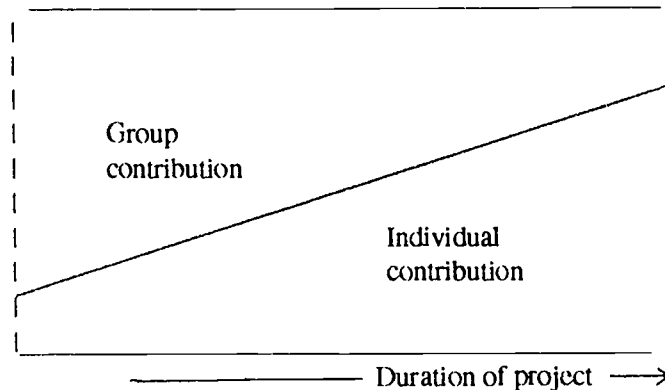


Fig.1 Group and individual contributions to design work.

## Duration of Creativity Courses

It would be preferable to hold a course of 3 days or more in order to reinforce ideas through practice. Consultation with engineering managers revealed that this was unacceptable. Creativity was stated to be important but was viewed in a different light from, say, a course on computational methods. The former is 'soft' engineering and the latter 'real, hard' engineering. Time can be justified to learn techniques where the benefits of the course are readily seen, e.g. knowledge of a new computer language. The benefits of a creativity course for engineers is less apparent and so courses on this subject are not so easily justified.

For the CET provider, just as it is for the designer, it is necessary to work within the constraints set by the client. Therefore, a 1 day course was devised. In fact, on some occasions an extended half day course has been used (12noon - 5pm, including a working lunch).

## Overview of the Course

### *Content*

The objective here is to give an outline of the course content in order to convey the 'feel' of the creativity teaching programme. Due to space constraints, each topic is not described but the time allocated is given. A typical programme would include the following:

	hr
* Introductions and KAI questionnaires	0.5
* Creative design principles (talk)	0.5
* Creative style (talk and discussion with respect to design practice)	0.5
* Innovative style techniques (practice)	1.5
* Adaptive style techniques (practice)	1.5
* Individual/group activities (practice)	1.0
* Course review	0.5

For further discussion of the content of the course and the theoretical aspects see ref 3.

### ***Problems set***

All exercises on the course are provided by the course participants. Importantly, all problems are engineering problems. The use of 'abstract problems', e.g. dropping an egg from a window, are interesting exercises but do not reinforce the relevance of the creativity course to industry.

### ***Location***

All courses have been held in industry and with a group of engineers from one company. A visit(s) to each company is made prior to each course to 'gain a feel for the industry' and to meet some participants. Thus, the relevance to particular individuals and the industry sector is stressed.

### ***Feedback***

Feedback on the course has highlighted the following points

- \* The material on creative principles was liked greatly.
- \* Understanding personal creative style (adaptive/innovative) coupled with the relevance of the course to design practice in their industry was received well.

### **Approach to CET Provision**

This research project has led to a very different form of CET provision to that given previously by the author. Like those of many other academics, courses have usually been concerned with the transmission of research results to an audience in a 'softer form' than a research paper. Essentially CET has been another way by which research results could be disseminated. Courses have been advertised widely and participants have come from many industries. On occasion, follow up courses have been given to industry but these have been more focused, in depth courses following on from a previous course.

The creativity course has been very different. It originated from discussions between the author and engineers in industry. It was said that there was a need for new ideas in industry. However, creativity courses were considered to be unsuitable for engineering designers, but they may be suitable for bright graduates going into marketing! Clearly there was a need for a new type of course.

Research was undertaken into creativity theory leading to the importance of creative style. It became apparent that most creativity courses were devised and delivered by innovators for innovators and thus the majority of designers were alienated in the heavy plant industries. Thus, a new creativity course was devised to meet a specific market need.

Therefore, a radical change has taken place in CET provision as a result of this project. Instead of 'We are good at this subject, come and learn from us' the approach has been 'There is a problem with CET provision in this field for some people, let us find a solution'.

The outcome has been a course which serves a need and which receives favourable comment from participants. There is a down side however.

- \* The pre-course work load is heavy because a visit(s) to industry is made before each course.
- \* The course is given to a group of engineering designers from one company. Therefore, a mailshot followed by a course delivered on university territory is not possible. A client company has to be found for each course.
- \* Creativity is still regarded by many as a 'soft' subject in engineering design and needs more effort to convince managers of its value to the company than is the case for 'hard' engineering topics.

### **Impact on the Researchers**

#### ***Theory***

In most CET provision, there is a tendency to 'play down' theory, especially in technological subjects, placing more emphasis on applications. In this project, the topic of theoretical aspects of creativity was received very well. Indeed, it is seen now as essential because:

- \* it stimulates interest, and
- \* it enables a person to discover the relevance of creativity to their own work in industry.

Such a result was contrary to the perceived wisdom of many pundits at the start of the research who suggested that engineers would not be interested in 'that sort of thing'.

#### ***Good and bad practice***

In the process of reviewing creativity publications a startling discovery was made. In engineering circles many courses were based on incorrect principles and inadequate knowledge. This was probably due to: excessive reliance on personal approaches to the subject, appreciating only 'way out thinking' as being creative, confusing creative ability with creative style and lack of research into the subject. At times it was very disconcerting to receive certain accounts of academics' work. But engineers are great believers in their own abilities, and it is difficult to convince them of greater knowledge elsewhere in the literature, especially when that knowledge is descriptive and not quantitative.

In contrast, the approach to creativity taken by management psychologists is well thought out and based on sound principles. It has attracted innovators to the subject and many courses focus on

innovative methods and so become unattractive to the broader spectrum of engineering designers. Innovators tend to design courses for innovators.

### ***Interdisciplinary research***

The combination of engineering design and human resource development has proved useful. The two researchers who undertook this project come from these disciplines. At times difficulties have been experienced. For the engineer, it has been necessary to agree precise meanings for words which are otherwise used generally and which lack a mathematical definition, e.g 'innovative'. For the researcher from a human resources background, the need to appreciate the quantitative nature of engineers has been required.

The combination of disciplines is believed to have been an important factor in the successful outcome of this research. The human resource approach took the research out of the present domain of engineering design to establish sound basic principles. Engineering input helped shape the research results to a meaningful creativity course for engineering designers.

### **Conclusions**

Research has been undertaken into the principles of creativity and the nature of engineering design in heavy plant industries. Using the results of this work, courses have been devised and run successfully in industry.

The research has found that successful CET provision in this field relies on:

- \* teaching theoretical principles in addition to practical methods,
- \* creating a personal belief in engineers that the course is relevant to them and their industry,
- \* helping engineers to discover their creative style and talents,
- \* delivering material which is suited to all styles of creativity, and
- \* concentrating on improving the creative abilities of all people in a positive manner, omitting assessment of ability.

The approach to CET provision has been changed as a result of the project. Instead of presenting a course on the results of research to engineers from various industries, an in-company course is given which features company products and practices including a pre-course visit(s) to identify subjects for problem solving sessions.

The researchers are from different academic backgrounds and it is considered that this has been an important contributory factor to the successful outcome of the research. They have been surprised by the lack of knowledge of creativity in some engineering circles and by the lack of attention to adaptive creativity styles by some management psychology researchers.

### **Acknowledgement**

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# The Leeds Adult Learners at Work Project: Knowledge and Control in Employee Development Schemes

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## Introduction

As the editor of a recent collection of studies into the changing labour process in higher education puts it, 'higher education around the world is undergoing massive and unprecedented changes ... Most of what is happening is going ahead largely unexamined, and certainly unopposed ...' (Smyth, 1995.1). The first part of this paper will selectively comment on these major structural adjustments and accompanying policy shifts in the late modern world. This opening section will provide the context for a brief outline of the 'Leeds Adult Learners at Work' project. The final part of the paper will link a number of the contextual concerns with a discussion around issues of knowledge and control within conceptions of education and training. We suggest that, when examining Employee Development schemes, it is more illuminating and helpful to conceptualise workplace learning along 'adaptive' versus 'emancipatory' forms of learning than within current debates over, for example, differences between training and education. A bi-polar model is developed to illustrate the argument. Finally, the paper also suggests that it is conceptually useful, although complex, to situate developments within 'workplace learning' with changes in higher education.

## Economising Education

For those grappling with the recent turmoil and changes besetting the tranquil world of universities, there are a number of common themes beginning to emerge. As the state increasingly aligns itself to the corporate economy, there is a growing recognition, for example, of the influence of 'the market' in defining the nature and business of universities (Neave 1990, Wilson 1991). The 'human capital' view of higher education, so dear to the various contributions of the OECD, is premised on the need for more 'flexible' and 'responsive' forms of labour, increased participation by the private sector and the need for higher education to operate more like a private market (Smyth, 1995.3). The consequence is a changing relationship between the traditional boundaries of state and higher education (Neave, 1982). Despite the pretence of withdrawal, recent changes have witnessed an enormous increase in central state control, primarily at the level of curriculum, professional development and research. At the same time, a decentralising trend, largely centred on money, management and industrial relations, is at work organised through a variety of privatisation, deregulation and commercialisation measures. 'At risk', observes Giroux, 'is both the traditional civic democratic function of public school and the very nature of how we define democratic community, critical citizenship, and the most basic premise of teaching and learning (Giroux, 1994.51).

Others, while accepting the scale and pace of change, take either a less critical perspective or actually endorse the changes. The HEFCE, for example, in its submission to the Secretary of State for Education's review of higher education, identifies 'higher education as a tradable activity' which 'should be recognised more explicitly as a purpose of HE' (HEFCE, 1993.5). Van Ginkel recognises that 'after a long and relative calm, universities have become the focus of a broad social and international debate about the tasks of a university and the way in which it fulfils and should fulfil these tasks' (Van Ginkel, 1994.66). He then proceeds to outline a rather exciting and

uncritical role for universities in the future 'knowledge-intensive society'. More obvious policy endorsements for current trends arise from governments and the European Union (Memorandum on Higher Education).

While it may be correct that 'academia is gaining a progressively stronger influence on society' (ibid.72), too uncritical a perspective serves to blur or mask developments. Too close an endorsement with the view that education is insufficiently responsive to new economic times risks legitimating certain interests that seem constantly to be privileged over others. Too broad a conception of the changes in 'the knowledge industry' - between, for example, the 'community of scholars' model versus the 'Fordist/post-Fordist' model - risks obscuring the more subtle cumulative changes at work. In relation to our two-year study of Employee Development scheme and adult learners at work (outlined below), then, what particular analytical themes can be identified that shaped and added significance to the findings of the study?

First, as Halsey (1992.13) points out in regard to the academic professions, 'explicit vocationalism displaces implicit vocational preparation'. Vocationalism sees worthwhile knowledge as defined as that which prepares students for paid work (Kenway et al, 1994). The most worthwhile knowledge is seen as that which can assist national economies to compete economically and technologically. Secondly, and aligned with the above point, the stress on mathematics, science, technology and business studies are indicative of a technical or scientific rationality which informs curriculum design, professional development and research funding. Within such a context, we need to situate the emphasis on 'competencies' with its largely behaviourist and instrumental approach to learning and 'outcomes'. Thirdly, as a result of the state aligning itself more closely and directly with the corporate economy, public funded education has adopted a variety of market or quasi-market forms and relationships as Kenway et al's (1994) recent article has illustrated. The public-private binary divide is weakened and further undermined at the level of educational policy and practice as the workplace and the 'home increasingly become(s) (a) site(s) for formal and informal learning ... new modes of de-institutionalised education guided entirely or partly by marketing logics' (ibid.326). Not only are conventional educational binary distinctions challenged but so are current understandings of pedagogy and understandings of who constitutes students and teachers. Fourthly and finally, as we discuss in more detail in the final section of this paper, the long-standing debate between 'training' versus 'education' versus 'learning' can usefully be linked to these restructuring themes and so provides a greater clarity on what has sometimes been a confusing and circular debate.

As mentioned in the introductory comments to this paper, we are not suggesting a linear or direct relationship between these 'new times' in higher education and our immediate concerns in the two-year 'Adult Learners at Work' project. Rather, it was more the case that as we proceeded with the research (1991-93) and in the period after the research we were increasingly aware of the importance of the wider context which added to the significance and poignancy of the research. The final report (Payne et al, 1993) commented on the post-Fordist / post-industrial debate but not on the changes within higher education. The comments in this section of the paper therefore illustrate not only a continuing interest in the subject matter of 'adult learners at work' but also a recognition of the usefulness of linking this research interest to changes within higher education.

### **Leeds Adult Learners at Work Project**

The Leeds Adult Learners at Work project (1991-93) examined the nature and growth of Employee Development (ED) learning programmes within the workplace. By ED is meant training and education initiatives which provide a major focus on the personal development of employees and extend general learning opportunities to sectors of the workforce often excluded in the past from both job-specific training and educational initiatives. ED builds motivation as well

as generic skills and knowledge. Well-known schemes of this type include those run within Lucas Industries, Ford UK, Rover and the Body Shop. Universities are involved in such schemes both as providers of courses for employees and as researchers and evaluators of schemes. It therefore follows that the issues outlined above have a direct bearing on attitudes in Higher Education towards Employee Development, and the extent to which ED will result in either emancipatory or adaptive forms of education and training.

Initial enquiries as to the scope and number of such schemes in the UK were followed by a postal questionnaire survey of schemes run by large firms. This was followed by a series of case-studies in both the private and public sectors. Throughout the project there was a concern to relate ED schemes to changing patterns of work organisation and to broader issues such as trade union involvement, industrial restructuring, unemployment and social justice. It emerged from the large firms questionnaire that one of the few forms of education supported by all firms was support for Open University study. This represents an implicit criticism of the emphasis on full-time study in English Higher Education. The findings of the project thus represent a challenge to the Department of Adult Continuing Education (and indeed to the whole of HE) to examine how developments such as part-time study, access courses accreditation of work-based learning, modularisation, trade union education and the conversion of traditional liberal education courses to award-bearing schemes can match the educational aspirations of less well-qualified employees identified as part of the project. At the same time, a rejection of the narrow elitism traditional in English Higher Education does not imply a rejection of the tradition of critical, rational thought which is the major contribution of higher education to modernity.

#### **What Are We Talking About?: Education, Training, Learning and Socialisation.**

In the writing that has resulted from the UFC-financed Adult Learners at Work project (University of Leeds Department of Adult Continuing Education, 1991-93), we have argued with our colleague Kevin Ward that the current use of the term 'learning' carries both advantages and dangers (Payne, Forrester and Ward 1993; Forrester, Payne and Ward 1995a, 1995b). We have rejected the simplistic assumption that, just because the supporters of 'education' and 'training' have fought one another to a standstill, the simple substitution of a third term ('learning') will somehow solve the problem. It won't: learning can range from the crudest forms of socialisation ('that'll learn ya') to the philosophies of Paulo Freire (learning for liberation for the oppressed people of the South) and Carl Rogers (learning as self-actualisation for corporate managers). The terms 'education', 'training' and 'learning' are paradigms of reality constructed, refined and changed by social actors. As discourse, their power is not in what they signify but in the work they do on behalf of interested social actors. We view them as another way in which social actors make competing claims for political hegemony and the use of public (and sometimes private) resources.

In unpacking the accumulated baggage of these terms, we have made use of Williams' (1961.140-43) distinction between the three groups of participants in 19th century debates about education in an industrial society: public educators, industrial trainers and old humanists. He points out that while the public educators allied themselves with the industrial trainers against the elitist liberal education concepts of the old humanists, they 'inevitably drew on the arguments of the old 'liberal' education, as a way of preventing universal education being narrowed to a system of pre-industrial instruction.' (Williams, 1961.142). Thus in so far as 'learning' represents anything, it expresses the current uneasy alliance between on the one hand those of us committed to the development of lifelong learning through public policy initiatives and on the other hand the social partners (employers and unions) with both their shared and differing economic interests. One might say that survival in the risk society depends on knowing the history of who you are in bed with and why! In the same way, 'education' has come to signify the defence of elitist academic and cultural values,

while 'training' is used by those who view competitive economic advantage as the only justification for expenditure on learning activities<sup>1</sup>.

In so far as the terms 'education' and training' have a continuing significance, it is their interrelationship which is of fundamental importance. For example, it is clear that a broad general education which emphasises core skills such as English, Maths, Information Technology and Study Skills is an important basis for job-related training, both at work and in community settings. It is also clear that a fundamental problem with training at work is that employees who do not possess good basic skills will have difficulties in taking part in, let alone benefiting from, training provided within the workplace.

It is not just a matter of skills, or even knowledge, either. As Barnett has recently noted (Barnett, 1994.99), understanding is all too frequently tucked on to the end of the triad 'knowledge, skills and understanding' and then given no separate treatment of its own. We would argue that knowledge and skills can be rapidly acquired given the combination of individual motivation and provision. It is understanding at the individual level which promotes motivation, the understanding that comes from a sense of who we are as individuals, who we might become and how those zones might be linked. It is understanding at a social level that enables a society (here defined as a social entity having control over resources: local, national or international government) to identify how the promotion of lifelong learning can enable people to deal with a range of risks in the late modern world - economic, environmental, health and so on - and make provision for the adult continuing education arising from these concerns. The first of these two elements is anchored in the work of Anthony Giddens, the second in that of Ulrich Beck (cf the other paper by John Payne in this collection). Our policy concerns have emphasised the urgent need to socialise the learning market:

*(T)he policy issue ... is that of education throughout life - publicly provided opportunities which enhance the possibilities for creative work and creative leisure - particularly for those people who have had least post-compulsory education.' (Forrester Payne and Ward, 1995b).*

### **Education and Training for Human Emancipation and Human Control**

Far from there being a clear distinction between training which prepares people for work-roles and education which is a neutral process of individual development, the question of the purpose of education in capitalist society has always been paramount. The first two moves in this argument run as follows:

- firstly, it has never been possible to divorce the publicly funded education system from the human resource requirements of the economy.
- secondly, both within education and training there is a current of thinking which is concerned to extend the control of both individuals and collectivities over the circumstances of their lives and work.

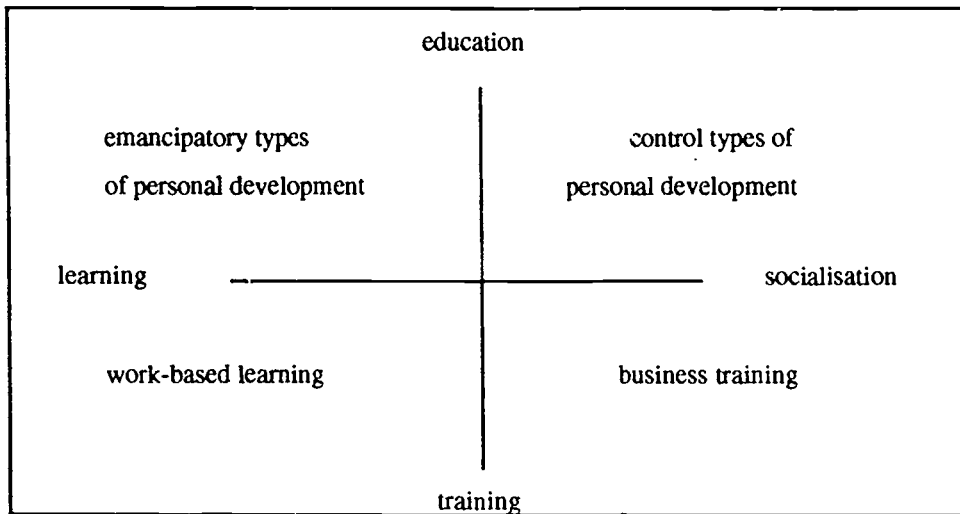
It follows that there is no purity to be found in 'learning', 'education' or 'training'. What is called for is constant vigilance over the issues that have always been at the heart of sociology of education as an intellectual project: who learns what and for what purpose. This is summed up in figure 1. Beginning with the ideal type contrasts of education, training, learning and socialisation, a bi-polar model allows us to proceed beyond the ideal types presented in the model to the location and identification of actual practices in the fields of education and training. While this model can be

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<sup>1</sup> These points are developed at length in a forthcoming article (Forrester, Payne and Ward 1995)

adapted for use in any educational setting, we have used it here to represent those sorts of education and training which might be sponsored by employers.

*Figure 1*



In terms of our research on Employee Development (ED), this model made a surprisingly clear distinction between adaptive models of education and training (the right-hand side of the figure) with their emphasis on organisational aims and teacher (trainer) input, and Employee Development (the left-hand side) in which a dialogue is set up between the aims of the organisation and individual motivation. It is in that sense, we demonstrated, that Employee Development may include job-training but its scope always goes beyond that to a personal development which enhances individual freedom. It is precisely this tension which explains the success of those schemes which have been established; at the same time it also emphasises the difficulty of establishing them because the notion of a potential or actual mutual interest clearly cuts across a common view (held equally by management and unions) of the necessarily conflicting interests of capital and labour<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, it is easier to provide a theoretical justification for the claim that Employee Development is able to deliver emancipatory forms of personal development than to find hard evidence for this in practice. Part of the frustration of a 2-year research project is to arrive at the point we have reached where theoretical questions can only be answered by further empirical enquiry. As C. Wright Mills puts it: 'Social research of any kind is advanced by ideas; it is only disciplined by fact.' (Mills, 1959:71) The evidence of the actual ways in which employees use the opportunities made available under Employee Development schemes has sustained our own excitement through a research report and a book, while the existing data (quantitative and qualitative) is also available to other bona fides researchers for the purpose of secondary analysis. It is time to set out for the field again, but who will pay for our tickets?

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<sup>2</sup> These points are elaborated in Forrester, Payne and Ward 1993.

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# Contexts: The Community

# 'Personal Troubles and Public Issues': University Researchers, Adult Educators and Adult Learners in Rural Areas

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*'Social research of any kind is advanced by ideas;  
it is only disciplined by fact.'*  
(C. Wright Mills 1959:71)

## Introduction

The rural adult education project based in the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) at Sussex University was designed to explore the range of barriers to participation in adult learning in rural areas. A number of case-studies were carried out: John Payne researched and wrote up case-studies in East Sussex, Cornwall and Derbyshire, while Mike Boice did the same in North Yorkshire. Susan McGrath drew on her own experience as an adult educator and development officer, and on data collected in the case-studies to explore particular barriers for women in rural areas, while John Lowerson, project director at CCE, wrote a summative essay relating the case-study findings to broader issues within rural sociology. The whole was published as *Out of sight, out of mind? Barriers to participation in rural adult education* (Lowerson and Thomson 1994).

Using initially key respondent methodology, but increasingly adopting more naturalistic techniques, the case-studies chart some of the tensions, achievements and problems of adult educators and learners in rural areas:

- the problems of educators making provision, and learners accessing that provision in geographically scattered communities
- tensions arising from social and economic change in rural areas, including those between 'local' and 'incomer' communities, the decline of traditional industries such as coal and tin-mining, high rates of unemployment and 'hidden' poverty in apparently wealthy areas
- the tensions between the various purposes of adult learning: learning aimed at increased potential in employment; learning for personal satisfaction; learning for community development
- the relationship between formal providers and informal providers, including churches and voluntary organisations, where adult learning is only one aspect of the organisation's work
- the possibilities and limitations imposed by changes in the funding and organisation of formal adult education and training.

The research was particularly successful in generating partnership with practitioners and learners in a variety of both formal and informal settings, and it is the practical and theoretical value of such relationships that this paper addresses. Initially, the intervention of the researchers in the case-study areas was seen as a 'parachute' exercise. The researchers would go in, obtain



information and return to write up the case-study. In practice, each stage of this process proved problematic.

### **Access: Preparing the Ground**

Initially, access was negotiated via a set of 'key respondents' in each area. These key respondents were to be adult education providers (universities, colleges, LEA services, WEA). In practice, this led to an over-emphasis on formal provision, and too little attention being paid to informal learning, particularly as it takes place through membership of voluntary organisations. Within the case-studies, there is a clear progression from the Derbyshire and East Sussex case-studies which concentrate mainly on formal provision, through Cornwall, where the WEA villages project provided an interesting insight into how adult education might link to community development, to North Yorkshire, where, with the support of the project Steering Group, Mike Boice made a deliberate effort to spend more time contacting voluntary organisations. There are two reasons for this progression from the formal to the informal:

#### ***The values of the researchers***

We were all interested in how adult education might serve not just as 'icing on the cake' for people who had already benefited from initial education, but how it might serve to support culturally and materially deprived individuals and communities, and how education and training might improve the life-chances of those people. In other words, despite the constraints of the project, we were interested in digging beneath the most obvious manifestations of adult education such as LEA leisure classes, or university extra-mural provision.

#### ***Not education, but learning***

We were conscious that increasingly the emphasis in policy and theory is on adults learning, in whatever way that happens, rather than on institutional issues. While the two are clearly connected (opportunities for adults to learn are clearly going to be affected by LEA decisions to close down formal provision in rural areas), there were questions to be answered about how adults learn in practice, and the use they make of both formal and informal learning opportunities: opportunities at work and in the community, as well as in educational institutions.

### **Gathering the Data: at Work in the Field**

Key respondent methodology, used insensitively, produces a very top-down view of what is going on in the field. In practice, three out of the four case-studies (Cornwall, Derbyshire and North Yorks) used more naturalistic methods once in the field. This involved interviews with adult students, and members and officers of voluntary organisations, as well as adult education organisers. Any one contact led on to a number of others. Decisions about which avenues to pursue were taken in the light of the observations above about the social and educational concerns of the research team. Such decisions were also cumulative: novelty became increasingly a consideration - what new insights might a possible visit offer us into our theme? For example, the opportunity to meet with a Cornish village WEA branch who were involved in community development and defining their own learning needs within the village was not to be missed. At the same time, such a procedure does have its dangers, and it can be the many forms into which the familiar transmogrifies which offer the clearest insights into possibilities and constraints experienced by adult learners. Thus I reported in the Cornwall case-study on hill farmers and fire officers coming to terms with Information Technology at a LEA evening class centre in Bodmin, and an extra-mural department Local History class at Chacewater which was part of a village community coming to terms with its own history and identity.

## **Writing Up: Bringing in the Harvest**

Is a project such as this dealing in audit or evaluation? Clearly, any reader of the final report will be most conscious of the element of audit. At the same time, there is also an element of evaluation. Thus 'Models of development' in the Cornwall case-study (pages 132-4) or 'Issues, concerns and questions' (North Yorkshire, pages 174-8) raise concerns about substantive issues such as the meaning of the rural in the modern world, links between adult learning and community and economic development, and policy developments which might facilitate access to learning in rural areas. The writing developed in a number of ways:

### ***Criticism***

Drafts were shared by members of the Steering Group with detailed criticism and discussion. This proved enormously valuable. It is also important to note that far from producing a bland report, individual authors were forced to articulate clearly and strongly their individual commentary on the research work.

### ***Validation***

At a second stage, drafts were circulated to key respondents in the case-study areas. This allowed not just the correction of obvious factual errors but also for respondents to judge the 'fit' of the evolving analysis to their own perceptions of what is going on in their area. What was happening here was part of an acknowledgement that as researchers we wanted to move away from an 'outsider' account towards an 'insider' account of learning experience.

### ***Reflection***

As a result of discussions within the Steering Group, and the case-study writing, John Lowerson's piece ('Reflections') and Susan McGrath's contribution ('Adult education and the changing role of women in rural communities') were fashioned, with the same critical approach as in 3.1.

### ***Extension***

One particular small group of learners in Swadlincote used my transcriptions of taped interviews with them to eventually produce their own account of the way learning is both enabled and blocked in a rural areas, with the help of Janet White, an LEA tutor. This was eventually published in *Adults Learning* under the unlikely title of 'Pigs, aeroplanes and community education' (White 1994).

## **The Rural and the Modern: a Retrospective View**

What is absent from the written report of the project are the beginnings of a theoretical exploration which might link our professional concerns as adult educators with those of the communities which, as adult educators, we exist to serve. That is to say that neither audit or evaluation are adequate ways of describing a research project which seeks to links on the one hand adult learning and on the other hand social and economic change. Ultimately, the exploration of adult learning is a sociological endeavour.

Adult educators have often claimed to be 'committed' (Collins 1991). At particular times and in particular places, this commitment has been focused on a particular political struggle or ideological position. More commonly, adult educators have claimed to be committed to 'society' or

to the people of a particular locality. The truth of the matter, as we all know, is that adult educators have found it even more difficult than other areas of education to resist the ideology of 'the market', which in fact amounts to the creation and sustaining of quasi-markets for various types of education and training, and the concomitant emphasis on individuals. This ideology of individualism uses the willingness of some people to spend time and money on education and training to justify the exclusion both of other individuals (the poor; the socially and culturally deprived) and other objectives (for example, community economic development).

The uncertain response of adult education to this brave new world of market individualism has been partly related to the weak resources base of adult education, always vulnerable to changes and cuts in government expenditure. The Sussex report does not ignore these important issues. However, there are also inherent weaknesses in our understanding of social relations and the actual and potential intervention that adult education constitutes in those relations. One of the strengths of the *Barriers to participation in adult education in rural areas* project at the University of Sussex was that it provided empirical evidence of some of the characteristically reflexive ways in which individual social actors, professional groups and local and interest communities deal with the processes of change inherent in modernity. In the remainder of the paper, I shall deal with three linked issues: knowledgeability; structure and agency; risk.

### Knowledgeability

The title of this paper comes from C. Wright Mills' linked dictums: '*many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues*', and '*the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles*.' (Mills 1959:226) Both researchers and adult educators deal in personal troubles. At a distance it follows that they deal in public issues. Here the professional ideology of the educator (defining needs and promoting access) coincides with the professional knowledgeability of the social researcher:

*What ordinary men (sic) are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighbourhood; in other milieux, they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel. (idem:3)*

Social actors, then, are the victims of structures they know little about, and C. Wright Mills identified the 'solution' to this 'problem' in the use of human freedom and reason, and the ways in which 'mass' problems might become 'public' issues:

*Freedom is not merely the chance to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them - and then, the opportunity to choose. That is why freedom cannot exist without an enlarged role of human reason in human affairs. Within an individual's biography and within a society's history, the social task of reason is to formulate choices, to enlarge the scope of human decisions in the making of history. (idem:174)*

Freedom and reason are both seen as part of the project of liberal education in a way which resonates with many of the classic texts of university liberal adult educators:

*An educator must begin with what interests the individual most deeply, even if it seems altogether trivial and cheap. He must proceed in such a way and with such materials as*

*to enable the student to gain increasingly rational insight into these concerns, and into others he will acquire in the process of his education. And the educator must try to develop men and women who can and who will by themselves continue what he has begun: the end product of any liberating education is simply the self-educating, self-cultivating man and woman; in short, the free and rational individual. (Mills 1959:187)*

Yet this view of social actors as irrational beings whose only hope is to become the clients of social science or the students of educational institutions is unsatisfactory. It is my contention that C. Wright Mills underestimates the knowledgeability of social actors and the interplay between structure and agency in a way which has major implications for adult education endeavours. Furthermore, his writings presume a unified public space which is alien to contemporary experience. While there is a sense in which people know more within the specialised or localised setting, the social system itself has become 'disembedded'. Anthony Giddens defines this as the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space' (Giddens 1990:21). It is this reconstituted and complex time-space which constitutes the diverse contexts in which public affairs take place. If the consequences at the societal level constitute exactly those risks which I shall refer to below in relation to the writings of Ulrich Beck, at a personal level the threat of personal meaninglessness (idem:102) is countered by the 'reflexive project of the self' within modernity. People become literally the authors of their own biographies.

Giddens refines and develops C. Wright Mills' propositions on knowledgeability in a way which stresses the extent to which social actors do indeed 'make sense of' the social world:

*Human beings normally know not only what they are doing at any moment but why they are doing it, and they are able discursively to give an account of what they do and of their reasons for what they do ... But it does not follow that they know all there is to know about the consequences of what they do, for the activities of others or for their own activities in the future. Nor do they know all there is to know about the conditions of their action, that is, the circumstances that are causally involved with its production. (Giddens 1987:221)*

The circumstances of people's lives are permeated by that which is other. In a passage which cuts at the very notion of locality which underlies much work on 'the rural', Giddens argues:

*Place has become phantasmagoric because the structures by means of which it is constituted are no longer locally organised. The local and the global, in other words, have become inextricably intertwined. ... The local community is not a saturated environment of familiar, taken-for-granted meanings, but in some part a locally-situated expression of distanced relationships. (Giddens 1990:108/9)*

### **Structure and Agency**

These apparent contradictions of the social actor who knows but does not know, and a social reality which is at the same time local and universal, are central to structuration theory, because

*structure is both enabling and constraining, and it is one of the specific tasks of social theory to study the conditions in the organisation of social systems that govern the interconnection between the two. According to this conception, the same structural characteristics participate in the subject (the actor) as the object (society). (Giddens 1979:69/70)*

It is precisely this view of the dynamic between structure and agency that has enabled Giddens to retain concepts such as empowerment, political engagement and social transformation against postmodern pessimism (Giddens 1990:150). The implications of Giddens' adherence to this view are therefore wide-ranging, not least to adult educators seeking to engage with the full range of people's aspirations for themselves, for their local communities and for their society. When adult educators take seriously the views of those people they claim to provide a service for, they will be mindful of his admonition that if people are regarded as having no understanding of their position, then 'their own views can be disregarded in any practical programme that might be inaugurated'. (Giddens 1979: 71/72)

The final move here is to link knowledgeability and agency back to the central condition of reflexive modernity:

*All human beings continuously monitor the circumstances of their activities as a feature of doing what they do, and such monitoring always has discursive features. In other words, agents are normally able, if asked to provide discursive interpretations of the nature of, and the reasons for, the behaviour in which they engage. (Giddens 1991:35)*

It is on this basis that qualitative research with adult learners together with the planning of programmes of provision to support adult learning, remain the corner-stones of the adult educator's professionalism. 'Need' in this formulation is understood as that which is negotiated between social actor, researcher and educator. The role of the adult education guidance worker acquires a centrality it has in neither needs-access or market views of adult education and training (cf the work of the Cornwall Education Guidance service in Lowerson and Thomson 1994:109/10). In agreeing with Michael Collins (1991) about the dangers of reducing adult education to technical rationality (the 'how' rather than the 'why' of learning), the adult educator will find in Giddens a firm sociological tradition in which people's lives are both structured by forces beyond their control but in which those same social actors can take individual and collective action to change their life condition.

## Risk

For both Giddens and Beck, the unpredictability of modern life is its very condition:

*At the center lie the risks and consequences of modernization, which are revealed as irreversible threats to the life of plants, animals, and human beings. Unlike the factory-related or occupational hazards of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, these can no longer be limited to certain localities or groups, but rather exhibit a tendency to globalization which spans production and reproduction as much as national borders, and in this sense brings into being supra-national and non-class-specific global hazards with a new type of social and political dynamism. (Beck 1992:13) (author's emphases).*

Beck claims that

*we are eye-witnesses to a social transformation within modernity, in the course of which people will be set free from the social forms of industrial society - class, stratification, family, gender status of men and women - just as during the course of the reformation people were 'released' from the secular rule of the Church into society. (Beck 1992:87)*

Inequality persists but the old collective ways of dealing with it have gone. This leads Beck to coincide with Giddens in the notion of biography as a reflexive project (idem:90) and the importance of education as a way of developing that project:

*The educated person becomes the producer of his or her own labor situation, and in this way, of his or her social biography ... Depending on its duration and contents, education makes possible a certain degree of self-discovery and reflection. The educated person incorporates reflexive knowledge of the conditions and prospects of modernity, and in this way becomes an agent of reflexive modernization. (idem:93)*

However, in his concern to carry through his perception of the global, allembracing nature of 'risk society', Beck plays down his own observation that risk is not equally shared within modern societies; 'wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom' (idem:35). While he is correct in showing how disasters such as Chernobyl affect people regardless of location or class, there are many risks characteristic both of the recent past, the present and the prospective future which have socially divisive effects: thus long-term unemployment is more likely to impact on working-class people with few qualifications who have been doing mainly unskilled work; pollution from industrial plants continues to affect local populations with little power in the housing market who are forced to live nearby. There are numerous instances of such unequal risks, and adult education responses to those risks, in the Sussex case-studies. for example the North Derbyshire Coalfield Project (Lowerson and Thomson 1994:65-68).

#### **Adults Learning: Hope for the Future?**

How far can we - where "we" means humanity as a whole - harness the juggernaut, or at least direct it in such a way as to minimise the dangers and maximise the opportunities which modernity offers to us? (Giddens 1990:151)

Such then are the conditions in which adults learn, and a number of propositions can be based on such an analysis:

1. What is at stake is not *what* people learn, but the self-consciousness of their learning.
2. Adult learning relates *both* to traditional class and locality-specific risks *and* to contemporary global risks.
3. A lot of officially encouraged adult learning relates primarily to one category of risk - that of (un)employment and the attempts of social actors to position and reposition themselves within labour markets.

Less emphasis is given to adult learning as an effort to locate the self in relation to other risks, particularly those around health and environment. While publicly funded programmes do exist, a lot of the effort here is structured by individuals themselves through the media (radio, TV, magazines) and through voluntary effort (clubs, organisations, societies). But such risks are also issues of public concern. To give one example, many of the members of the WEA branch at Boscastle in Cornwall had been active in a local campaign to stop the spread of wind-farms along the North Cornwall cliff-tops. While at one level local people might be said to be behaving in a characteristically NIMBY way in rejecting an apparently ecologically sound energy development, they were keen to learn more about this, and what might constitute ideal trade-offs between the 'heritage' type of environmentalism and the ecological approach.

Given that individuals acting alone and within communities can use their learning in order to deal more effectively with both the risks we have inherited from the past and the inherent risks of the late modern world, what is the role of adult educators in all this? Will adult education simply become subsumed in consumerism as the characteristically modern form of social control, as Bauman suggests:

*The 'tragedy' of consumer society is that it cannot reproduce itself without reproducing inequalities on an ever rising level and without insisting that 'social problems' must be translated into individual consumption of marketable commodities; by so doing, it daily generates its own handicapped, whose needs cannot be met through the market and who therefore undermine the very condition of its reproduction. (Bauman 1987:187)*

The horns of this particular dilemma are clear. One horn is represented by collapsing adult education into just another market commodity; the other horn is adult education as a residual service for the 'handicapped' - the unemployed, deprived and marginalised (the victims of the inequalities of risk). Now while it is important that adult education should address such audiences, it is also clear that there is a strong case to be argued for an adult education service that meets learning requirements across a range of social segments, that is an inherent way in which society enables individuals and communities to deal with the consequences of modernity (Jansen and Van der Veen 1992). That implies adult educators trained not just to 'deliver' pre-packaged bundles of education and training but to engage with individuals and communities in a common social endeavour of building a learning society. Being a 'reflective practitioner' is not only a way of 'going on' in a rapidly changing environment, but is the condition of the individuals and communities we serve becoming increasingly aware of what they know, what they do not know, what they desire to know, and how to mark their progress along the road. The road leads not to enlightenment but to survival.

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# Voluntary Organisations Citizenship, Learning and Change

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## The Project: Shape, Purpose, Methods and History

This paper shares the working title of the final report (cf. Appendix B) of a project which started in 1989 and was recently completed after just six years. It has occupied me full-time; two colleagues worked on it almost full-time for two and a half and four years respectively. UFC grant covered two half-time research assistant posts and all our working expenses for the 3rd and 4th of the six project years. The Nuffield Foundation covered my expenses during year 2; the Barrow Cadbury Trust and a little departmental money met the rest of expenses and about an equivalent of one person-year of salary. It worked out because all the team were OAPs on pensions. Altogether, it must have consumed up to some 11 person-years, not counting the brooding on the subject which went on for 17 years before I was able to start. This is rather a lot, and readers will no doubt want to ask whether the end result justifies the effort and the resources we have expended.

The project was stimulated by the realisation that, although we all believe in the value of voluntary organisations (VOs) and the benefits we think spring from them, we know very little about them. Much of that little, the project demonstrated to be erroneous. Thus many important administrative acts and policy decisions of local and national government are based on vague assumptions, erroneous information, ignorance and prejudice about VOs. My own inability to give adequate answers to the questions which occurred to me was aggravating. It also seemed to me that there was, perhaps, no other area of knowledge about ourselves and our society of which we were so extraordinarily ignorant without even being aware of the fact. So there seemed to be good reasons to launch the project.

The questions I wanted to at any rate begin to answer were: what kinds of voluntary organisations are there, how distributed, how many? What is their formal *and* informal, educational *and* educative impact on individuals, groups and communities? How great is it? How, to whom and how far is it transmitted? If some answers could be gathered to these, would it be possible to find out what are the origins and characteristics of good practice in different kinds of such organisations, operating in different contexts and with different objectives, and how can such practice be supported and disseminated? What would be the national and local policy implications, and those for training and development?

All the usual background work of any research project had to be done first of all, including some thought about methods of working. The original assumption was that I was going to spend about a dozen years conducting about two case studies of VOs p.a. and thus, eventually, leave a sizeable and varied body of raw material to somebody else to explore. To be useful, this collection would have to be representative - and this revealed the first major obstacle: the fact that quite clearly nobody knew the number and distribution of kinds of VOs. This led to the establishment of a first working model of a typology. Its main use was that it threw up two fairly extreme type-organisations to be attempted first. It seemed that if adequate case studies of opposite extremes could be conducted by the intended method, then the project as a whole stood a reasonable chance of being practicable.

The chosen method was to carry out systematic but outline only background studies of each organisation as such and in its context, and then to concentrate on a sufficient number of in-depth interviews with a representative sample of three different groups of informants. These were the organisation's members, any staff employed by them, and as many knowledgeable outside observers as possible who were competent to comment on the organisation and its effects. All interviews were based on a standard aide-memoire which covered the organisation and its context, and five areas of learning and change (if any) experienced or observed by the respondent: learning and change as related to their membership of the group, as related to the content of the organisation's activities, to their own occupations, to their experience as responsible members and as citizens, and to their own personality and attitudes.

It will be noted that we did not work on the basis of any hypotheses or within the framework of any social theory. Experience suggests that hypotheses are self-justifying and theories create their own universes - and I wanted to get at the truth. This meant having an aide-memoire at the back of one's mind to make sure of coverage and help with writing up, but conducting interviews by letting respondents talk themselves out at length, in whatever order they wished, listening intently, recording but never shaping: it was important to get their words, their feelings, their interpretation. After the completion of all interviews from a case study the findings from the three groups - members, staff, observers - were separately assessed and used as cross-checks before writing up. In short, the approach was primarily phenomenological, and the evidence subject to triangulation.

By the time the second case study was being written up it became clear that the project as originally conceived was viable. This meant that money was going to be needed to cover expenses in subsequent years. An advisory group was set up, and this began operations by deciding that the project was too urgent to continue slowly as planned: it was to carry out its field work as rapidly as possible, publish it, interpret its findings and produce a general report - all of this by March 1995.

This is as good a point as any to explain the advisory group, as compared to an ordinary steering committee. I saw its function as critical, and therefore invited the most knowledgeable and (I hoped) most relentlessly critical individuals I knew of, and nobody else. The group as a whole met face-to-face only on the rare occasions (three, I think) when face-to-face discussion was needed. Its main functions were to be available for consultation by telephone or letter and to receive all plans and all first drafts, in versions with wide margins for scribbling critical comments, to be returned to the team. The group's regime has been tough, extremely helpful, has wasted none of their or our time, and been far more economical than a steering committee would have been.

The group's first suggestion meant finding staff and funds to pay them, and cover the working costs of three people doing fieldwork at once. The new UFC funding scheme came to the rescue. Our budget was extremely lean, worth only one rock-bottom research assistant, while I needed a team and mature experience. This is why I chose to look for two half-timers, and the rest of that story has been told. Before the end of the first year's of UFC funding we learned that two years was all that the UFC scheme would provide, while we were committed to another three-and-a-half. So it was back to "The expense of spirit (and time) in a waste of shame" that is grant applications, from which the Barrow Cadbury Trust rescued us with sensitive generosity and continuing personal care and support.

I had made a point of looking for statistical skills when making appointments, and perhaps the first act of John Reynolds was to discard my amateurish draft typology and develop a method

which enabled us to select a sample of case studies which represents 343 variables of organisational objectives of VOs, and of personal ones of their members. We found that 31 case studies would cover the total adequately, chose accordingly and got on with them. Instead of two by myself we built up to five case studies p.a. each over a two year period. This included writing up and publishing them in annual fieldwork volumes.

The case studies were completed ahead of schedule, which gave us just five months in which to execute an additional fieldwork task which should have been but was not foreseen: we needed to find out how VOs in a locality interact with each other, with the public services, the Local Authority, with business, industry and the professions, and what is the effect on the quality of life and active citizenship. There was time for just one such locality study, in Retford, which became volume 4 of our fieldwork.

This left just over a year in which to assess, analyse and interpret the mass of accumulated material and distil from it a general report. The mass consisted of the detailed notes of interviews with 552 VO members, 68 staff and 211 observers. These 834, multiplied by a potential 107 factors each, made up the main data base. Then there were the 157 questionnaires and the 104 Retford returns and interviews. From these the second and third data bases were produced. Thus there were altogether over 1100 lots of intensive personal input, which represented memberships of well over 8,000 in the case study organisations and about 6,500 from the Retford group. Finally, there were the three volumes of case studies and the Retford locality study.

It will be recalled that even at this stage we had no preconceived hypotheses and theories; it was a matter of deliberately soaking oneself in the material until it was possible to hold all of it in the mind at once, and then to let it say what it wanted to say. Meanwhile the data bases were being created, and then questioned. The outcome of all this was a different writing process from any I had experienced before. It was very like a learning spiral. Chapter by chapter (or sometimes section by section) it started with draft text, then statistical output findings illuminating, challenging or enriching its observations, which would lead to new questions of the data bases or the verbal evidence, with answers altering impressions, and conclusions, which stimulated both further questioning of the data bases and of the verbal evidence, and so on by successive syntheses, until I appeared to reach satisfactory conclusions.

### Various Findings and Outcomes

There is no space here to outline all our findings. What may be said is that we produced, in our fieldwork volumes, what have been variously described as new and fascinating documents in contemporary social history, and highly entertaining bedside reading. Our main findings are contained in the final report. I would claim that it clears the ground of what is effectively a new field of study and is a pretty good first ranging shot at answering the questions which it was intended to answer. What I find very exciting indeed is that it has produced so much more new knowledge than I had expected: doing this research was almost like being in an orchard in a gale, with windfall findings landing all around. We got the first reasonably convincing approximations to knowledge of just how much VO activity there is nationally, what kinds, proportions and numbers of people are involved in different sorts of it, what is the effect in terms of citizenship and the active society as well as general quality of life. We learned about stratification of knowledge, about histories of participation and what factors influence them, about the relationship of VO activity to health and social services provision, about what makes for dynamism and stasis and regression in groups, about the nature and sources of leadership, about ways in which educationally underprivileged people can be helped to cross the barriers of the Trenaman effect, and many other fascinating and often useful things. And we are left with a huge quantity of statistical and descriptive information about VOs. This remains to be exploited

because we had to stick to our last or the final report would be completed in five volumes four years hence instead of one a couple of months ago.

What comes of all this? In practical terms there is now a body of real knowledge which enables the many central and local government policies and decisions which involve VOs to be made on a foundation of real knowledge. We now know something of what kinds of learning and attitude change are mediated to members of VOs, how and where to they are transmitted, and what this does to the quality of life in an area and to the vitality of civil society. The same is true where training is concerned - for those who work in or with VOs, and for those in services and institutions which work with them and with adults in general. We have learnt much about what practices and arrangements in and by VOs make them more rather than less effective, and this means that good practice can now be consciously identified, considered on its merits, and applied consciously wherever it happens to be appropriate.

### **Personal Outcomes and Hopes**

For me personally it has been the most satisfying and instructive project of my professional life, and the most exciting, more sheer fun than any. It has not just given me an enormous amount of new knowledge - it has transformed my understanding and perception of VOs in general, filled me with enormous respect for human activities I had hardly considered before. It has enriched my understanding of the relationships between informal activities in society and its politics no less than my understanding of the scope and stratified depth of adult learning. It has taught me for the first time how extraordinarily valuable statistics can be as both a source of *qualitative* information and as a lead into it. Above all the project has stretched me mightily in ways (including technical procedures) and directions (including new concepts) of which I had been unaware or which I had neglected. On the negative side there are some things which I wish I had thought of doing, and some which need doing now, if they become possible. And I have learned that, if practicable, I don't want to do any research in the future which involves *me (as opposed to other people)* wielding the begging bowl. The content of this paragraph is, I suspect, no more than a sample from what I have learned these last six years.

The impact on our department is something others rather than I must judge. I hope it may have reinforced those who believe research ought to grow out of real questions which plague us until we start looking for answers to them. I hope it has reinforced anyone who believes in looking for evidence in its own right rather than slavishly following pseudo-scientific fashions. I hope it helps to illustrate that understanding needs to grow organically and may take time and patience to do so: energy and good organisation are necessary but not sufficient. And I hope it reinforces those who think curiosity is a virtue and that finding out is fun.

Finally, I am grateful for the UFC contribution to my project. But I have two questions about the policy: was there a deliberate decision to limit grant in ways which confined the initiative to small-scale or superficial or partial work, and what degree of qualitative judgment was employed in making allocations or considering potential outcomes? - It would be both sad and deeply counter-productive if research questions which are too big to fit neatly into one- or two-year slots were to become a monopoly of elderly pensioners.

### **Appendix A: Developments**

Since the completion of the original project it has become clear that some kind of limited replications would be desirable in a representative group of other countries. Comparison of the findings might conceivably enable some general principles to emerge. At the time of this note (August 1995) several offers in principle to participate have been received and some preparatory

work has been done. In the meantime the Home Office, in ignorance of our work over the years, has launched a major national study of voluntary organisations and volunteering. We are working with them on possibilities of making their and our instruments and codings compatible. If this succeeds we hope to test the revised materials in a joint locality study and thus to establish a standard set of instruments for international comparison. Everything, as usual, depends on funding and, on this occasion, a great deal of it over a long period.

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## Inside Perspectives Ex-Prisoners' Views on Prison Education

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This paper documents and discusses a pilot research project to explore the perceptions of prison education held by ex-prisoners. The research was undertaken from the Department of Continuing and Community Education, Goldsmiths' College, over the period March to September 1993, and built on a range of earlier research and development initiatives relating both to prison education and penal policy, in Goldsmiths' (Burney 1992, Lawrence, Pearson & Aina 1993, Lawrence 1993, Malin, Neal & Smith 1992).

### Background and Aims of the Project

Prison education, and the prison system in England and Wales, is in a period of considerable - and controversial - change. In April 1993 the Prison Service became the third largest executive agency to be established under the Government's Next Steps programme. The move to agency status has been accompanied by an unprecedented codification of Prison Service aims, objectives and values, enshrined in the Corporate and Business Plans, and the the Citizen's Charter framework has also been extended to prisons. At a policy level, agency status has been seen as a means by which, newly formalised parameters, the Prison Service can be given greater autonomy from both ministers and the Home Office, and the private sector can assume a growing role in prison provision and management. Prison education contracts were put out to tender in 1992, a policy reaffirmed in the Business Plan for 1993-94, and although the placing of contracts was delayed and complicated by a number of factors, prison education is now being delivered within a new administrative framework.

Such changes are a familiar from other realms of Government policy - the National Health Service is perhaps the most obvious example. Central to political arguments for such a strategy in the public services has been the claim that agency management can, through the introduction of more rigorous business methods, bring real benefits to the service consumer. As a consequence, there has been growing interest in "consumer audit" - the development of methods to involve the consumer in service monitoring and development (Dennis & Hunter 1991, Dennis 1991, Hughes & Humphrey 1990).

In the context of such major change within the prison system and prison education, we wanted to study the perceptions of prison education held by users of the service. Models of consumer audit clearly raise major difficulties in relation to the prison service, not least in determining who is the consumer of prison services. But although prison education has been diversely seen by researchers and practitioners as a means of rehabilitation and containment, how it is seen by users of the service has largely been neglected. Some earlier research in this area had already been carried out as part of the Home Office sponsored National Prison Survey and the Woolf report, investigating the prison disturbances of April 1990, also included prisoners' comments on prison education (Dodd & Hunter 1991). However we were of the opinion that research conducted from an institution entirely outside the criminal justice system, and funded independently, would offer new opportunities to build on existing findings in this area and could be particularly relevant for policy makers as well as for academics at a time of such major change in prison education.

So the first aim of our project was to carry out an independent study of users' perceptions of prison education.

Our second aim, again with the intention of building on existing research, was to examine and differentiate user perceptions of a growing range of different learning opportunities within prisons. Historically, prison education in England and Wales has run as a discrete operation within prison regimes, and there has been considerable discussion of the need for greater integration of education within the prison system. The need to harmonise provision in different establishments and to dovetail the work and educational opportunities available to inmates are two areas which have attracted sustained concern. Recent years have also seen the development of a range of other learning opportunities within prisons; such initiatives include the growing body of quasi-educational work, for example, by Prison Psychologists, Probation Officers, the Chaplaincy and Prison Officers, the growing role of which is affirmed in the Business Plan. However little research has been undertaken to date which reflected this growing diversity of learning opportunities within the prison system, a number of which fall outside traditional definitions of prison education.

Our third aim, once again influenced by existing research on prison education, was to develop a research methodology which would collect both quantitative and qualitative data on a wide range of aspects of prison life, including education and The Woolf Report (Woolf and Tumin 1990) comments on prison education from prison inmates. Our research was planned as a small-scale pilot initiative which would bring together these two methods of data collection and apply them to the updated and more broadly defined canvas of "prison education" which we have outlined above.

Our final aim was to explore patterns of participation in prison education. Prison education, and indeed most research about prison education has tended to develop in somewhat of a vacuum, divorced from a range of potentially relevant debates both in policy studies and indeed in continuing education (Jepson N 1982). Particularly germane to our concern with user perceptions of prison education we believed, was the debate about participation in adult education, most notable McGivney's major ESRC funded study (McGivney V 1990). Existing research highlights the role of both material and attitudinal factors in deterring from participation in adult education people from non-participant categories such as unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers, unemployed adults, women with dependent children, older adults, ethnic minority groups and people with basic education needs. Given that, within the prison population the above categories tend to be over-represented, we were concerned to explore whether the same factors hinder participation in prison education or whether, within the prison setting, other factors may encourage or hinder the uptake of educational opportunities by prison inmates.

### Research Method

The wider policy context surrounding the reconfiguration of the prison system and prison education has been important not only in inspiring this research but also in shaping the form it eventually took. Most significantly, the turmoil which accompanied rapid and far-reaching change in prison education had major implications for our choice of research sample. It had been initially hoped that we could contact a 100% sample survey in HMP Belmarsh, a Category B prison in South-east London with which our department already had links, and whose education department had a strong interest in the research. However this proved impossible and contact with the Home Office suggested that research access to other prisons was likely to be equally problematic for a period of 12-18 months - the period for which we had funding and within which we wished to carry out the research.

We decided instead to focus on ex-prisoners, research access to whom was likely to present fewer problems, and to structure the research as a more modest small-scale pilot study, interviewing 50 male ex-prisoners. Some of the consequences of this shift of focus will be discussed later in this paper. Within the sample, we aimed at a very broad level to replicate the age-structure of the male prison population; interviews were sought with 40 male ex-prisoners over 21 years and 10 male ex-prisoners

under 21 years at time of release from prison. We were extremely fortunate to gain the generous support of 4 areas of the Probation service in the London region in locating potential interviewees.

The study was designed to elicit areas of interest from ex-prisoners and, through the administration of a semi-structured interview to the research sample, to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Preliminary interviews were carried out in March 1993 with 7 students recruited from two ex-offender projects - the insight project based in the Community studies department at Goldsmiths', and the NACRO founded North London Education Project in Hackney. On the basis of the preliminary interviews there were 6 areas of interest identified. These areas of interest were:

- 1 Basic Literacy
- 2 Basic Numeracy
- 3 Sports Activities
- 4 Group Discussions
- 5 Occupational Skills training
- 6 Training for Nationally Recognised Qualifications

10 pilot semi-structured interviews were administered in May 1993 the purpose of which was to test and adjust the questions for use in the main survey, and 50 semi-structured interviews were administered over the period May to September 1993. Interviewees were contacted through the Kent, Middlesex, North-east London, and South-east London areas of the Probation Service. The average response rate over the 4 areas of the Probation service was 50%.

### **Main Findings**

Main findings of the research project were:

#### **Ex-prisoners Value Prison Education Highly**

Our research confirmed the earlier findings of the National Prison Survey and the Woolf Report that prison education is highly valued. 58% of our sample thought that education was very important and a further 32% thought that education was important. Further analysis indicated that education was particularly highly valued by older ex-prisoners.

However, responses to the question "How satisfied were you with the educational opportunities you received in prison?" indicated that a substantial body of ex-prisoners - 32% - were not at all satisfied with the educational opportunities they had received in prison. This finding merits further research.

#### **Ex-prisoners Have Varied Perceptions of the Different Learning Opportunities Within Prisons**

Our interview schedule included questions about the availability, acceptability and uptake of educational opportunities within prisons, and analysis of responses indicated important variations in ex-prisoners' perceptions across the identified areas of interest. In particular, sports opportunities were seen to be widely available, whilst opportunities to undertake occupational skills training or to take classes leading to nationally recognised qualifications were seen to be more restricted. Levels of personal satisfaction with classes attended also varied, and basic literacy emerged as an area of particular concern



## **Ex-prisoners Recommended a Wide Range of Possible Improvements to Education Facilities in Prisons**

We included a number of open-ended "qualitative" questions about possible improvements, and our interviewees had a great deal to say in response to such questions. Common areas of concern which emerged on analysis were:

- \* the need for more appealing and imaginative basic needs provision, sensitively managed so as not to deter or stigmatise potential students
- \* the extension of opportunities to develop new skills and qualifications which would enhance employment possibilities on release
- \* discussion groups - drawing both on the expertise of professional counsellors and the experience of prisoners "who had been through it" were widely seen as a valuable opportunity to help prisoners to reflect on and understand their own actions and attitudes
- \* educational guidance and advice about learning opportunities both in prison and post-release were seen as crucial to uptake of education
- \* the need for effective equal opportunities policies to ensure real access to education for more vulnerable inmates, such as section 43 prisoners.

### **A Number of Barriers to the Uptake of Prison Education Were Reported By Ex-Prisoners**

Our research suggests that there are considerable variations in the availability of different kinds of learning opportunities within prisons and that there may at times be a mismatch between the curriculum on offer and the curricular preferences of prisoners. This mismatch was seen by ex-prisoners as a potential barrier to uptake of prison education. In addition the need to make education more financially advantageous to prisoners was highlighted; ex-prisoners commented on the disincentive to study whilst prison work remains a better-paid option. Problems of informal criminal learning were stressed, as was the traumatic effect of imprisonment itself; in such a context, prison education could easily appear irrelevant to the real concerns of the prisoners.

### **Discussion**

This research has been undertaken as a small-scale pilot survey of ex-prisoners, rather than as the more ambitious survey of prisoners in HMP Belmarsh which we had initially planned.

Our findings are therefore necessarily based on a small sample. Difficulties in tracking down sufficient and appropriate interviewees, and the self-selecting nature of the sample, will also have affected outcomes. In particular, it should be borne in mind that the sample includes ex-prisoners whose experience of prison education relates to a number of years ago and which spans a number of different prisons. Because of the small size of the sample and the large numbers of prisons discussed by the ex-prisoners we interviewed, it has not been possible in this research to document a "prison effect" and to relate findings to individual prisons or prison regimes. Nor on the basis of such a restricted sample has it been possible for us to relate our findings as closely as we would have liked to the patterns of adult participation in continuing education.

We wanted our research to be useful and relevant to both policy makers and prison educators, and so were concerned to produce measurable - quantifiable - outcomes. But in practice much of the interesting material was collected in response to our open-ended qualitative questions.

What the research has done is to suggest a number of themes deserving of more detailed investigation. In particular there is a need for further research within individual prisons of patterns of uptake of educational opportunities, and for detailed evaluation of the potential of educational guidance, curriculum development and outreach approaches in enhancing uptake. Such research could usefully help prison education to draw more effectively on wider research and development in continuing education. At a broader level and particularly given the major changes currently underway in the prison system in England and Wales, policy study research is needed which would look at the process of implementing major change in prison education consequent on the move to agency status. However the increasing role of the private sector and market forces in prison provision may raise difficult issues in the future not only about how independent researchers are to obtain research access for such projects, but also about the ownership of, and uses to which, any resulting research knowledge is put.

As researchers, we have been both frustrated and excited by this project. The political context of the research - major changes in the prison system, and an enduringly high profile for all discussion of penal policy - has made the work more urgent but also considerably more difficult to carry out in a way consistent with high quality research practice. On a more positive note, our research report *Inside Perspectives*, has been widely circulated within the prison and Probation Services; it has also attracted considerable interest from adult educators and academics, and has enhanced the research status in the field of prison education both of our Department and of the College. We have also found our own belief as adult educators in the potential value of prison education strengthened by the comments of the ex-prisoners we interviewed, and see important work ahead in continuing to draw discussion of prison education into more mainstream debates of adult continuing education

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# **Cultural Identities in Continuing Education**

# Mainstreaming, Critical Histories and Cultural Identities

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Adult education has not, traditionally, been in the mainstream of educational provision. But because of its marginal position between the official provision of further and higher education and voluntary self-help groups, social movements and campaigning organisations it has been able to develop different, often radical and innovative, educational agenda. The most well documented examples of these have been in the space between the universities and what used to be called the British 'working-class movement' and its associations such as the WEA, which generated the tutorial class. The 'community education' movement of the 1970s also thrived in the space between mainstream F. E. and local community groups. Less well-known are the contacts made by university extension with European working class and nationalist groups in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with nationalist groups in West Africa and Tanzania and the innovations in India and other Third World countries in participative and liberation education. The current process of mainstreaming adult education may well have a number of benefits but what will be lost in the process? The paper suggests that an important area of cultural negotiation about needs and identities of subaltern groups in society may well be at risk if mainstreaming is to become total. Mainstreaming individualises adult education to a concern with personal competencies and qualifications in a context of syllabi and curricula which are set by institutions, whose primary interests, necessarily, are their own continuity of provision. The idea of group needs and communal practices do not easily fit within these parameters and neither does the process of innovation and experiment which has at times been a hallmark of adult education. Thus crucial areas of negotiation between the dominant order and minority and subordinate groups mediated by educational providers, are in danger of disappearing. The consequences will almost certainly be a sharp decrease of fora for urgently needed cultural and social change, diminishing opportunities for communities and groups to debate their needs in an informed and concerned context, increased ghettoisation and ultimately an absolute loss in learning opportunities for those who most need them. The continued study of cultural history and cultural theory in adult education, the paper argues, is essential to contextualise the rapid functional changes now occurring in adult education within shifting relations of power and identity.

The Department of Adult Continuing Education at the University of Leeds employed me as a research fellow on two projects in the period 1990-1994. The first was in Intercultural Adult Education, 1990-1992, which was divided into three areas with three separate directors, namely: 1. the spread of University Extension in Europe 1880-1920, with Prof. Stuart Marriott 2. the Legacy of British imperialism in Indian Adult education and the development of India's own programmes, with Prof. Dick Taylor and 3. the export of the British Extramural Department to Anglophone Africa, 1945 -65, with Prof. Colin Titmus. Each of these projects has generated a number of published conference papers and articles and two books are in press. *Adult Education for Independence, The export of the British Extramural Department to Anglophone Africa, 1945 -65* will be published in the Leeds Studies in Adult Education series in late 1995 and *Learning Liberation, a Political Outline of Indian Adult Education* will be published by NIACE in 1996. The findings of the University Extension in Europe research will be published, possibly also in the Leeds series, later this year or early next.

A further significant outcome of this programme was the establishment of a European wide network of researchers on cross-cultural issues, which has so far met four times annually (in

Leiden, York, Strobl and Salamanca). Although initially a product of independent contacts between Stuart Marriott at Leeds, Barry Hake at Leiden and Martha Friedenthal Haase at Tübingen in Germany, the conferences have now been integrated into the newly formed ESREA network, largely Barry Hake's inspiration, which has generated a number of European wide research groups. I can't overstate how important these contacts are not only for historical research but for debating the current research agenda in Europe. There now exists, for possibly the first time, an international network of university continuing education researchers drawn from most European countries including the former Eastern block considering such issues as cross cultural influence, cross-border educational issues, citizenship education, popular education and so on.

Towards the end of the project Dick Taylor and I drew up a proposal for a further two-year project on the representations of class and culture in the post war period, particularly in the West Riding of Yorkshire, which had led to the academic development of British Cultural Studies. This centred on the work of E. P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams and their constructions of class, culture and education while engaging with working class and adult students. The research rapidly spiralled into related areas and unavoidably linked up with aspects of the previous two years research. So for example, we considered the origins and growth of English Studies, which were in fact initially part of the civilising mission in the 'British' India of the early-to mid-nineteenth century and which in the late nineteenth century were translated into English university extension. We believed there was a colonial metaphor here in the understanding that the processes which created the 'Anglo' Indian in the far flung 'provinces' of empire might do the same for the industrial working class in the domestic provinces of Yorkshire and Lancashire. English studies seemed to be part of the process of creating a modernised national identity, the experimental testing ground for which was adult education. The 'truth' of English studies, then, was the negotiation of the English political settlement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It then seemed to us that an analogous process was taking place in the immediate post war (WW2) years of the Labour government when Englishness was being once more reworked and democratised. Was there an argument that adult education and the construction of the new interdisciplinary hybrid of 'British Cultural Studies' played an important part in this? Certainly another Englishness which was located in the conjunction of working class and popular culture and a radical bourgeois tradition of dissent and Romantic cultural criticism of capitalism was being constructed by adult educators at this time, the most visible textual products of which were Thompson's *William Morris* and *The Making of the English Working Class*, Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* and Williams's *Culture and Society* and *the Long Revolution*.

A related issue was that of the association of emergent cultural groupings and social movements with radical university intellectuals. It had become clear that however structurally in a sociological sense we wanted to understand these relations that the charismatic 'individuals' which were constructed by the heroic narratives of adult education did have both biographies and intellectual trajectories which were worth studying in their own right. We approached these individuals in the sense advocated by Lucien Goldman as the crystalline points of group or class consciousness. One such obvious candidate was the one-time secretary of Oxford's University Delegacy and subsequently Vice Chancellor of the University of Leeds, Michael Sadler; another was a late successor of his at Oxford, Thomas Hodgkin. Why did adult education attract such radical figures? Was there something about its very marginality to the educational 'process' that invited other radical intellectuals like Tawney, Cole, Lindsay, Thompson, Williams and Hoggart to take part? Here findings drawn from the study of European university extension in the nineteenth century proved instructive. Perhaps distance lent perspective but again what was clear from this study was that 'university extension' in Europe signified a number of different but

related practices most of which included constitutive relationships between emergent social movements, nationalist, anarchist and socialist and cultural movements for popular science, national histories and modern life, on the one hand, and on the other university-based intellectuals. The Communist and prize winning French geographer, Elisée Reclus, for example, was part of an semi-insurrectionary university extension movement in Brussels connected to both Belgian socialist and nationalist aspirations. In Poland nationalist and socialist aspirations were articulated through the society dedicated to the poet Mickiewicz, which in turn became the vehicle for university extension. In Czechoslovakia university extension was the product of the demand for university education from workers' groups to the Bohemian University of Prague. Here the charismatic philosopher/sociologist T. G. Masaryk was responsible for persuading the university to grant the workers' requests and subsequently played a galvanic role in the nationalist movement. He became the first president of the newly created Czechoslovakia. In all these and the many other examples thrown up by the research it was clear that often the peculiar relationship of social and cultural movements to university intellectuals engaged in the education of adults was central to constructing new national and class identities and even on occasion to founding new commonwealths. This may have been peculiar to the late nineteenth century however, and not to be extrapolated.

Cross-cultural influence was not of course one-way despite the supposed insularity of British intellectual life. Leaving out the debt paid by many British philosophers engaged in university extension like T.H. Green to the German philosopher G. F. Hegel, the impacts of Tolstoyan ideas on the university settlement movements and Grundtvig's Danish folk high school movement, it became obvious that the university extension movement was itself a cross-cultural network for workers', teachers' and adult educationalists' groups.

With the rise of fascist and totalitarian regimes in central Europe during the 1930s it is possible that such networks facilitated the settlement of radical, mainly Jewish, intellectuals forced into exile in Britain. The impact of this immigration has been substantial, although it has been one-sidedly characterised by Perry Anderson in his seminal 'Components of the National Culture' as preventing the adoption of more Marxist sociological forms and filling the vacuum left by the lack of a domestic intelligentsia. It was of course much more complex than this. The arrival of Karl Mannheim, Adolph Löwe, Karl Polanyi, Arnold Hauser, Norbert Elias and many other émigré intellectuals as refugees from Nazi Europe was also felt in British adult education. It was through these groups that the first attempts at a 'sociology of culture' and a 'science of society' were made. Indeed the totalising sociology of the Weberian, Lukascian and Frankfurt influenced intellectuals seems to us to have been a necessary pre-condition for the foundation of British Cultural Studies. Many found their way into adult education, pragmatically, because university posts were not available to them. However both Mannheim and Polanyi for example made deliberate interventions into adult education, which they saw as the avant garde for both democratic social reform and also the restructuring of higher education. The resonances of these debates lasted well into the post-war period and positions articulated at this time particularly over the base and superstructure debate, the creation of class-consciousness, the need for a total science of society and fore-grounding of interdisciplinary study echo through the founding texts of British cultural studies - until, that is, they take 'the linguistic turn' in the late 1970s.

From the point of view of the study of adult education what this group and other radical intellectuals found attractive about adult education was that in many areas it was controlled by working class student bodies organically linked to the organised labour movement and interdisciplinary study methods were already commonplace. They were impressed by its democratic nature and its emphasis on social purpose. More than that in some areas, especially in the industrial north, the WEA seemed to embrace a form of class-conscious pedagogy which could challenge traditional academic approaches (cf. George Thompson's *The Field of Study for*

WEA Classes). They disapproved of conventional academic approaches, more common in areas where the 'working class movement' was less organised, which encouraged the working class student to reject and transcend his or her background and enter 'the world of culture'. Karl Polanyi, for example, wanted exactly the opposite to happen, that education should make the student more effective *as a worker*. It should adopt the worker's approach rather than that of the university, should abandon its nineteenth century divisions of knowledge, its conception of culture 'for leisure' and base itself on workers' own experience. Polanyi noted that,

*A vast amount of imaginative experimenting was done by tutors, who spared not time of effort to produce new solutions. Without their creative endeavours in the realm of presentation, dramatisation, and dialectical treatment, tutorial classes could never have attained their present success, while maintaining standards...Yet in one decisive respect these experiments were fatally limited. The subjects themselves were set by the academic tradition.* (Karl Polanyi 'Adult Education and the Working Class Outlook' *The Tutors' Bulletin*, November 1946, p. 10)

The key to interdisciplinary teaching was not to respect the conventional academic divisions of knowledge but to begin with the workers own needs and create new subjects of knowledge related to them - as he noted, one of the newest of these subjects was the 'Industrial Revolution'. Universities would then cease to reproduce middle class perspectives and reflect those of the working class which he believed were necessary if the social problems of the inter-war years were to be solved peacefully.

It seemed to us that adult education could not have occupied this experimental and innovative space, which ultimately forced changes in the university itself, if it had not been closely in touch with organised and articulate workers' movements, if it had not in crucial respects actually sprung from such initiatives. Despite the work of Brian Simons, Roger Fieldhouse, Jonathan Rée and others, the conventional narrative of adult education is one of the evolution of educational *institutions* franchised by the state and the role of popular and social organisations seen as largely secondary. Our research suggests that many studies from the 'bottom up' of popular education are urgently needed correctives to institutionally based histories.

If the stories of adult education yet to be written will show that its most transgressive, innovative and creative moments were precisely those when it forsook conventional academic practices, as we believe or, as in the tutorial class tradition, radically adapted them to working class experience, how should we understand the mainstreaming adult education is now rapidly undergoing? In the first place any moves which allow mature students more flexible access to mainstream university education and which allow more flexible degree schemes, are of course welcome. 'Mass' higher education, properly resourced, student-centred and academically coherent has been a long term goal of adult educational movements. The WEA began as movement for the higher education of working men and initially demanded no less than the quality of education given to the sons of the privileged classes at Oxford. Whether the changes currently taking place meet those requirements has yet to be seen but adult educationists can only persist in arguing for such quality. But as many contributors to the recent SRHE conference at York, 'The Student Experience', testified, the current scene is one where many mature students who have managed to breach the walls of HE find themselves bewildered, impoverished and alienated. There is no need to repeat the litany of overcrowded class rooms, poor resources, labyrinthine course structures, remote and harassed academic staff, impersonal bureaucracy and so on.

The question is what is being lost in the process? Has adult education merely been recruited as a pragmatic conveyor belt of desperately needed 'non-traditional' students into ministerially-driven



HE expansion to the exclusion of its traditional liberal and social purpose roles? Again there is no need to answer. Currently there appears to be an intellectual fashion associated with postmodernist ideas that historical study is a kind of psychologically unhealthy desire to cling on to the past and that a fresh slate is required so that the new can be embraced with optimism. Institutionally based adult education has of course no option but to follow the funding and optimism of the will is a pre-requisite. Without overdoing the pessimism of the intellect side of the equation, it seems to us that the value of the of the historical, cultural and comparative work of the UFC projects of the last four years is that they indicate alternative histories and strategies for adult education. Event though it appears at present to be the only option, mainstreaming is only one route for adult education and if recent work on the UCCA figures is indicative, one which further minimises adult education's traditional concern with subordinate, working-class and other social groups. Mainstreaming has not so far increased the entry into HE from working class groups and seems unlikely on its own to do so. This means that the ranks of the mature educationally disadvantaged are actually being swelled at the moment. Our studies of adult education in Africa and India indicate that what was formerly thought of as third world developmental education is now as Alan Rogers recently argued (in *Education for Development*) urgently relevant to the domestic scene.

In its hey-day between the wars the WEA provided for an elite of the class-conscious working people the kind of education which enabled them, democratically, to take public office. With the deconstruction of that movement and the industrial base which supported it, it is obviously no longer desirable or possible simply to reproduce such an education - although the elements of citizenship, interdisciplinarity and serious long-term study, for example, are still relevant. If adult educationalists wish to renew the vocation of 'social purpose education' then they have to look below the old elites to the new social needs. The existence of a growing underclass, relatively untouched by educational provision of any kind, will stretch educational initiative to the limit. In this critical situation the forms of participative and transformative education which have been developed in the Madras slums, the shanties of South America and the townships of Africa may be models for the future. For a proper understanding of these developments, historical and cross-cultural comparative research will be even more essential.

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# Responding to Language Shift Among Young People

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The research project undertaken by the Department of Adult Continuing Education at University of Wales Swansea investigated the use of Welsh among young bilingual adults in the county of West Glamorgan and Eastern Dyfed.

The fate of the lesser used non-state languages of Europe has been the subject of much attention in recent years, some languages faring much better than others. In our own islands, for example, Manx and Cornish have reached various stages of extinction, while there must be concern about the fate of Gaelic in Scotland and Irish in Ireland. On the other hand, notable advances in what the acknowledged leader of the study of sociolinguistics, Joshua Fishman, calls the reversal of language shift<sup>1</sup> - the reversal of the trend towards the dominance of Europe's larger languages, including English, French and Castillian, for example - have been made in the Basque Country and in Catalonia in the Spanish state.

Welsh presents itself as a fairly typical example of Europe's lesser-used languages. It has suffered greatly during this century through the influence of an anglicised education system and because of economic and social pressures. Nevertheless, the language is still spoken by around a half a million people, some 20% of the population, and it is used extensively in most domains - spheres of social intercourse - in largely Welsh-speaking areas of West and North Wales. Even in the anglicised areas of the North-east and South-east, it is still spoken by scores of thousands of people, but here the domains available to the language are more limited.<sup>2</sup> The vitality of the language, as testified by the daily production of five hours of television programmes, the production of five hundred books annually, the continuing growth of Welsh-medium primary schools, of which there are some four hundred, and by the increase for the need for Welsh for many posts in Wales, cannot be in doubt.

According to the 1991 census, the percentage and actual numbers of young Welsh-speakers increased in every county in Wales, thanks to the effect of the growth of Welsh-medium schools and to the introduction of Welsh to almost all schools through the National Curriculum. Nevertheless, concern has been expressed regarding the opportunities available to young people for speaking Welsh once they have left school. Others have voiced concern on the actual use made by young people of the Welsh language amongst each other.

It was our intention to discover whether the process of language shift towards English was evident amongst young Welsh-speakers in spite of their growing number. Another intention was to pinpoint factors that contributed towards this shift and other factors that were successful in counteracting it. The geographical area served by our university college includes some of the most Welsh-speaking areas of Wales - where more than 80% of the population speak Welsh, and

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<sup>1</sup> His book, *Reversing Language Shift*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, 1991, cites many examples in Europe and other parts of the world where attempts are being made to maintain and further lesser-used languages. His work emphasises the central role of intergenerational language transmission in the process of maintaining these languages.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed analysis of the recent state of Welsh is to be seen in Aitchison J and Carter H A *Geography of the Welsh Language*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1994.

some of the most anglicised areas, with fewer than 10% Welsh-speakers, and many intermediate areas. It thus presented us with a microcosm of Wales.

### Research Strategy

The study was carried out over two years, and was conducted through a detailed questionnaire, completed by 329 young people who formed 60% of the 16 - 17 year old age group of the area who have received a degree of bilingual education. This was followed by interviews with around 20 young people, mainly from the most Welsh-speaking and most English-speaking areas.

The questionnaire aimed at finding information on several factors which were assumed to be influential in the language choice made by the young people. These factors included the language spoken at home, the linguistic nature of the community, academic ability, ability in Welsh, and the amount of education, especially post 16 education, received through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.

The questionnaire's next aim was to try to measure the extent to which language shift towards English was evident; this could be reflected by the amount of Welsh used, the linguistic pressure of various domains, and by the tendency to switch language code, which in this instance means a change from the lesser-used language to the dominant one. This information would suggest whether a stable diglossic situation was in force generally or in specific geographical areas, or whether the bilingualism of individuals was not supported by an adequate diglossia, without sufficient protection from the language shift that has been seen in Wales throughout the century. Questions sought to find out the actual use of Welsh made by the young people: whether they used the language with siblings, with their Welsh-speaking friends, with children and with older age groups. Further questions were aimed at finding out which domains, apart from home and education, were most important in their lives and which language they spoke mainly in these situations; thus questions were asked on their social habits, and the frequency of their visits to pubs, discos, sporting activities and youth clubs, for example. The young people were then asked which language they preferred when speaking about various topics.

Attention was also given to their cultural orientation and to the link between language and ethnicity. The balance between Welsh and English in their television and radio viewing and listening habits, in the amount of music listened to, and in their reading was measured.

Finally, questions were asked on the way they viewed the Welsh language: whether it was important in their idea of Welsh nationhood, whether they saw it as a traditional element of this; to what extent they saw it as an important factor in the field of work and whether they wished to transmit the language to their children in future.

By using the SPSS package, it was hoped to find correlations which would point towards links between use of Welsh and the various influences involved.

The interviews undertaken were then used to give a fuller and more vivid picture of the patterns found in the answers to the questionnaire, in addition to giving an opportunity to ask more deeply regarding the link between language and ethnicity.

### Language Background

It was found that around 60% of the sample had parents considered to be quite fluent in Welsh; around 30% had parents whose linguistic ability in Welsh varied from fair to negligible. Nevertheless, the respondents considered that only around 40% of these parents spoke Welsh mainly to each other; indeed some 20% of parents who were very fluent in Welsh spoke mainly

English to each other while all other parents tended very heavily towards English. The difference between linguistic ability and Welsh language use among parents was also reflected to a lesser extent in the number of Welsh-speaking parents who did not speak Welsh to their children. Around half the young people said that Welsh was the main language spoken to them by their parents, while a further 12.8% said that both languages were spoken equally. As it was found that the language of the home was closely connected to the use of Welsh by the young people themselves, the failure of some fluent parents to use Welsh at home, and the failure of most of the less fluent parents to do this contributes to the basic patterns of language shift.

It was only in the Welsh 'heartland' that most parents - 75% of parents involved in the sample - spoke mainly Welsh at home, whilst only 21% of parents in the Swansea region - the most anglicised part of the area - did likewise. Perhaps the most disturbing feature was in a traditionally Welsh-speaking valley bordering on the heartland, where just 35% of parents involved in the sample spoke mainly Welsh to their children, suggesting that in areas where around 60% speak Welsh the process of language shift is progressing at a fast rate.

This erosion in the parents' use of the Welsh language at home was reflected closely by the language spoken among siblings; again only 40% spoke mainly Welsh to each other while around 45% spoke mainly English. The close link between home language and the language of siblings was shown by the finding that only 2 of the 132 young people who spoke mainly Welsh to siblings came from homes which were not strong in their use of the language. On the other hand, even in these predominantly Welsh homes, there were 60 young people who used mainly English to siblings, suggesting a deterioration in language use from one generation to the next.

This pattern of use of language by young people seemed to extend to their interaction with their Welsh-speaking peers. But although a minority (just 40%) spoke mainly Welsh to each other, the number of those who spoke mainly English was less in this instance (37%). Fewer bilingual young people spoke only English among peers; whereas 26.8% of them spoke only English to siblings, just 17% spoke only English to peers. This greater use of Welsh suggests the value of Welsh-medium education, where pupils from English-only homes intermingle with pupils from Welsh-speaking homes. On the whole, however, these young people use less Welsh with each other than they do with older people and young children: 78.7% would use mainly Welsh with people over 60 years old, 57.7% with people between 25 and 59, and 40.8% with each other. This drop of 20% from one generation to the next reflects the anglicization process at work in their society; 57.8% however speak mainly Welsh with younger children, suggesting both a degree of commitment to the preservation of the language and also a lack of conviction that Welsh is pertinent to their own lives. This positive aspect is seen even among young people who speak only English with each other: only 6.1% of the total sample would speak only English to children under 12.

When asked what proportion of Welsh these young people use in their daily lives, a distinct tendency is seen towards English. 28.6% of the sample use Welsh as their main language; 43.2% use English as their main language, while 28.3% use English and Welsh equally.

### Domains

The enormous influence of English as the main language of the main domains of young people was seen to present a danger to any positive efforts made in the field of language maintenance. While religious life has tended to exert a Welsh influence in the past, we saw that attendance at church or chapel is no longer among the main social activities of young people.

The following table provides an idea of the popularity of various social establishments, and of the language associated with them:

	Percentage attending at least monthly	Percentage using mainly Welsh	Percentage using mainly English
Chapel	22.2	68	22.7
Disco	63.6	13.7	68.2
Sports	52.5	20.4	63.5
Pub	69.5	19.4	63.9
Yr Urdd	2.7%	73.3	16.4
Hobby	25.8	18.4	61.4
Cinema	48.7	15.1	70.7

In only two spheres does Welsh dominate: the chapel is still influential, but it concerns a quarter of this age group. Yr Urdd - a national movement for Welsh youth which runs youth clubs throughout Wales as well as holding very popular cultural activities and youth camps - obviously does not attract people of this age group to its activities, and its linguistic influence can be disregarded. The main weekly activities are sports activities and visits to pubs, followed by attendance at discos and dances. The weighting towards English in these activities seems to ensure that everyone except a committed minority from Welsh-speaking homes turns to use English as their main language in these spheres. This is particularly true in all areas except the main Welsh heartland district in the survey.

Mass media presents another area where the dominance of English is clearly seen. Listening to cassettes, watching television and radio and reading books and magazines are all areas where English is the main language of young bilingual people. While almost all listen to English music records or cassettes at least weekly, only around 12% listen to Welsh music as often as this. Around 90% view more than 11 hours of English television a week, while just 8% view this amount of Welsh programmes; fewer listen to radio, but here again around 80% listen to at least 2 hours of English radio per week, compared to around 8% who listen to Welsh radio. Just 12% read more Welsh books than English ones. The reasons for this are numerous: the multiplicity of English books and magazines, the vastly greater provision of English and American television and radio programmes, and the pervading nature of English and American pop music must offer competition that is not easily fought.

The influence of these domains is reflected by the confidence shown by young people in discussing various topics in either language. Education and religion were the only fields which young people find just as easy to discuss in both languages. Other topics, such as sports, current affairs, forming personal relationships, pop music, technical work, jobs and even literature are more easily discussed by a majority through the medium of English. Rock music, not surprisingly, is the field least associated with Welsh: some 75% prefer to discuss music in English, with just 5% preferring Welsh. The most disturbing feature of this language choice seems to be in the field of courtship, where the pattern of language use of future families is formed. Here 54% preferred English, with 8% preferring Welsh. This language choice while discussing various topics is further reflected by tendencies to switch code.

The most relevant correlations to the tendency to use English reveal the importance of an enveloping Welshness in the home or in the community. Both of these, in association with Welsh-medium education, give young people a confidence in their ability in the language, and this confidence is a key factor. Those to whom Welsh was spoken at home are most likely to speak Welsh, more so than those simply living in the Welsh heartland.

The one very positive aspect of the study was that there was widespread support for the general idea of language maintenance. Only 5% said that they would not wish their own children to receive bilingual secondary education, and most of these belonged to a group that did not receive it themselves. 99% said it was important for children to speak Welsh while a substantial majority thought the language was important for personal and familial relationships, for jobs and for supporting the national identity of Wales. The task facing language planners is to translate these positive attitudes into practical use of the language in daily situations.

### **Adult Education and Language Use**

The bilingual education system was a positive factor, but where schools taught some subjects through the medium of English and others through the medium of Welsh, there was a tendency for the school community to suffer a linguistic divide, between the academic Welsh speakers and the less academic English speakers.

A factor that causes great concern is that most institutions of further and higher education, both locally and nationally in Wales, offer their provision mainly in the English language. This has the effect of making some pupils query the value of Welsh-medium education in some subjects, and of offering others an anglicizing environment. Students attending an English-medium post 16 establishment show a remarkable amount of loss of ability in Welsh.

The research project presents challenges for adult educators in Wales. If one accepts the value of preserving lesser-used languages, it is clear that adult education has a triple role that has not hitherto received sufficient attention.

The first involves the teaching of the lesser-used language as a second language to ensure a wider home base for the language, as this is the most influential factor in its preservation. Further language work could concentrate on boosting language skills and confidence in language use.

The second role includes teaching various subjects, which could include IT skills, secretarial skills and vocational courses, through the medium of the lesser-used language, so that young people become more confident in its use outside school and home. The need for community building work - activities or courses that provide networks for personal relationships of young people in a lesser-used language environment - could provide the spur for such projects.

The third role should involve work in the field of language planning and language maintenance. This could contribute towards concerted efforts by people involved in adult education itself but would probably give a guide to others as to the most effective ways of contributing in this field. Courses on language planning could provide a focus for influential members of the lesser-used language community.

### **Lesser-used Language Provision at Swansea**

Some aspects of issues raised have only just begun to be addressed by the adult education department at Swansea. Second language teaching has been progressing well for twenty years (the department provides basic 100 hour intensive courses in Welsh, followed by a series of classes that lead to a Certificate in Welsh for adults, comparable in standard to 'A' level). Otherwise, the Welsh-medium provision in Swansea, as in other adult education departments in Wales, has tended to concentrate on the traditional literature and culture classes which have attracted the older age group, classes which Joshua Fishman would describe as being a suitable end of reversal of language shift efforts rather than being the means.



Some language skill classes for unemployed and employed have been provided, but these need to be expanded so that Welsh can be used competently and with confidence in the workplace. Extra funding is needed to make this type of course commonplace in all major workplaces which have direct link with the public, and in all bodies which give a public service. Vocational Welsh-medium classes, for employers, managers and employees, with appropriate emphasis on developing language skills, as well as confidence raising in Welsh must be urgently developed. The possibility of bilingual teaching has not yet been explored; neither even has the possibility of providing Welsh-medium classes of this nature in the Welsh heartland.

Generally, the University of Wales has consistently done little more than pay lip service to the Welsh language since its foundation a hundred years ago, a hundred years that have seen the percentage of Welsh-speakers in Wales fall from to 54% to 18%. There are now however obvious challenges which should be met.

## Accessing The Imagination: Creative Writing in Community Education

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In the 1970s activism around local writing and community publishing entered the repertoire of Community Education [CE], often in response to a current political crisis (Rent strikes in Liverpool, property development in Brighton). These were sometimes aligned with counter-cultural formations and the incipient community arts movement but were more often linked to adult education. (See Morley & Worpole 1982 and Kelly 1984). In Cleveland, in the mid 80s, an alliance between local people and graduates who had followed non-traditional routes into Higher Education as mature students created a network of groups and activities predicated on the idea of local culture and widened access to writing. This initiative was supported first by The Workers' Educational Association and later the University of Leeds Department of Adult Continuing Education.

Cleveland became a site of innovative writing development, consolidating a infrastructure of writing groups and courses, a democratically managed festival combining mainstream and amateur writers and a publishing continuum from a radical literary magazine to a page in the evening newspaper. By 1992, when the UFC/HEFCE funded a research project to audit and evaluate this activity, it constituted the major form in which CE was provided by the University of Leeds in Cleveland.

Establishing an appropriate evaluative framework for cultural activity created two major hurdles. Firstly, arts activity is marginal to CE. For example, accounts of the Educational Priority Area Project in Liverpool often omit the innovative writing and drama work (Brookfield 1983:117 - 125) and efforts to make arts activity more central are hampered by the community arts movement's pervasive cultural relativism (Kelly 1984, McGuigan 1992). Secondly, some of the research project findings initially appeared to confirm reservations about the relation of cultural activity to CE. However, I resisted the explanation that cultural activity is a distraction from, rather than a contribution to, community action and social change and worked through the contradictions emerging in Cleveland's writing culture. These included: individualism, dependency and independence, perceived and actual barriers to involvement, the articulation of race and gender with class and issues surrounding the siting and take-up of creative writing activities. Doing so, I realised that because CE theory is, in the main, based on fieldwork from the 1970s it neither takes account of the ways in which what was a relatively new practice has diversified and developed nor can it account for the changed contexts within which practitioners and communities exist. In this paper I indicate those areas where it would be beneficial to revise our understanding of CE's imperatives for good practice.

The complexity of evaluating educationally framed cultural work with adults experiencing social or educational disadvantage is rendered simpler by the concept of access. Access, which defines much community education work, is as valid a rationale for the cultural as it is for more clearly delineated political and/or educational spheres. Besides, writing is a profoundly social - and socialised - practice. Although the contemporary literary establishment - and its canonical antecedents - bear the imprimaturs of its bourgeois, patriarchal and colonialist origins, this does not fault the activity of writing itself. Creating access becomes, therefore, as critical an activity as it is within its wider remit. And access brings its own contradictions. Although targeted

towards specific social groups - women, ethnic minorities, working class people, trade unionists - it rarely advances the social group, operating as it does at an individual level and risking incorporation as a "liberal rather than liberating" (Fletcher 1980:69) practice.

Over and above the inherent contradictions of the Access argument, difficulties remain when writing is put in the CE frame. Working through these both secures the argument over the cultural dimension and highlights inconsistencies in the existing model of CE practice. The aspects accentuated by the research were individualism and social change and self-reliance and the role of the tutor.

Although cultural activity may seem immediately disadvantaged in comparison with work centred in overt social deprivation - welfare rights, housing, racism and so on - the emphasis on process in much CE de-centres its subject - whatever that subject is. So, although it may seem harder to perceive writing as socially useful knowledge and/or transformative social practice, it is not necessarily the case.

Firstly, CE work's process orientation subsumes outcomes into social and psychological development within a broadly humanistic frame. The emphasis within the groups I visited on "the writing" - the here and now experience of producing and commenting on work in progress - reflects a commitment to "the educational value of the experience itself ... personality development, rather than a mastery of a body of information." (Titmus 1981:141 quoted in Brookfield 1983:177) which is entirely in keeping with mainstream CE work.

The groups and their members identified and valued the development of skills in producing and commenting upon writing and recognised, too, the consequent growth in confidence and self-esteem. For many, this was the result of overcoming isolation, often rooted in specific social causes - illness, unemployment, bereavement. Significantly, though, it was also often located in the conflict between their interest in creative pursuits and the belief - from themselves as much as others - that this was incompatible with their life experience and role.

Secondly, recent work on narrative supports a view of writing as a privileged medium through which to develop individual and collective perceptions of the interconnections between psychological and social determination (Fitzpatrick 1995, Hayler & Thompson 1995, Horsman 1992, Mace 1995). The value participants put on this opportunity to re-appraise life experiences exemplifies this. Such narratives are by definition personal and individual, but in the testimony I gathered it was impossible to deny linkage between writing, individuals and society. For example, an elderly group describes the positive effects of remaining intellectually active; unemployed men talk about the boon to them and their families of an emotional outlet and means to structure otherwise terrifying expanses of blank time; people - across all permutations of gender, age, race and occupation - recount writing's power to heal personal distress and crisis. I do not want to make the inflated claims for this that characterised earlier accounts - including my own - of writing in the community. Instead, I want to suggest that the polarisation of the individual and the social might be better understood as a constant crossing and re-crossing of boundaries in and between the social and the individual. Viewed this way, writing's exchange becomes a process not of individuation, but of socialisation.

Writing, does not easily find a collective form for its awkward dependence on individual creativity. But foregrounding this interaction between the individual and the social generates a new perspective on identity and belonging. They thread into the concern with locality and community which underpin CE and has particular force in a social climate where identity and belonging are under political assault. These campaigns - Back To Basics, Family Values - are profoundly ideological. They not only secure a particular family form (mum, dad and the kids)

but model the defeat of society by family. The development of a public space, within writing groups, in which a range of identities and experience can be critically explored is to be valued, not least because so many participants in community education fall outside this new definition of family as society - single parents, single people, including lesbians and gay men, people on benefits, members of ethnic minority groups and people with disabilities.

Although CE practitioners value increased self-reliance in the groups they work with, and de-centre the role of the tutor and formal input to encourage it, the groups often take a different view. In Cleveland, the desire for more formal input from tutors was often expressed. Several people who mentioned having previously attended WEA courses were critical of its decision to encourage independent groups by withdrawing tutors after a set time. When the Leeds CE programme began many used it either to supplement or substitute their free standing group. For them, CE was from its outset a refuge from, not a route into, self-reliance.

The issue of self-reliance is complicated by the nature of writing, an activity constituted by selection and judgment *both* at the point where individuals negotiate word, text and idea and when what they produce enters a group exchange. This makes acts of response and, in its widest sense, assessment central to the group activity. Many groups felt keenly they were unqualified or unwilling to perform this role for each other. Symptomatically, for many this was solely an issue of their perceived lack of knowledge and ability but some saw the role as difficult and potentially divisive and wanted an outsider to shoulder its stresses.

The conflict over self-reliance has also to be understood in the context of writing and the market. Unlike other cultural activities where the range comfortably spans the hobbyist, amateur and professional, writing operates a shortened scale with payment for publication often an immediate short term goal. The orientation towards the commercial sector and its values was pervasive within Cleveland's culture of writing. This has to be contexted by long term structural unemployment. Earning from writing may seem no less improbable than other forms of employment. There were cases of writing providing purposeful activity more comparable with work than leisure, although no-one earned significant money as a result. In the North East, the example of several working class people - Catherine Cookson pre-eminent amongst them - who have written their way out of poverty re-inforces this aspiration.

Participants were also attuned to writing's earning potential as a consequence of enterprise's penetration into the local state via employment and community development. Education becomes recast as training and small business principles inform and direct much community action. A case study illustrates this. A parent's group was set up at a junior school to encourage involvement in their children's learning. Envisaged as literacy support, it was immediately re-defined by the parents who brought not just literacy skills, but active interests in writing to the group. This caused a sea change in the school's attitude towards parents, especially when arts and educational bodies provided support to what soon became a confident and capable group. So far so model project. The attempted incorporation of the group by a City Challenge initiative to develop a community newspaper employment project destroyed it.

The issues around differing perceptions of dependence/independence also illustrate the value of reconsidering past principles. Much of the creative writing activity seemed, superficially, to fit the accepted practices of community education. Tutors stepped back from their role, acting as a resource to groups which exercised "control of the content and conduct of learning" (Brookfield 1983:86). This is in marked contrast to creative writing in schools and higher education, where professional writers lead from the front, demonstrating their expertise and command of the medium as an inducement to and model for others. However, relinquishing the tutor role can act negatively, as the absence of focus and structure, or in creating a vacuum quickly filled by

dominant personalities. Even in less extreme instances, groups rarely discussed what they wanted to achieve so the tutor's well intentioned non-directive stance was interpreted as a lack of interest or incompetence. Similarly, although students participated in an apparently egalitarian group based approach to writing, some were clearly unhappy with it. They lacked an explanation of the tutor's role and although acquiring the skills they needed to function effectively in the group was implicit in its activity, many left not having realised this or stayed, but were unable to engage with this developmental process. The students' desire for a more structured approach was sometimes articulated as dependency and sometimes as entitlement. The relationship between the two, and power, is crucial. Dependency is produced by powerlessness, helplessness a response to lack of agency. An imperative to independence, whether given implicitly through the behaviour and values a group validates or explicitly as injunction, cannot overcome the conditions of powerlessness that produce dependency. Tutors need support in adopting the role of animateur - an active but non-directive role which enables them to act as catalyst and resource for the group.

Twenty years ago self-reliance was a radical idea but now that the most vocal critiques of dependency come from the political right its value as a goal is compromised. The desire for help articulated by the Cleveland students is perhaps a response from people already at the sharp end of free market forces who are decidedly cynical about how good for them such independence really is. The entitlement it demands politicises the liberalism against which earlier forms of CE honed their radical edge and may also involve, to return to my starting point, re-valuing the contribution of cultural activism to the social and political spheres.

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# Research Cultures

# **Learning From Working Together: Experiencing Collaborative Research as Education.**

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## **Introduction**

The Collaborative Research as Education Project, funded by the UFC/HEFCE, was undertaken between 1992-1995 by The Industrial Studies Unit in the Centre for Continuing Education, Development and Training, at the University of Hull. The general aim of the project was to examine forms of research bringing together workers and academics in a joint research enterprise, geared towards a pooling of skills and knowledge.

More directly, there were three areas of potential interest. Firstly, we wanted to assess the extent of collaborative research, particularly in the UK, but with some attention to Europe and the USA. Secondly, we wanted to identify approaches to collaborative work; and finally, to consider the nature of collaborative research processes, particularly in relation to any educational value they may have, and their potential to inform theories of learning, research and education.

## **Background to the Collaborative Research Project**

The project developed out of a number of collective studies undertaken over several years at Hull (Somerton, 1985 and 1989; Topham, 1980; Vulliamy, 1981 and 1991), all of which are examples of research bringing together workers, as 'lay' participants, and academics as 'professional' researchers, to work together on specific research projects. These projects came about through different circumstances, sometimes initiated by trade unions to address a particular problem; sometimes as part of studies undertaken by adult students on day-release courses.

An early account reflecting on the experience of working collaboratively (Somerton and Vulliamy, 1993) was the first conscious approach to theory building to come out of this work. Here, collaborative research was characterised in relation to other types of research as generally cheaper to conduct; more likely to be accessible to workers and trade unionists, and to meet their immediate needs; and more likely to have a direct impact on policy than other research, because worker involvement in the research may strengthen commitment to implementing the results.

From this early work, we began to identify collaborative research as a democratic process which actively prevents the concentration of expertise in the hands of the trained social scientist, by encouraging group participation in the process of pooling skills and knowledge. Also out of this work came the conclusion that further investigation was needed in a number of areas. Firstly, the need to establish why collaborative research is more common in some countries (eg Scandinavia and Netherlands) than in others. Secondly, the need for deeper investigation into the extent and types of collaborative research which predominate in the UK. Finally, the need for detailed research on the processes of collaborative research - in particular, to reach a deeper level of understanding of the ways in which new knowledge is constructed by workers and academics attacking a problem from different perspectives, and how this process might have educational outcomes. This final issue was the essential starting point for this UFC/HEFCE project.

At the beginning of the project then we had a perspective and broad idea of collaborative research in terms of the nature and benefits of joint working and problem solving, relatively low costs and democratic processes, together with potential gains for individuals, groups, organisations, and ultimately, wider society.

## Methodology

Data gathering was through a semi-structured questionnaire followed up by indepth interviews with workers and academics who had taken part in collaborative research projects across the UK. These participants came from a wide range of backgrounds - workers included seamen, bus workers and local council employees; while academics came largely from adult education in colleges and universities, with some kind of industrial relations interest. Much of the information pieced together for analysis then, was an expression of participant voices, importantly for us voices of manual and low paid workers not normally heard, in that we drew essentially on the words participants used to describe their experiences of working on a collaborative research project.

## Findings

Much of our understanding developed from an analysis of the thinking, reflections and perceptions of participants. Our project report is thus structured around verbatim extracts gathered through interview. It becomes clear from a reading of their words that the collaborative experience is a potent tool for both the positive and negative - it has the potential to alter perceptions and change lives; but it can also be beset with problems and barriers.

Workers, for example, made observations such as: "I've realised I'm not thick. You get to the stage where you're doing the same job for a long time and you think its all you can do. It gives you confidence and self respect. I actually moved on to the district committee of the union, so I'm more involved in changing ideas, I'm a more active member". Others reported going on to take up further education courses and Open University degrees.

Academics endorsed this view of the collaborative experience bringing about a change in direction for those involved. They also, more broadly, made optimistic assessments of their work as an approach to knowledge building which challenges the traditional: "...we're trying to battle against the snobbish orientation of what I call main stream (research). Participatory and collaborative research can provide important scientific knowledge. What happens is you encounter creative surprises...The standard approach we were taught and perhaps is still being taught, is that you proceed first by reviewing the literature on the topic you want to study, and then devising and setting up hypotheses, and then you design a research project to focus on the testing of these hypotheses. Its a sort of guessing game. Then you describe whether you guessed right or wrong. If you guessed wrong you go back and start over, but you're always operating within this framework of what you thought you knew... In collaborative research we encounter insights that we would never encounter if we had proceeded in the natural fashion...".

Academics also tried to offer definitions in assessing their work. "...If I were looking for a determining criteria of collaborative research practices, until recently I held that it was methodologically...that was the determining difference and character of collaborative research projects, in other words, it was the type of methodology that you employ that determined the character of the practice. I've changed my view on that, I feel its more fundamental. Its the epistemological base of your research, its an argument and debate about the nature and accumulation of knowledge that determines the collaborative practice, and from that your methodology emerges."



They also, described the educative value of their work - "I think education is the cement glue of all the projects whether as formally in the two year course we run...whether its an evening class, it doesn't matter, its education that provides the initiative and the dynamic because there's a learning process for everybody involved...I think it has more to do with adult educators or trade union studies tutors who are interested or feel this is an area they would like to put time and effort into and I think at the present time there happens to be a few of us about."

On the other hand however, participants also saw problems with the method when obstacles became visible. In describing his early experiences as a worker involved in researching his work place one participant told us that officials in his organisation - both management and union - tended to value only costly, 'academic' research: "...if they wanted a project like that done they'd put a few million aside, go to a university and get the experts to do it...it was only universities that did this kind of research and we paid a lot of money for it". He described how the final report of his project was ignored by the organisation, union officials and academics: "People involved have always been questioned by the academics because they were nobodies, so it wasn't given any credibility. We had problems with it because we were going to get this published, we were changing working conditions...and this was going to cost money. The logical recommendations to come out of this were going to cost and management were not prepared to pay...When it was first published they said yes it is a nice piece of work but nobody pushed for it and its been shelved ever since...".

For our purposes in examining collaborative research, stories taken from research studies serve as a crucial illustrative device. They highlight the enormous benefits of the process, indicate the educative value for participants, and also show that where traditional approaches to research persist - ie in notions of who and how new knowledge can be generated - attitudes can close off potentially important avenues of investigation, exploration and experiment, and can lead to barriers to implementation of research findings when validity is called into question. Collaborative researchers, we would argue, in emphasising the importance of working with participants outside traditional research communities, are particularly involved in confronting ideas concerning the nature of knowledge, notions of scientific privilege, and the process of mystification in which academic culture is unnecessarily steeped.

### **Locating Our Research Within a Knowledge Base In Continuing Education**

Wider debate of relevance to the collaborative research enterprise comes from the radical/progressive perspective in the research and education of adults. As a result of our research project we found that contributors to this debate suggest very much what those in the collaborative research enterprise have already undertaken - a building of knowledge and understanding outside traditional boundaries, drawing on the perspectives and experiences of oppressed groups themselves.

This has meant, for example, in developing countries, research and education determined by the indigenous population; in feminist methodology, learning from research by women for women; and in factories, research and education done by workers for workers. Harding (1987) refers to this as an 'underclass' approach; Whyte (1991) in his descriptions of participatory action research, borrows the term 'underdog'. Both envisage an empowering effect, and see research and education within a context of social and individual change. In this framework Harding has pointed out '...the questions an oppressed group wants answered are rarely requests for so-called pure truth. Instead, they are queries about how to change its conditions; how its world is shaped by forces beyond it; how to win over, defeat, or neutralize those forces arrayed against its emancipation, growth or development...' (Harding, 1987, p8).

This emergent framework then, recognises multiple perspectives, the personal nature of sense making, the importance of direct engagement with those involved in research and, in the knowledge making process the educative outcomes for those involved. In this way, subordinate voices and voices of experience are included to shape what has been called a 'pragmatic socially informed analysis' Seidman (1991).

### **Our Contribution to the 'Progressive' Knowledge Base in Continuing Education**

This research project was an attempt to build an understanding of collaborative research by exploring the nature and processes of shared learning and how these can be seen in relation to education. We examined the assumption, for example, of the objectivity, neutrality and universality of scientific knowledge; the assumption that the world is divided into those who know (academics) and those who don't (manual workers); and the assumption that the university is the site of real knowledge and the home of the knowers.

We clarified thinking around the following issues. Firstly, the collaborative approach can be seen as part of a growing movement away from what was the dominant positivist tradition in social science, and in this confronts traditional assumptions about the nature of knowledge, ideas about scientific privilege and the process of mystification underpinning academic culture. Secondly, and this is a key issue, in recognising the value of experiential knowledge, collaborative research treats participants from outside the traditional research community as competent knowers and co-researchers. Thirdly, in taking this stance, collaborative research is committed to an amplification of the 'voices' not normally heard, empowering lay participants within a framework of individual and social transformation.

In all this there is a strong emphasis on qualitative methods of discovery, primarily because the collaborative framework in giving validity to local knowledge has a groundedness of theoretical in practical understanding. It also recognises that local knowledge, although potentially humanizing of the research process in offering those who traditionally are researched a contributory voice, it can sometimes only be anecdotal. Some collaborative researchers feel that this can be a potential weakness and perhaps in bringing together insider and outsider knowledge research participants should be aware of this.

Our specific focus and contribution then, developed particularly around issues of process. In particular the difficulty of bringing together insider/worker and outsider/academic knowledge in a collaborative research project. We feel this is an emerging issue at the centre of the collaborative experience. Our findings suggest that participants are aware of the potential for inequality here, as the academic can be cast in the role of expert and workers in the role of students. However, even with an awareness of potential difficulties, a central finding to emerge from our project was that it remains true, in terms of knowledge 'making' collaborative research has a potential to offer insight into areas of understanding traditionally excluded from research vision. In this it offers participants an educative experience in which learning can be related to both process and outcome for participants and for wider society. Indeed, the strength of the collaborative approach is that the process is an outcome in itself.

In this respect, we have been concerned to examine how the collaborative approach, in undertaking a redefinition of the relationship between research participants, aims, to produce 'professional researchers able to combine the skills of academics with the knowledge of workers' (Forrester and Winterton, 1990); and to produce workers with their own research skills, capable of reaching a level of autonomy in 'learning to learn' (Elden and Levin, 1991). We examined something of the connections between the promise of the collaborative approach, some of its

problems, and relevant theories of learning which can be used to illuminate our understanding. In research outside adult education and industrial relations, there seems to be much to aid the collaborative perspective, with the potential at the same time for collaborative experiences to feed back into these bodies of knowledge in education and learning research - Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian (in Bruner's work) approaches seem especially relevant.

We suggest that at the core of the shared learning process of pooling and combining skills and knowledge, role relationships between participants are always potentially unequal despite the collaborative aim of democracy; and we have seen that education and learning theorists are in relatively early stages of understanding the transitional stages in the dynamic of shared learning, and of visualising how combinatorial moves are successfully made when participants share coding systems to produce a novel joint system.

### **Impact the Project on us as Researchers**

The key to the future partly lies in the reflexive development of a specific body of knowledge grounded in collaborative experiences which will begin to generate a more systematic understanding of the particular strengths of working together. Within this framework there is the need for a deeper level of insight into the dynamic of the collaborative process itself.

To this end, the project impacted on us as researchers in the form of a realisation that in process terms, we would benefit from a more consciously reflective approach to our work. In an earlier paper we outline some of our developing thinking (*Working Collaboratively on Research into Collaborative Working*, 1993). The ideas here are part of a continuing perspective within which our ongoing work is grounded. In it we see the importance of working democratically ourselves, in combining our knowledge and skills bases. Our own approach to the generation of knowledge has been underpinned by a notion of practical knowledge which is sharable and has a 'socializable character' taking it beyond the relatively narrow confines of the traditional research dynamic.

'It has often been in the process of sharing practical knowledge, combining and connecting it with theoretical and statistical knowledge, that has imbued a movement with power and social leverage.' (Wainwright, 1994). This is a useful concluding point, and offers a glimpse into the ultimate value of a participatory, collaborative approach in presenting a view involving shared learning and understanding, involvement, a kind of equality in which experiential knowledge is given validity, and a link beyond this to a more systematic understanding, with an overall wider socio-political perspective.

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# **The Challenge of Linking Research and Practice: Ways of Learning in Adult Basic Education**

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The Open Learning In Adult Basic Education Project was a collaborative project between Goldsmiths College and Lancaster University funded between 1991-1993. The aim of the project was to document a new form of provision in Adult Basic Education - supported self-study in specially equipped open learning centres. We hoped to examine the impact of this innovation on the field of ABE, and to explore tutors' and learners' views of open learning, in comparison with their experience in more traditionally organized programmes (small group and individual tuition). Some of the project results are reported in Bergin and Hamilton, 1994.

From the start the project was designed to develop participatory approaches to researching with students, tutors and managers of the open learning programmes. We wanted to let the concerns of practice in ABE shape the research agenda, in particular making visible student perspectives on the new developments. Our definition of the "ideal" in participatory research is a research process which shares the decisions that have to be made at all stages of the research process: in formulating questions, collecting data, interpreting the data and writing up the research report. Hamilton et al 1992 gives a full discussion of this approach and Bergin et al 1995 gives more details of how we applied it in the Open Learning Project. We see our work in developing this research approach as being one of our special contributions to the field of ABE and continuing education more widely.

Two full-time researchers were appointed to the project, both of whom had previously been teachers and organizers in ABE and who brought "practitioner" perspectives with them into the research project. Whilst they both had recent experience of post-graduate study, this was their first experience of working on a funded research project.

They were both "insiders" and "outsiders" to the research context: "insiders" in the sense of having a great deal of experience and knowledge of ABE and issues of teaching within it, and "outsiders" in the sense that they were not connected to the specific histories and politics of the institutions within which they were interviewing and observing, and had no teaching responsibilities toward the students involved in the project. They were also relative outsiders to the culture of higher education which framed the project and their lives as employees over the two years in which they worked as research associates, an issue which we will return to later in this paper.

Our commitments to linking research and practice led us to set up the project in specific ways. We want to argue that these both enriched the findings and threw up difficult issues for the research team. In themselves these issues are important to document in order to review the contribution and outputs of this project.

In retrospect, we realise that we had set ourselves the task of negotiating a complicated set of relationships which challenged and extended our understandings of the limits of participation and



of what it means to link research and practice. It also raised resourcing issues which need to be taken on board by funders of research who wish to encourage real collaborative processes in research.

The issues we discuss in this paper centre around:

- \* The effects (both immediate and longer term) of recruiting practitioners into temporary research posts: how this improves the research process and confronts the differences between research, theory and practice perspectives which we set out to address in the project.
- \* The challenges of researching in organizations where the research agenda is pulled in different directions by participants with competing interests and perspectives: having to be clear where our commitments lie as a research team.
- \* The demands of researching practice in a rapidly changing policy context. Our strategy was to keep aspects of the research extremely open-ended in order to be able to respond to issues and concerns from the field as they emerged, but to keep a measure of control and coherence to what we were doing.

Fig 1, is an outline of the activities we covered in the course of the project.

The project used a mixture of methods derived from two sources:

1. **Recognisable research traditions**, both quantitative and qualitative. Methods included observation in case study open learning centres and "shadowing" individual students; repeated interviews and feeding back transcripts to interviewees for their comments; a national questionnaire survey to staff of Open Learning Centres to complement the more qualitative findings from the case studies.
2. **Traditions of ABE teaching and learning** adapted to produce research data. These included day and weekend events which involved students in group discussion and writing activities; writing and editorial meetings to produce collective reports of people's experience. Activities for group discussion, identifying and comparing experiences were adapted from resources used in ABE and adult education more widely<sup>1</sup>

In designing these methods, we had a concern for the benefits of the research to students and staff who took part, as well as our own research goals. We tried to develop activities which would reinforce the process of reflective learning which students were (hopefully) engaged in already, so that the time spent in helping us with the research was seen as extra space and resources to support this learning, rather than an interruption of it. In many cases interviews with staff had a similar function of offering a space to reflect even though this was usually snatched from a busy schedule. Seen in this way, a main aim of the research was to work with students and staff to develop their interpretations of the learning context they were engaged with.

Another benefit of the research process that we tried to capitalise on is its potential for breaking the isolation often felt, particularly by staff in their work, by offering opportunities for exchange and networking, feedback on practice and learning.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details see Bergin et al. Activities included "some people say" activity; assertiveness workshops; looking at past learning experiences and strengths; drawing images of learning; life lines, etc



**THE OPEN LEARNING PROJECT**  
**Open Learning in Adult Basic Education**

Project Team: David Barton; Sue Bergin and Mary Hamilton for Lancaster  
 Wendy Moss and Chris O'Mahony for Goldsmiths'

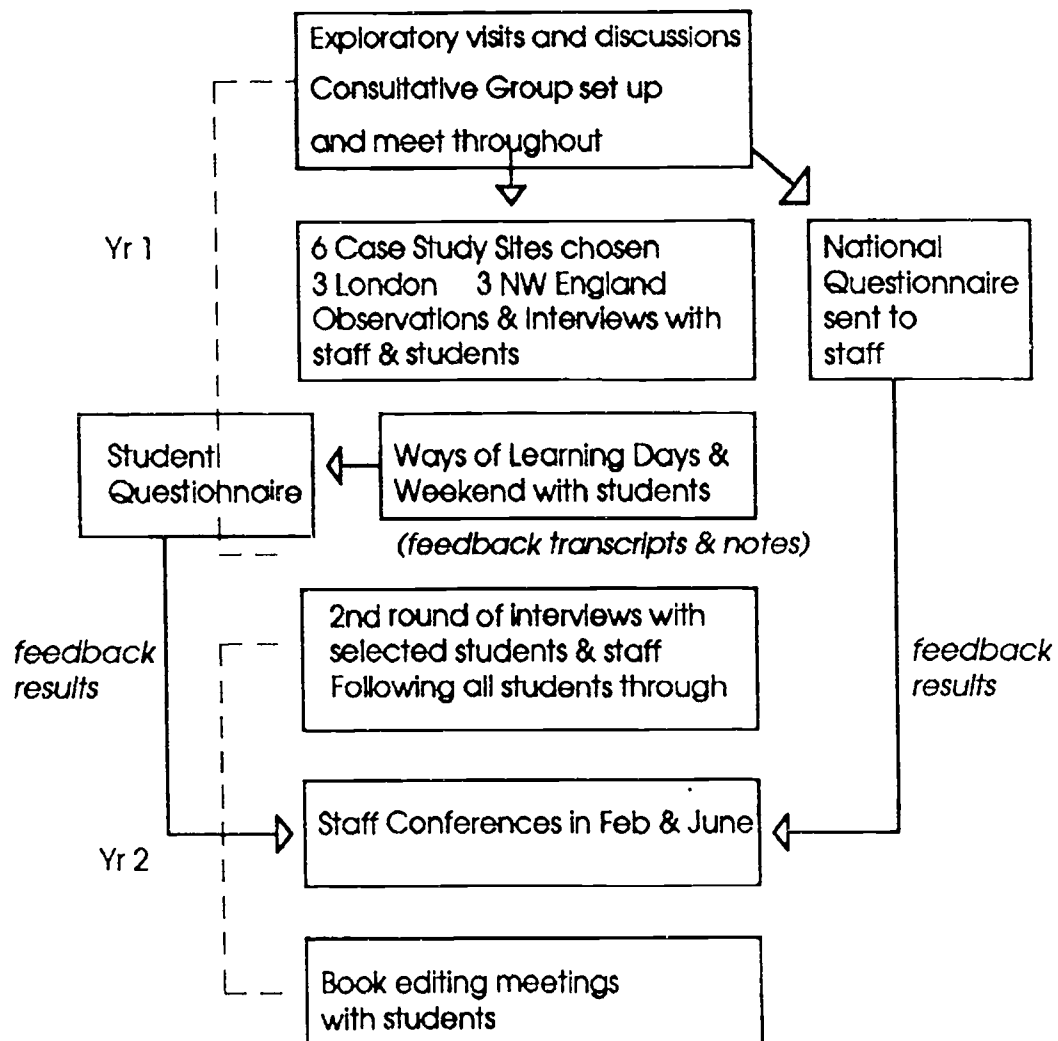


Figure 1

We were also concerned to find useful ways to feed back our results to participants, not just looking for outputs in academic publications. This led to a wide range of outcomes: we organized events at which findings could be presented and discussed by participants, produced a book of student writing about experiences of learning in ABE, working papers, a student resource pack, and publications in practitioner journals as well as more academic books and conventional research papers and reports.

We set up a consultative group at the beginning of the project which consisted of a mixture of practitioners and researchers in open learning and ABE. It also included a representative from the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Agency which had set up the Open learning Centres and monitored the development of their policy initiative. ABE students also joined the consultative group at different points during the project to contribute their perspectives. The group met at approximately 4 month intervals throughout the project, to help us with what ever tasks we were struggling with at that time: for example, they gave us advice and feedback on drafts of the national questionnaire and helped us plan a realistic programme of writing up the findings. We used the group as sounding board, a point of reference for assembling our thoughts, justifying the decisions we had taken and critically reviewing the research as we went along.

### **Confronting the Divides Between Research/Theory and Practice**

We were deliberate in our strategy of recruiting people with a strong practitioner background into the full-time, temporary research posts on this project so that our research team could draw on the complementary strengths of research and practice. We did this in the belief that this would improve the research process. We wanted to confront the differences between the research, theory and practice perspectives which we set out to address in the project.

There were many positive outcomes from this strategy. The research associates were able to make creative suggestions about methodology, especially how to draw on traditions of practice in ABE teaching and learning and exploit their potential for generating research data. They were able to think about how to fit research around and into the pressures and routines of teaching and learning that they were familiar with (eg. student reviews, staff meetings, committees and networks)

They brought different qualities to the research relationships than a purely research trained person would have done and this was especially important in working with ABE learners: for example, both had training in counselling techniques and in active listening. Their understanding of their developing relationships with students and staff enabled them to challenge orthodox research practice where necessary, for example in working out appropriate strategies for tape-recording, using pseudonyms and so on.

Their initial knowledge of the field cut short a lot of the background contextualising/orientation work that often has to be done in a new research project. Their ability to see issues from the perspective of practitioners eased the process of designing the staff questionnaire, for example, and helped to identify questions that would be seen by practitioners to be relevant to their concerns.

Working with practitioner-researchers also presented challenges and difficulties which we had not foreseen, although in retrospect they are not at all surprising. Higher education was only a temporary home for our research associates and one with which they did not identify strongly at the start of the project, approaching it with considerable scepticism. They have both returned to practice now, taking whatever they gained from working with a research perspective with them. This hopefully has a useful impact on the practice of ABE, but it means that their expertise can

have no longer-term impact on the university environment (though in the case of Lancaster, the project did leave a legacy, a subtle shift in culture of the research unit and the ways in which it perceives the quality of the work we carry out).

A major problem for the research itself is that they can't contribute to longer term written outcomes or conference presentations from the project, except by giving up their time for free - and much writing inevitably cannot be completed within the funding period of the research. The commitment of the research associates to this project was considerable and we have a good set of working papers written. Turning these into finished products is proving problematic now that the original team is scattered.

We experienced difficulties in negotiating and mutually recognising our different contributions within the research team. In part these difficulties arose because the cultures of adult education and higher education are so different: adult education puts an emphasis on action-oriented decisions and speedy practical outcomes whilst higher education privileges critical reflection and systematic documentation. By trying to work together across these cultures, we were confronting every day in our research all the issues that divide research and practice: differences in priorities, in the language used to describe everyday practices and concepts, in the power and status of adult basic education and academia.

Needless to say, these confrontations were often uncomfortable, personally and professionally. They seemed to take up an inordinate amount of energy within a research schedule which was already quite gruelling. They had the effect of making each of us, at times, feel uncertain about our skills since what seemed like authoritative knowledge in one setting is not recognised in another. One of the research associates, Chris, who is a skilled manager of ABE programmes deferred to less-skilled team members because this was not her primary role in the research project. Mary held back on imposing her research skills on the team in order to allow the research process to be redefined more appropriately using practice perspectives. There were misunderstandings, for example about what was the point of a mid-project report; there were moments when what seemed like a mundane point of information to one person, was a turning point in understanding or posed a serious dilemma for another!

These differences of perspective were compounded by having to communicate at a distance and there is certainly a lesson to be learned from this project about the costs and benefits of collaboration between institutions at opposite ends of the country. In the end we had to accept that the two ends of the project would have to operate to some extent as distinct entities as it was impossible to synchronise all decisions and fieldwork schedules in the way we had hoped.

### **Issues of Commitment and Competing Interests**

Our previous experiences of participatory research had been working with individuals and this project posed new challenges because we were working within *organizations* where the research agenda is pulled in different directions by participants with competing interests and perspectives. This required us to be very clear as a research team about where our commitments lay.

We had defined our main commitment as lying with students in adult basic education, working with them to make their perspectives and interpretations of learning more visible. In order to explore the environment in which the students were learning we also needed to work with staff in different roles within the institution (Open Learning Centre, Community Education programme or College). We set out to offer equal participation in the research decisions to all these groups but at times this became problematic: for example in many programmes we could only gain access to students via staff who sometimes felt they should control who we talked to. In one centre there

were feelings from some staff members that others were acting in racist ways towards them and we had to make decisions about how to act on this information. Staff at another centre wanted the project to look at why students don't come forward, rather than working with existing students. We felt that we could not accommodate this into our research brief even though it was very open-ended. There were tensions where staff were enthusiastically looking for ways of expanding open learning whereas we definitely saw our role as questioning and comparing the effectiveness of open learning methods by documenting students' experiences in a more open-minded way.

Issues arising from this include the way in which the role of the researcher slips and a different times comes to include elements of counselling, lobbying, teaching and advising. The research team were not experts in open learning, but staff in centres sometimes looked to us as such, especially where they were developing new programmes or wanted to compare their own experiences with what was going on elsewhere. Students were sometimes in need of advocacy or guidance which was beyond the brief of the research but the researchers inevitably became drawn into these areas. Complex issues of confidentiality arose in these situations, and we were aware as a research team of the double-bind of needing to respect confidentiality but also wanting to acknowledge publicly the insights and the many hours of time that individual students and staff gave to the project. Negotiating such issues depended on developing strong, clear commitments and relationships of trust.

A major conclusion from this experience is that the culture of the institution itself has a huge impact on how far participatory research can work and how students and staff will respond to the invitation to take part. The nature of existing staff-student relationships and expectations is crucial to this, including whether programmes include democratic structures such as student committees. If there is no or only a weak tradition of consultation and shared decision-making in a learning programme on which to build, it is hard to develop a real involvement in a relatively short-term participatory research process.

### **Responding to Changes in the External Context of the Research**

This project had to confront the demands of researching practice in a rapidly changing policy context. These demands were much stronger and the pace of change more radical than we had ever expected at the beginning of the research. By chance, it took place during a period of national educational reform which resulted in the incorporation of Further Education Colleges and a major shift in the governance and funding of adult basic education. These changes were much more important than the original policy initiative we had been funded to investigate, and overshadowed the development and impact of the open learning centres.

This made the interpretation of our original research questions more complex and forced us to re-think the focus of the project. Though our interests as teachers and researchers in ABE lay with the detailed experiences of students in workshops and learning groups, we could not ignore the bigger picture of policy and funding that was shaping these experiences and in many cases disrupting them and the continuity of the programmes in which they took place. We had to develop analyses which took account of this changing context and a research strategy which could accommodate to it.

Our strategy from the start was to keep aspects of the research extremely open-ended in order to be able to respond to issues and concerns from the field as they emerged. This was particularly the case with the topics we explored in interviews with staff and students. The difficulty in this strategy was balancing responsiveness with a measure of control and coherence to our activities so that we didn't lose our way.

As we have discussed above, there were demands made on the research team both from individual students and from staff who had needs we could meet or agendas we could help promote. From time to time situations arose where we were asked to contribute to the shape of the whole programme: for example, we were approached for evidence which could be used to help defend the privileged staff/student ratio in the ABE programme which was under attack in one college and this resulted in a short working paper on this topic. In another case study site, the researcher found herself in the middle of a campaign by staff and students to prevent the closure of a local centre.

On the whole we were positive in seizing opportunities that weren't in the original focus of the project in the belief that these would lead us to a better understanding of the issues shaping the field and individual's experiences of it. When our initial analysis of the national questionnaire revealed strong concerns and anxieties about funding changes, we designed a followup questionnaire to track the impact of these changes. Again, this took the research into a whole new area.

### **Impact on Us and Our Organizations**

Our situations as researchers in the two universities collaborating in this project were different from each other and perhaps from the majority of project funded under the UFC initiative. At Goldsmiths College we were based in a department of Adult Community and Continuing education that was fast moving away from its commitments to the "Community" end of its work towards higher status, vocational work (and has in fact now changed its name to reflect this). At Lancaster the research team was based in a general department of Educational Research, and not with the embryonic Department of Continuing Education. This meant that neither department saw adult basic education as a mainstream or particularly prestigious research area.

Our evaluation of the impact of the UFC initiative in our organizations is that the funding gave some status to an under-valued area of research in higher education but not enough to sustain it without other resources or real commitment in the institution. It was not powerful enough for a long-term culture shift. The university will absorb this research in ways that fit in with its existing priorities.

In summary, our strategy of encouraging control/participation in research is a lengthy process. It is resource heavy, both in time, energy and in the clerical tasks involved. It places additional demands on the process of analysis and on the management and communication of research decisions. It is, however, an exciting and rewarding way to do research and ultimately we believe it will prove its worth through the new insights and relationships it is developing in adult learning.

In the current research climate it is difficult to argue for the importance of this process and to get it recognised by the university as valid in terms of outcomes, performance indicators and so on. Our commitment to a variety of means for disseminating the findings, for example means that we do not measure our own effectiveness simply in terms of the academic publications emphasised by research selectivity exercises.

At Lancaster we have been working on ways to get our participatory research process recognised within a set of "quality indicators" that we are drawing up for our research activities. We also stress the importance of our explorations in developing innovative research methodologies, and the power/knowledge issues in research. We have set up modular courses on research-in-practice skills for practitioners who can incorporate them into their programme of professional development.

As a result of this project we are much wiser about the complexities of doing participatory research and linking research and practice. We are somewhat battle scarred. Both research associates have returned to a changed context of ABE with an overview and a wider vision from the research, knowing things as a result of their research experiences with staff and students that they would not have had access to in their role as teachers.

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# **Access and Formal Institutional Cultures**



# Disability Voice

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## Background

From 1990 - 1992 Tessa Lovell, my research associate, and I, undertook UFC funded research into equal opportunity practice in British universities. We explored, using a triangulation of questionnaires, telephone interviews and visits, the practices of a range of departments in each institution and sought to identify good practice in relation to ethnicity, gender and special needs. One of our findings was that there is a relative lack of awareness of disability as a form of oppression and correspondingly, little disability awareness in departmental practice or provision - both in relation to the education of all students and also in connection with catering, for special needs (Leicester and Lovell 1992). During this time Tessa Lovell, an active and energetic young woman, was diagnosed as having multiple sclerosis, and I, an older academic, had brought up a "severely disabled" daughter who had been educated at special schools and, now in her twenties, was still living at home and having negative experiences of post school training and the search for employment. The combination for both of us, of considerable professional experience in the field of equal opportunities and education, and personal experience in connection with disabilities, led to our decision to use our remaining UFC "equal opportunity" funding (plus a small grant from Warwick University's research innovation scheme) on a research project which became referred to as "Disability Voice".

We were aware, from our own earlier UFC research, from our experience as practitioners in the field, and from the literature (including, for example, a recent literature review commissioned from the NFER by the National Committee on Learning Disability and Further Education, chaired by Professor John Tomlinson) that post school educational provision for students with special needs is inadequate. We believe that the experience and views of people with disabilities should inform and influence educational change in the context of the developing civil rights movement. Therefore, we decided to conduct in-depth interviews of people with disabilities and of parents of special children, probing their experiences of school and post school education and eliciting their recommendations for educational provision.

## Aims and Outcomes

Tessa Lovell interviewed seventeen adults with impairments and I interviewed nine parents of special children. Individuals were carefully selected to represent a wide range of different kinds of impairment and included women and men from different class, ethnicity and age groups. We interviewed each other to test our interview schedules and to legitimately include our own experiences within the findings. We found that our interviewees were pleased to share their experiences, views and reflections with us. Many of them said that they had not before had anyone to listen to these experiences and feelings. They were very open and the interviews yielded rich, detailed, personal biography about educational experiences. We taped the interviews which have been transcribed.

Our theoretical framework included ethical, epistemological and political assumptions: the ethical judgement that educators ought to hear marginalised voices, the epistemological belief that inter-subjective agreement in the experience of marginalised groups can enrich our "objective educational knowledge" and the political commitment to equal opportunities in education. We

also shared the belief that equality in education and in the wider society would be facilitated by a "disability aware" perspective in the (lifelong) education of us all. (This could be compared to the Swann report concept of "Education For All" (Swann 1985).

Within this theoretical framework we formulated the following aims:

- \* to empower people with disabilities and their carers and families by providing a forum for the expression of their shared experience, particularly in relation to education, and opportunities to explore its implications for the development of more adequate and enabling (lifelong) education
- \* to influence policy and practice in the provision of educational services to people with disabilities through increasing academic, professional and general understanding of significant patterns in the educational experience of disabled people and thus to bring this neglected dimension into the construction of academic knowledge of oppression, and into the practical decisions of policy makers.

We are currently working on the data to produce a book which will include a selection of transcribed data as the direct expression of the experience of people with disabilities. We hope to highlight significant patterns of experience and their implications for relevant professionals and policy makers. We will be mindful of the frequency and strength with which patterns of experience emerge to provide the main categories by which we structure our material.

In connection with continuing education we intend to keep in mind a range of types of educational provision: provision for people with specific kinds of impairments (eg. like the courses at Bristol University for the visually impaired); provision for carers (eg. welfare rights, forms of support etc); provision for professionals (educators and policy makers); education for all (including disability awareness training as an aspect of equal opportunities education) and vocational education (including careers advice).

There has been little (continuing education) outcome from the research to date, prior to the proposed book, though I have published a paper based on the school education findings from my parent interviews (Leicester 1995) and reported these findings to the Society for Brain Damaged Children (in Coventry) and at academic conferences at the Universities of Bath, Birmingham and Belgrade. Both Tessa and I have helped to establish, and obtain funding for, a self advocacy course for people with severe learning difficulties based at the University's Hillfields Outreach Centre.

## **Findings**

### ***General***

Though beyond the scope of this present paper and its central concern with the contribution of the research to the direct knowledge base in continuing education, it should be recorded that significant widely shared non educational experience emerged from the transcribed interviews. For example, ninety per cent of the respondents described a process of the diagnosis of impairment, and its communication to them (or their parent in the case of newborn babies and young children) that was felt to be inadequate, and which added to the shock and distress of the recipient. For example, mothers were rarely listened to when they had noticed problems with their children (delaying diagnosis) and individuals were informed, when alone (ie without partner or friend present) of serious, even life threatening conditions, or only told indirectly. One young

woman, for example, insisting on tests against her doctor's insistence that she was suffering only from stress, learned of her multiple sclerosis like this:

"The hospital said, well here are the notes from your doctor, which is saying what is wrong with you and can you give it to your doctor. They didn't even bother to lick it down. They knew I would look and that was their way of telling me".

Even these non-educational experiences, given that they are so widely shared and so distressing, do have indirect implications for continuing education, in that they have implications for the professional training of those in health care and other relevant professions.

### *Schooling*

Parents of special children reported a mixture of positive and negative experiences of special education for their children. For example, most had a positive experience of the statementing process to identify their child's educational needs. The process had been made clear to them and they had been properly involved. However, almost all reported that because of funding difficulties, the schools had failed to provide the resources to meet these identified needs.

All of the parents had mixed feelings about the integration of special children into mainstream schools. They recognised that it was a desirable aim but one that could only be successful with proper resourcing, and a change of attitude among non-disabled children and adults.

To separate children with disabilities was assumed to be a part of a lifelong process of mis-education. We interviewed a special school teacher who is also the mother of a special child. She said:

"I think integration is fantastic, very important. It's good for both sides. The children in the mainstream school can learn from them and vice versa. The children from the mainstream school can learn to accept these children as normal children and not be afraid of them. And they'll grow up hopefully realising that. They'll be educated! These children aren't to be feared and have the right to be in society and they have a lot to offer as well. The mainstream children can see this for themselves and I'm certain there are a lot of adults that need educating because they don't really understand".

### *Continuing Education*

The area of provision, in post school education, that emerged as of most concern to the adults with disabilities, and to the parents with special children, was that of vocational training, including careers advice. The general picture was one of poor careers advice offering very limited training opportunities and inadequate training schemes. This was set against a background of high levels of unemployment for people with disabilities, leading to a loss of social interaction and restricted lives.

The point was made that people with disabilities have to perform better than others to overcome social prejudices. Another point made by several respondents was that for some jobs (counselling for example) the very experience of facing disability could be considered an advantage, but employers seem unaware of this.

Training schemes gave few options. Respondents felt that they were offered training for (menial) jobs below their capabilities, that there was a lack of information about support schemes available, and that the present economic climate has led to cuts to an already under-resourced

provision. One respondent described how she had been moved on too quickly from placement to placement in a youth training scheme, without explanation. One young woman described an experience of not being listened to; thus appropriate training could not be given.

"So you know, I mean basically I didn't have any careers advice and the advice I did have I personally didn't have a say. My careers officer had a say, my parents had a say, but not me. And the only time I found out about things was when people used to turn up on my doorstep and say, 'this is the next step for you' and I used to say, 'well who decided it? I didn't. I haven't even had a say .... I'm virtually an adult and you're still walking over me'."

Another respondent made the point that people are often scared even to apply for training, since they fear yet another rejection or another experience of failure.

The parents of special children were aware of, and troubled by the lack of post-school provision that their children would one day face. One mother pointed out that people with learning difficulties needed more, not less, continuing education, and an initial education reaching into their twenties. These parents also had much to say about their need for continuing education about disability. Since the schools were failing to integrate special children into the mainstream, prejudices against disabled people were learned, not unlearned during schooling. One respondent described how her neighbours petitioned against a small group home, for young men to learn independent living, being set up in the neighbourhood. Subsequently these young adults were subjected to verbal abuse and smashed windows.

A lack of integration of adults with disabilities into mainstream continuing education provision was seen to exacerbate unease with disabled adults. One mother of a special child said:

"Because much to my shame I can't converse, I can't communicate with an adult handicapped person. I can cope with Curtis and children that go to his school, but teenagers, I feel very shy. And that's bad. I have got to get over that one and learn how to communicate with adults as well".

Another black mother described her unlearning of stereotypes like this:

"When I first started working with the elderly I thought, 'these poor people, not being able to do anything'. But after a while it wasn't 'these poor people'. After a while I thought, 'gosh, these people are amazing', when you realise what age they were and what they were actually doing. And it was 'there's Sarah, there's Molly'. It wasn't 'these old people' anymore. It was Molly and Sarah you know, because you knew them as people. So I suppose it could be the same for integration. The mainstream children accepting the special children for who they are instead of what they think they are".

In short, the disability voice project confirms the need for a continuing education provision that offers more vocational and professional training opportunities for people with disabilities, promotes more integration of adults with disabilities into mainstream courses, offers more recreational opportunities and a provision in which a disability awareness perceptiveness permeates the continuing education of us all. We must find ways to expand provision in a climate of economic stringency. We must do so with appropriate support structures to guard against giving students yet more negative and painful experiences of failure and exclusion.

### **Conclusion - Impact on Researchers**

The impact of the research on the researchers has been considerable; both the impact of the research process and of the findings. The process of conducting these long and detailed

interviews was an emotional one. We were listening to accounts of suffering that resonated with our own experiences. We were listening to accounts of prejudice and discrimination that made us angry, to accounts of courage and love that elicited our admiration and of physical and emotional pain that touched us and the departmental support staff who did the transcribing.

The findings confirmed our perspective on disability as a form of oppression, and our belief in the value of qualitative research in education, of biography as part of that and of the importance of making space for marginalised voices in education. What we could not know in advance was how complex the picture we would find (along with the commonalities of experience) and, in particular, how our own perspective on disability would develop.

We knew, at the beginning, that there were two kinds of models of disability: sometimes referred to as individual and social models. The individual model of disability ascribes disability to the individual. The social model conceives disability as socially constructed. Thus, for example, we might distinguish impairment as an attribute of the individual, and disability as the degree to which, because of social factors (in the environment, in the education system etc) the impaired individual is disabled ('a blind person is disabled if there is no book in braille or no sound signals at the pedestrian traffic lights). The disability rights movement emphasises this social model of disability. We shared this perspective (and still do) but as a result of research findings we came to make a kind of synthesis of personal and social models. We saw that much of disability is socially constructed (and thus could be removed through social, including educational, change). But we also thought that some disablement through impairment cannot be removed. (Certain qualitative sighted experiences are simply lost to a blind person, for example.) Similarly, some, but not all of the negative experiences of our respondent could have been avoided. An appropriate disability aware education for all requires the development of a commitment to justice, but also the development of qualities of compassion and empathy (Leicester 1995).

Both the process of the research and our findings have increased our commitment to the disability rights movement. We also see the need for further and larger scale research. For example, we would identify the need for research into the educational experiences of black disabled people, of the siblings of people with disabilities, and of those with hidden disabilities. For a variety of reasons, we ourselves are unlikely to be able to continue with this work, but would certainly encourage continuing educators to explore the field, and would be happy to share our experiences of this particular, small scale research project with them. As our findings indicate, continuing education in connection with special needs is important, but (with some honourable exceptions) too much absent (in all its dimensions) from our collective provision.

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# Returners, Mathematics and Targeting

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## The Project

This paper summarises the results of a UFC/HEFCE funded project run at the University of Exeter in 1992/94 which investigated whether the mathematics GCSE requirement for courses such as teacher education and some social sciences is a barrier to higher education for adult returners on Access courses. Access students are not a homogeneous group so we also questioned whether, if mathematics was a barrier, this was for all Access students or just for particular, identifiable sub-groups. This work led to a further exploration of targeting policies in Access provision. More detailed results of the project have been published elsewhere (see publication list).

## Mathematics as a Barrier

Two questionnaires on attitudes to mathematics, one for students and one for staff, were tested in a pilot survey then sent to 109 institutions offering Access to Social Science and Humanities courses (20% national sample) and Access to Teacher Education courses (100% national sample) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Analysis of these questionnaires indicated that students are arriving on Access with considerable anxieties about mathematics often based on bad school experiences; that the approach taken by tutors is critical in how students perceive mathematics and how they accomplish what is for some a difficult subject, both emotionally and practically; and that the provision of a mathematics component in an Access course has a number of enabling roles for the students.

## Mathematics and the Constituent Groups of Access

We extended this analysis by considering the mathematics requirement with particular reference to the constituent groups in Access. The social classifications considered were gender, class, age, race, those with little in the way of formal qualifications, and those with no mathematics qualification. The first and most obvious conclusion to draw from our results was that there is a sizable proportion of each group that considered mathematics to be a high barrier for themselves and this is true whether the question is asked directly or indirectly. Earlier it was argued that these attitudes were being changed for those on Access courses. Nevertheless these statistics indicate that mathematics is an area that must concern all Access providers. It is also important to note that respondents express more concern when asked directly if mathematics is a barrier. This is perhaps not surprising as the very question may cause them to recall not only their own experiences and fears of mathematics but also the negative views of mathematics within our society.

## No Mathematical Qualification

It comes as no surprise that people with no mathematics qualification upon leaving school see mathematics as a barrier to higher education and exhibit the highest levels of anxiety. This poses a dilemma for access providers. Access is premised on the notion of open entry but it is clear from both our statistics and an analysis of individual comments that some people are entering or considering entering Access with very low levels of mathematical knowledge. It may be that

people in this group should be counselled to take a mathematics course prior to Access or seriously consider alternative routes that do not require mathematics.

### **Low Level of Non-mathematical Qualifications**

We had anticipated that this group might see mathematics as a high barrier but they showed no exceptional problem.

### **Gender**

It is clear from our results that women on Access, whether asked directly or indirectly, show more anxiety about mathematics than men. There are many cultural explanations for this (Walkerdine 1989). It would seem that both at Open Days and in early mathematics sessions on the Access course, tutors need to discuss these cultural experiences and expectations with both men and women to raise awareness in the students that earlier failure in mathematics may be due to this socio-cultural reality rather than their own inadequacy.

### **Race**

In the Access group, 7.8% were Black which compares well with the 5.5% for the whole population in the 1991 Census. When questioned indirectly, Black people as a group, showed the same anxiety as White people but, when the group is broken down further, Africans and Caribbeans showed higher anxiety. The results of the direct question about mathematics as a barrier indicated greater problems for the Black group. Each sub-group of Black minorities had a higher percentage stating that mathematics was, for them, a high barrier than for the cohort. Although some of the group sizes are small, this indicates a worrying trend.

### **Age**

Our results do not indicate a clear correlation between age and anxiety about mathematics.

### **Class**

Empirical research has traditionally used the Registrar General's (RG) classification of occupations as the method of classifying people in the social structure. However, past theoretical and research debates concerning social classification and women (Stanworth 1984; Roberts and Barker 1989, 1990) would suggest that perceptions of women on Access gained through use of this classification may not bear close relation to reality. Work on this project published elsewhere (Benn and Burton 1993b) agrees with this contention and hence we do not feel able to draw any conclusions on whether links exist between class and anxiety with mathematics.

### **Targeting in Access**

The research raised fundamental issues about targeting in Access and further national surveys of Access course directors and Access Validating Agencies (AVA) development officers established that, although there is a strong rhetoric supporting Access as an more emancipatory approach, commitment to collective action and a belief in a more egalitarian society have been forced into the background by the more urgent imperatives of education for social conformity and a well trained workforce.

## Background

Access provision is a deliberate attempt by the adult and continuing education sectors of the education system to alter the values of the education system at a variety of levels, and to alter the class, race and gender composition of those who participate in education beyond the statutory school leaving age (Kearney and Diamond 1990). Access has been challenged as an attempt to diffuse disenchantment and disaffection in many alienated communities by creating a black middle-class in an effort to control communities from the inside (Benn & Fieldhouse 1991; Kearney and Diamond 1990; John 1981). Nevertheless the notion of targeting groups disadvantaged by gender, race and class has received general support.

## Participation in Access

As could be expected, it is not easy to obtain a clear picture of Access participation nationally in a range of provision which prides itself on meeting local need. Nevertheless certain trends can be identified. Access is attracting mainly mature women who have little in the way of formal qualifications. The Registrar General's classification of occupations is not sensitive to the particular issues of women's work, as discussed earlier and is hence a crude tool for Access participation. However, it seems that most students are in the lower or middle middle classes rather than the working class. Representation from the ethnic minorities is higher than national representation but arguably low for provision with a particular mission to attract these groups.

The rhetoric of Access is located in the targeting of certain groups traditionally under-represented in higher education. However when asked in the questionnaire whether the prime purpose of Access is to change the position of certain groups in society or give individuals increased opportunity, a substantial majority of both AVAs and course directors opted for the latter. This focus on the individual was reinforced by the overwhelming response of course directors that selection was primarily on the basis of enthusiasm and motivation, of necessity characteristics of an individual not a group.

Historically the mission of Access was informed by a desire to reach those in society who had least benefited from education. It can be argued however that even Access provision is orientated to the dominant or middle class values that are reflected in the education system as a whole and the concept of disadvantage in Access reflects a concern with helping individuals to adapt to dominant educational and cultural structures but does not question the modes by which education controls differential access to knowledge and power (Keddie 1980). The outcome of our survey is to support the argument that the rhetoric of individualism obscures the way in which terms like 'individual need' and 'student centred' are socially constructed and located in ways that make Access more readily available to certain groups (*ibid*). Access provision, like the higher education it prepares students for, does not attract certain groups such as those from social classes 4 and 5. Individualism and a curriculum which reflects middle class, white lifestyles may be the deterrent.

Access is often referred to as a social movement. Social purpose is inherent in any movement and is evidenced in Access by its commitment to targeting. However, selection criteria that focus primarily upon enthusiasm and motivation, a philosophy that reinforces the New Right concentration upon the role of the individual and the demanding tasks which result from the current 'mainstreaming' of Access, all divert Access from this commitment.

## Targeting by Ethnic Group

For ethnic minority participation to increase, we argue that commitment to equal opportunities and widening access are in themselves not enough. There needs to be active recruiting and



marketing for under-represented groups. Targeting policies both in programmes and in AVAs need to be re-assessed. For these to be effective there need to be agreed target figures and methods of implementation and evaluation. Without targets little will change, they provide the incentive and rationale for positive action strategies. Programmes need to re-examine their selection criteria, particularly when there are more applicants than places. In line with the targeting policies of the programme and AVA, it may be appropriate to introduce positive discrimination or, at the least, criteria that are located in the targeted groups rather than just motivation and commitment, important though these are. Targeting needs to be focussed more specifically than the broad categories of non-White, Black or Asian.

### **Targeting by Gender**

Is access to higher education a class or gender issue? We consider that many women still experience considerable disadvantage in our society today and hence the gender issue is crucial in all educational provision. However, disadvantage is not confined solely to women and Access with its strong and powerful rhetoric of equal opportunities could seize the opportunity of expansion in further education to target one other group that is disadvantaged in terms of both job opportunities and access to higher education ie working class men (Benn and Burton 1995c).

### **An Evaluation of the Outcomes of the Project**

Outcomes of the project were both theoretical and empirical and they contributed to several areas of the knowledge base in continuing education. They clarified the deterrent effect of the mathematics requirement for some university entry, showing that this does vary over identifiable subgroups. Links were made between current theories in adult education and mathematics education and in addition examples of good practice were identified and practical ways forward noted. The project also contributed to notions of targeting in Access. It exposed the inherent dichotomy in Access between adult education provision as a catalyst for social change or an agent for social conformity through an examination of the contradictory social, political and economic forces acting on Access course providers.

The ideas and issues raised whilst located in the area of Access can be interpreted in the wider context of continuing education provision. The use of Adults Learning and the Journal of Access Studies as well as mainstream continuing education journals has ensured wider dissemination to staff in further and community education as well as university adult education, to practitioners as well as researchers.

Through the national surveys, I am convinced of the dedication and commitment of tutors to Access provision and in particular that of the Mathematics tutors. The student comments are universally complementary and appreciative. However, this research has made me aware of the crucial role university adult education has to play in ensuring a greater confidence and more positive attitude to the learning of mathematics, a subject which is crucial for all individuals whether as members of the workforce, citizens or for their own self-development and pleasure. It is this branch of adult education that has the remit to provide a social, political and educational framework in which mathematics educators can locate their own practice, drawing on theories of mathematical education, until now directed at initial education, and linking these with current adult education theories. Many Access tutors have little or no training in the education of adults. The effect of this can be seen at conferences on the theme of adults learning mathematics where the lack of the wider frameworks within which mathematics is situated leaves educators vulnerable to current ideology. There is a real need for more provision to support this group of tutors in what is often an isolated role.

The project also reinforced my belief that education is ultimately political, even or indeed particularly in subjects such as mathematics. For over two thousand years, mathematics has been dominated by the belief that it is a body of infallible and objective truth, far removed from the affairs and values of humanity (Ernest 1991:xi). This body of truth was seen as existing in its own right independently of whether anyone believes or even knows about it. In more recent times there have been serious critiques of this belief in the certainty of mathematics, the belief that fundamentally mathematics exists apart from the human beings that do mathematics and that Pi is in the sky. Now it is more common to argue that mathematics is not a body of truth existing outside human experience. It is a construct or an invention rather than a discovery, a collection of norms and hence social in nature. This attack on the certainty of mathematics led to the questioning of its neutrality. If mathematics is certain, if it reflects the God-like power of innate, transcendent human reason, if it is a body of absolute truth, and if the answers are already written, then it is independent. It must be neutral. However if mathematics is a social construct, an invention not a discovery, then it carries a social responsibility. The belief in the certainty and neutrality of mathematics and science has deprived these subjects of any cultural or social context and the consequent dehumanisation of these subjects has alienated and hence disempowered many in society.

This pedagogical approach has had limited success when the whole body of students in Britain is considered. Its failure is even more marked with groups that consistently underachieve in our education system, groups such as ethnic minorities, the working class and girls or women. Practitioners in the field who are teaching these groups as adult returners have developed alternative approaches. They set mathematics in a historical, cultural and socio-political environment and they ensure a more relevant syllabus set in the context of every-day life. They ensure mathematics is seen like other disciplines as a negotiated journey, a quest and a voyage of discovery. The main result is an increase in student motivation with subsequent increase in success. This practice, though perhaps pragmatic rather than theoretical in origin, reflects the view of some philosophers that mathematics far from being a body of truth is in fact a collection of norms and a social construct. The focus of my research over the next few years will be a further exploration of these ideas.

I am extremely grateful to the HEFCE for the opportunity to undertake this research which would not have been possible without the funding. I found the whole exercise rewarding and stimulating and the knowledge gained has enriched me beyond measure. I am indebted to my research assistant, Rob Burton for all his hard work and for the thousands of people who completed our various questionnaires. The relatively high response rate, indicates the importance of the topics to students and providers alike. Throughout the project, I was given unstinting help by so many people and I should like to take this opportunity to thank them all.

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# **Access of Adults to the University: A Comparative UK/Belgian Study**

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## **Origins of the Research Project**

Over the past few years the widening of access for adults into higher education (HE) has been high on the research agenda in Britain, with research focusing particularly at the point of entry and participation. Access to higher education within a European context is also an issue of increasing importance but less well addressed by research. This paper outlines the findings of an English/Belgian institutional case-study research project on the policy and practice of the access of non-traditional students to universities. The project was funded by the UFC for a two year period, 1992-94, and involves the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Warwick and the Faculte de Psychologie et des Sciences de l'Education at the Universite Catholique de Louvain.

Working comparatively and collaboratively in cross-national research the two research teams were interested in examining the following question in relation to adult access and universities; what makes an institution accessible? Progress initially was slower than expected largely due to the comparative and cross-national nature of the project. Originally the project set out to undertake an analysis at the micro-level of the politics of change within universities in relation to adult access. This has not been achieved but research has continued since 1994 and we are now seeking other funding to realise this goal.

## **A Summary of the Research Project: A European Approach**

By concentrating on a comparison at the macro, meso and micro levels of access policy and practice within universities the research aimed to identify national, institutional and educational arrangements and strategies for facilitating the access and achievement of non-traditional students. Beginning with the macro level the impact of national policy within Belgium and England was studied and evaluated. At the meso and micro levels research centred on institutional case studies analysing several elements: the experiences of non-traditional students, the perceptions of academic staff and organisational policies and practices. Six variables were considered: admissions conditions and procedures, course schedule, course location, curriculum, pedagogy and student services. The research process was divided into distinct but inter-related stages:

- macro level; an outline of the education systems in England and Belgium
- meso level; a quantitative description of the universities' policies and practices in relation to admissions conditions, course location, time of teaching and adult participation rate
- micro level; a qualitative study of the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of mature students and lecturers in relation to access

- an analysis of the organisational dynamics and the politics of change underlying access policies and practices.

Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used drawing on the different strengths of the two groups of researchers to give a full picture of the two institutions. The team is strong because it includes researchers from different intellectual traditions. The Louvain group includes a demographer. At Warwick one asset lies in our life history approaches. By supporting each other we were able to draw on a wide range of methods. Findings from the research are now being fed back to appropriate policy-making bodies within both institutions to enhance policy and practice in this field.

### **The Starting Point: Venturing into Quantitative Data**

Working comparatively in cross-national research is stimulating but problematic. Our starting point was to familiarise ourselves with each others' national education systems with a particular emphasis on access and HE. A shared understanding of the English and Belgian education systems was essential. This process took longer than expected but it did enable us to stand back and examine key concepts, such as access, adult, non-traditional students, from different perspectives. A common understanding of concepts between the two European cultures was assumed:

*Quite difficult was the necessary process of separating and distancing oneself from the taken-for-granted; from the assumption that the way things were done in one's own country was natural, self-evidently better. The problem was not one of chauvinism but of seeing anew what was familiar, yet perhaps odd, seen from outside, and odd too ... looked at afresh in trying to compare it with another system.*  
(Bourgeois et al, 1994: ii)

To determine what makes a university accessible to adults both groups began with a quantitative survey of key arrangements; admissions conditions, time of teaching and location of teaching (on or off campus) in relation to all undergraduate and graduate programmes. The adult participation rate was analysed by programme, department and faculty and in comparison to the three above arrangements. By combining participation with the three kinds of arrangements a typology of programmes was constructed. At this stage some methodological problems were encountered largely because of the different education systems in England and Belgium. For example at Warwick it was difficult to:

*quantify the admissions conditions on a continuum of openness as the Belgian partners elected to do. It was not possible to devise a truly satisfactory and parallel typology for the English university. The admissions system appears ambiguous and problematical alongside the relatively clearcut Belgian system; there was not a standard procedure across all departments. Thus, at Louvain, it was possible to obtain information on admissions conditions from a course catalogue. At Warwick a questionnaire had to be sent to admissions tutors in each department, with consequential problems of securing returns in some instances.*  
(Bourgeois et al, 1995:5)

203 programmes were analysed at Warwick for the 1992-93 academic year. 117 undergraduate and 84 graduate programmes. Two programmes aimed specifically at mature students, part-time and 2+2 degrees, were included among the undergraduate programmes. The 2+2 degree programme is aimed at local non-traditional adult students. No formal entry qualifications are required. It is a four year degree, the first two years being taught in local FE colleges. At Louvain the total was 293 programmes across the three levels of degree study; level 1; candidature, level 2; licence and level 3; graduate study. A variety of admissions conditions were identified at Warwick ranging from the three recognised routes of entry; 'A' levels, Access and vocational qualifications through to APPEL and no formal qualifications, while at Louvain there was a simpler six-part hierarchical classification from the least to the most open.

### Comparing the Results

Comparing the two sets of data some commonalities can be found. Similar departments and faculties, Social Sciences and Education, at Warwick and Louvain are more open in terms of admissions conditions and similarly the Sciences are the most closed. However, at Warwick there is no uniformity within a faculty: in Social Studies Business Studies, Sociology, Women's Studies, Race and Ethnic Studies appear open and Politics, Economics and Law restrictive. At Louvain the most open programmes lie within the one-year candidatures and first year of licence degrees. The Belgian degree structure is a 2 year (Candidature) plus 2 years (Licence) plus 2 years (doctorate). Entry is more open than Britain as an 18 year old has the right of entry to a university provided they have passed the final school examination, the DAEFS.

Both institutions are inflexible regarding time arrangements such as evening or weekend teaching. Only 11% of programmes at Louvain have such arrangements although there is differentiation by level of study as first year of level 2 and level 2 complementary programmes (licence) have a higher percentage (34 and 31%) of time arrangements. This includes faculties of Psychology and Education, Economics, and Social and Political Science which offer special programmes to adults. The lack of flexibility at candidature level makes it very difficult for working adults to join traditional first-level programmes. This level is entered mostly by school-leavers. Faculty level is more important than departmental level at Louvain. Programmes not attached to faculties offer the most time arrangements (63%). Next is Psychology and Education at 55%, mostly at level 2. At Warwick only 17% of undergraduate programmes are taught outside of daytime hours. These are the part-time degree programmes aimed largely at adults in full-time employment. A higher degree of flexibility is found amongst graduate programmes.

Regarding location of teaching only 4, all education programmes, out of 293 programmes, less than 2%, at Louvain are taught off campus. Only the 2+2 degree at Warwick has a special teaching arrangement in the first two years. Summarising these three arrangements the analysis shows two main routes for the entry of adults without formal qualifications at Louvain, both at the second level of study. Of these one is a bridging programme, offered by the Open Faculty for non-traditional students moving from a non-university higher education programme to university. The other is to enter directly into a licence programme. In contrast it is relatively easy for non-traditional students to enter into certain departments at Warwick.

Differences in cultural and methodological traditions surfaced in the study of adult participation. For the Warwick group it is important to know the social composition of students for addressing issues of equity. Breaking down the adult student population by gender, race, class and age is considered important. Collecting such information was not a problem as the relevant data was available from the administration. Equally at the qualitative stage how could we understand the experiences of non-traditional students without looking at the impact of class, race and gender

upon their lives? In Belgium educational research rarely focuses on these issues, and these data are not readily available, institutionally or nationally.

At Louvain adult students consist of 9.4% of the total student population. The proportion of adults on education unit programmes which are not attached to faculties is 82%. Next comes the Theology Faculty with 56%, followed by Philosophy with 37%, Psychology and Education 19% and Economics, Social and Political Science, 11%. Warwick's statistics are differentiated between undergraduate and graduate programmes. A higher percentage of adult students can be found at graduate level (first year) than at undergraduate level, 69%:21%. This is quite high for a traditional, 'old', elite university. Most adults are to be found in the second level of study at Louvain. Sciences have the lowest number of adult students in both institutions, although at Warwick they are the largest faculty. Humanities have the next lowest number. Not surprisingly Social Sciences and Education share the highest proportion of adults, again across both institutions. Cultural differences between departments and faculties, particularly Social Studies and Sciences features in the qualitative data. Women, amongst adults, outnumber men at Warwick by 3:1 on both full and part-time undergraduate courses although the numbers are more even at graduate level.

In conclusion, Louvain is better geared to meeting the needs of second chance adults mainly at second level, and of successful graduates seeking further qualifications, than to providing second chance access opportunities. In the first year of level one only 2.3% of students are adults. Most adults are continuing professional education students extending their existing higher education qualifications. Only a small minority of programmes admit non-traditional students with non-formal qualifications. On the whole admissions conditions and arrangements are more flexible at higher levels, facilitated by bridging programmes for transition from non-university higher education to university.

Little relationship can be found between admissions conditions and adult participation at Warwick. Some programmes which have open admissions conditions have very few adult students, yet there are programmes with restrictive admissions conditions and a high proportion of adults. For Louvain the proportion of adults is much higher in programmes where special arrangements are made for the timing of courses (71% :5%) and the difference is more marked still with off-campus teaching provision (95%:9%). These are not significant factors at Warwick. Rather, what is important is the social group of the adult students. Evening teaching is an essential prerequisite for part-time degree students in full-time employment. 2+2 students, particularly Social Studies, are mostly women with domestic commitments requiring daytime teaching hours, preferably coinciding with school hours.

### **Moving to the Qualitative Stage**

The Louvain group went into more depth in analysing quantitative data. At Warwick we were eager to move to the qualitative stage. Qualitative data provided both research teams with a fuller picture of what is happening, allowing us to bring the human element into the research process by talking to adult students, admissions tutors and academic staff. Using the quantitative data on adult participation rates four departments were identified for study at Warwick, one department with a high number of adult students, Sociology, one department with a low number of adults, Biological Sciences and two departments with an average number of adults, Law and Arts Education (a BA degree with teacher training). All three categories of undergraduate adult students, 2+2, part-time and full-time, were included.

We wanted to understand why as adults they had decided to study for a degree at this particular moment in their lives and what it is like to be a mature student from the perspective of students

themselves. Employing a life history approach participants were encouraged to talk about their experiences in schooling, employment and the family. In relation to university life we looked at, for example, their experiences and attitudes towards studying, teaching approaches, different departments, studying with younger students, support systems, facilities and the advantages and disadvantages of being a student. To complete the picture of how accessible the institution is the attitudes and perspectives of academic staff towards adult students and the issue of access were considered.

A wealth of data was collected from questionnaires and interviews. Only experiences at undergraduate level are considered here. While sharing similar expectations and aspirations the background and needs of each three categories of students differ. 2+2 Social Studies students are mostly working class women and unemployed men. The majority of students are in their late twenties or thirties. Class and gender factors played a significant role in preventing many from continuing in post 16 education. A 2+2 degree offers, as one Social Studies student explained, 'the opportunity to take advantage of a system of education which for some is taken for granted but which for me at 18 was never an option'. For many of the women a traditional female job followed by marriage and motherhood had been the limits of their horizon:

*I got no encouragement from my parents. In those days from a working class background the idea was that you worked for a few years and then got married.*

(2+2 Social Studies, female)

Similar views are expressed by women in studies by Pascall and Cox (1993) and Edwards (1993). Full-time three year degree students enter largely via Access or 'A' levels. Many are single, in their early twenties and from outside the local University community. Part-time students are on the whole more highly qualified than 2+2 students and many are in full-time employment.

Entry to Warwick was viewed as a positive experience. Participants felt staff were understanding of the needs of mature students and found the institution to be a welcoming one. As one part-time student recalled:

*Both interviewers were mature and aware of the problems encompassed in terms of fitting study into work and family commitments. Both were sympathetic and supportive.*

A full-time student received the following encouragement:

*My interviewer gave the impression that it was not beyond the capabilities of mature students to gain a degree.*

Admissions tutors in the four sample departments stressed that they process applications by adults differently from those of 18 year olds. With adults they are looking for academic ability to cope, commitment and interest. One Sociology admissions tutor, providing a sociological explanation, admitted:

*However, the interviewer stance has to be very different - 18 year olds are the ones who have been the 'successes' of the education system' adults very often have been failed by that system.*

An Arts Education tutor stressed the importance of life experiences:



*Discussion of life-experiences becomes important in a higher proportion. We might push a little harder if we're expecting to be kinder to them over 'A' level's.*

In practice the admissions procedure was not as clear-cut as suggested by the quantitative data. Discretion, exerted by some admissions tutors, can play an important role. For example, although Access is an accepted route of entry, Biological Sciences were sceptical about its value for their subject area. What does emerge strongly from the data is the presence of cultural differences or contrasting academic tribes as Becher (1989) describes it. Biological Sciences frequently refer to the nature of their academic discipline as being problematic for adult students:

*They have to be committed to want to do a Science degree. Science moves rapidly and 5-10 years away is a long time. In Arts this is not a problem - you don't forget how to read a book but DNA synthesis may now be part of school curriculum and we expect them to know it.*

The belief in the 'high knowledge' of Science compared to other disciplines is reflected constantly in comments made by respondents.

*In Science adults cannot catch up with the workload. In Arts they probably can and should be encouraged to enter Arts/Sociology type courses.*

The notion of a hierarchy of academic knowledge within universities is discussed by Becher (1989) and Bourdieu (1988). Different cultural identities are not wholly confined to Sciences versus non-Sciences. 2+2 and part-time students participating in more than one department commented upon contrasting experiences within the same faculty. Sociology and Applied Social Studies, unlike Politics, are frequently cited as model departments in their support and practice towards mature students. One 2+2 Social Studies exclaimed, 'Sociology are accomodating but with Politics you'd think you were in a different university'. Another respondent replied succinctly:

*I think the Politics department at Warwick has got a lot of catching up to do . They disappointed me greatly. They are so rigid, strict in their petty rules. Sociology department I found so warm, affectionate and treat you as a human being so I'm very biased with Politics. Lecturers in Sociology are more supportive.*

In practice it has resulted in some students changing from Politics to another subject area. Subject choice is also an issue for other adult students. A minority of part-time students would like to see a wider range of teaching times and course choice in the evenings. On the other side of the coin teaching at these times has implications for the family and leisure time of staff. At the moment only a small number of staff teach in the evenings but in the survey 65% stated they would be prepared to.

Full-time and 2+2 female students with children occasionally feel restricted in their choice of courses as they want ones which fit in with school hours. Again they experience different departmental attitudes. One full-time Sociology student argued that mature students should be given first choice on seminar times as, 'it would make such a difference, women particularly, to

how they could manage'. In practice the majority of respondents have found lecturers willing to change seminar times. Opinion was divided about whether or not Warwick should be more flexible. Some women argued that teaching times should not be changed for them but often these are students who have supportive family or friends:

*On the core courses there are so many seminar classes to choose from that one will fit in. You know its coming and you've got two years to prepare for it. I knew how old the children would be and I've got supportive parents.*

(2+2 student)

These practical but important issues raise questions about institutional change. How far should Warwick change to meet the needs of mature students, and to what extent should students adapt to the institution?

The actual learning experience proved to be central to the day-to-day life of mature students. Wanting to learn and to be able to prove to themselves they are capable of learning, and 'completing their education', are the main reasons why they have chosen to study for a degree. Tied up with this is the desire to improve their employment prospects and escape from boring and unfulfilling jobs. Although eager to learn, many were at first nervous, particularly those who had been out of education for a long time, at the thought of starting a degree course. As one male, Labour Studies, part-time student explained:

*I wondered what on earth I was doing here because of the language used but I persevered and now I enjoy and understand it.*

Academic staff are on the whole impressed by the learning skills of non-traditional adults. The following comment by a Sociology lecturer was typical:

*Mature students do just as well if not better statistically than non-mature students and some of our best results, our outstanding students, very few in number, have been mature students among them. I think our general view (the departments') is that mature students make the whole life of the Department healthier in some sense. In that latter way it has made the whole experience of teaching more rewarding. This is a universal view throughout the Department.*

The problem of juggling roles, particularly for women, and managing time for study with its impact upon relationships and family life were analysed. What is apparent is their determination and enjoyment of learning. No one reported regretting their decision to study for a degree and all felt that studying had changed them as people for the better. The value of lifelong learning and the opportunity of being given a 'second chance' was stressed:

*It gives a different dimension to life apart from home and work. This venture is just for me, to justify me to myself if you like. You may probably describe it as a boost to one's ego. I would never have thought 5 years ago that I would be taking a degree now as someone who was labelled a failure at the age of 15.*

(female part-time degree student)

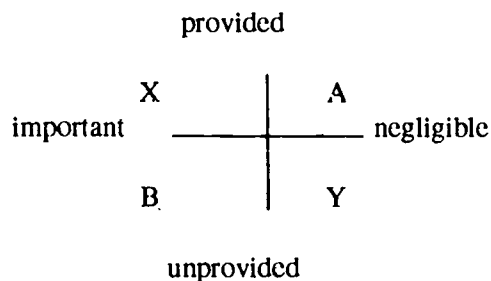
*Knowledge is wonderful. I'm questioning things. Why did I get to 40 before I went to university? I've learnt so much. Whatever happens no one can take the three years away. Its been like gold. I've really enjoyed it.*  
(2+2, female student)

Louvain analysed the same issues as Warwick at the qualitative stage by different methods. Choosing a sample of 36 programmes based on their particular characteristics in terms of adult participation and admissions conditions, time and location arrangements, the director in charge of each of these programmes was interviewed. The aim was to obtain complementary information about the three types of arrangements already analysed and to examine in depth other kinds of arrangements such as the curriculum, course format, teaching methods, support systems, part-time arrangements, services and facilities.

It would take too long to present the detailed results but three major elements can be emphasised. First, the analysis enabled a full inventory of all arrangements at Louvain to be drawn up, locating them in the different components of the institution. Secondly, the inventory enabled a complete description of a typology of programmes to be undertaken. Thirdly, by comparing the data on time, location and admissions conditions with comments made by the directors it is possible to distinguish between the formal situations as presented by the authorities and the actual practices.

A questionnaire was sent to all adult students at Louvain. There was agreement amongst respondents concerning time and location arrangements. Respondents who had encountered a time and/or location arrangement stated that this arrangement had a positive effect upon their access and/or success at Louvain. On the other hand, if they had not encountered any time or location arrangement they did not feel that the lack of such arrangements had affected their access and/or success at Louvain. This finding is represented by the following diagram.

#### Sketch Providing Arrangements



#### Contributing to Continuing Education: Some Reflections

An interesting characteristic of our research is its comparative approach. It has produced original tools and materials which integrate the particularities of each institution and country. A comparative approach has widened our understanding of what makes a university accessible to adult students and the implications for policy. Understanding the issues of access within a European framework is of growing importance. Other European countries have now joined the Belgian/English team; hopefully, a truly European picture will emerge.

Most research tends to focus on one aspect of the access of non-traditional students. Ours has encompassed a multi-level but inter-related analysis of the macro, meso and micro levels through in-depth case-studies. This three-level approach enables us to acquire a more detailed and overall picture of the components and dynamics of universities.

The research has been valuable to both institutions. For Warwick we gained insight into the attitudes and experiences of our three categories of mature students. So far little research has been undertaken which compares the experiences of different groups of students. Their comments and recommendations are being fed into appropriate committees and departments to improve policy and practice. Being aware of the perspectives of admissions tutors and lecturers helps us to identify areas for staff development and other development work. In Belgium Louvain's study has opened new doors in the field of adult education research as it is the first time a global approach (national, institutional, departmental) has been developed about adult access to higher education and the accessibility of programmes in higher education. This interim stage of research highlights several substantive issues in relation to both findings and process; it contributes academically, methodologically and at policy level.

The research team is now analysing factors to explain diversities across departments and its implications for institutional change. This part of the research considers the academic world by drawing on the theories of Bourdieu (1988) and Becher (1989) to identify the academic cultural determinants and its relationship to organisational change (Baldrige, 1971, Pfeffer, 1981).

### **Reflections upon the Research as Researchers**

Being involved in comparative, cross-national research has developed the researchers in a way which a national research project could not have done. Cultural differences in the interpretation of concepts and approaches to methodology meant we could not take our ideas for granted. It is a rewarding and stimulating, although at times, frustrating experience. An important outcome for the researchers is an increased understanding of themselves as researchers and their institutions. Without a doubt working collaboratively and comparatively has sharpened our research skills.

As a female researcher, interviewing predominantly female mature students was an enjoyable and enriching experience. Respondents spoke at length about their lives and valued someone listening to their 'stories'. By drawing on feminist (Oakley, 1981, Reinharz, 1992) and interactionist (Seidman, 1991) traditions the research data was richer and less exploitative of participants. What was encouraging was the interest and enthusiasm of the research participants in the research aims and objectives at both universities. All expressed a willingness to collaborate in the future. This for us as researchers is encouraging.

It is too early to judge the long-term effects of the research upon institutional change. For Louvain one positive outcome already is the awareness the academic authorities now have of adult participation and access within the institution. As Warwick, the hope is that the findings will result in more effective policies in the future which will enhance the access and experiences of non-traditional students.

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