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ABSTRACT
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questions, beginning in the 1920s with the vision of Eduard Lindeman
and John Dewey. It considers the contradictory roles of adult
education practice bringing learners into conformity with mainstream
expectations; selecting, developing, and validating the privileges of
an educated elite; and linking learning with social change. The
influence of human capital theory upon adult education practices has
fostered divisions between those concerned with developing autonomous
individuals and those concerned with encouraging social
responsiblity, between those focused on professional status for adult
educators and those emphasizing social action. In the 1980s, such
movements as popular education, feminism, and critical theory led to
increasing calls for a revitalized adult education curriculum focused
on transformation and learning to take action. Two influential
educators inspired practice for social change: Myles Horton and Paulo
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instrument for the legitimation and perpetuation of the status quo,
grassroots efforts continue to link learning with democratic social
change. The paper concludes that what may be needed is reconstruction
of the foundations of adult education and possibly renaming of the
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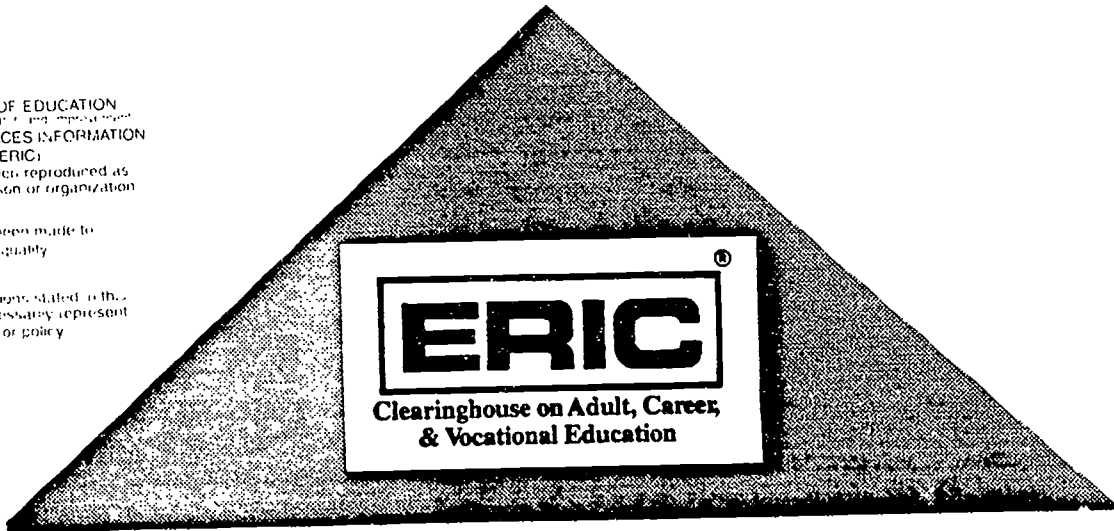*From Center Stage to the Wings and Back Again*

Information Series No. 365

Tom Heaney

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Adult Education for Social Change:

From Center Stage to the Wings and Back Again

Information Series No. 365

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Foreword

The Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education (ERIC/ACVE) is 1 of 16 clearinghouses in a national information system that is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. This paper was developed to fulfill one of the functions of the clearinghouse—interpreting the literature in the ERIC database. This paper should be of interest to adult education practitioners and students.

ERIC/ACVE would like to thank Tom Heaney for his work in the preparation of this paper. Dr. Heaney is associate professor at National-Louis University, directing graduate programs in adult education. From 1986-1994 he was director of the Lindeman Center for Community Empowerment through Education at Northern Illinois University. He was a founding associate of the Alliance for Popular Education and co-founder of North American Educators of Adults for Democratic Social Change.

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Executive Summary

To what extent was social change on center stage during adult education's formative years? Whose vision embraced social change and whose did not? What factors led to the decline of social action as a goal of adult education, and what factors suggest renewed interest in social goals?

This paper examines these questions, beginning in the 1920s with the vision of Eduard Lindeman and John Dewey. It considers the contradictory roles of adult education practice—bringing learners into conformity with mainstream expectations; selecting, developing, and validating the privileges of an educated elite; and linking learning with social change. The influence of human capital theory upon adult education practice has fostered divisions between those concerned with developing autonomous individuals and those concerned with encouraging social responsibility, between those focused on professional status for adult educators and those emphasizing social action.

In the 1980s, such movements as popular education, feminism, and critical theory led to increasing calls for a revitalized adult education curriculum focused on transformation and learning to take action. Two influential educators inspired practice for social change: Myles Horton and Paulo Freire. As adult education becomes a big business and remains an instrument for the legitimation and perpetuation of the status quo, grassroots efforts continue to link learning with democratic social change. The paper concludes that what may be needed is reconstruction of the foundations of adult education and possibly renaming of the field of practice and study.

Information on adult education's role in social change may be found in the ERIC database using the following descriptors: *Adult Education, Adult Educators, Change, Democracy, Educational History, *Educational Philosophy, *Role of Education, *Social Action, *Social Change. Asterisks indicated descriptors that are particularly relevant.

Introduction

Adult education in the United States began in the flowering of democratic hopes and aspirations. Early commentators described a "movement," a spontaneous commitment to learning outside the walls of formal schooling—learning linked inexorably to building a democratic social order.

At the same time, embedded within the practice of adult education were the learned incapacities of not-so-golden school days, which sought to extend their tentacle arms to the very ends of the lifespan. The eventual collapse of the almost-movement was inevitable, given the propensity of many adult educators to bestow instrumental knowledge on "human resources" (Cunningham 1993) and their inclinations toward discipline, control, and mandated learning, which have afflicted K-12 schooling. Liberatory adult education grew up alongside a top-down, professionalizing, and more lucrative practice—a practice that devalued learning-in-action and stressed adaptation to predetermined institutional and national goals.

Someone once said that nostalgia is the lingering desire to return to a past that never was. To what extent was social change on center stage during adult education's formative years beginning in the 1930s? Whose vision embraced social change and whose did not? What factors have led to the dissolution of social purpose and a turning away from social action and change as a goal of adult education? And, most important, what factors suggest a renewed interest in social goals and encourage a change-oriented practice?

At issue is the social purpose of the field—the socially redeeming merit in the work to which adult educators commit themselves. Democratic vision, once on center stage, edged to the sidelines by techniques and the narrow, instrumental goals of "human capital development," is now enjoying a modest, if not resounding, comeback (Newman 1994; Thompson 1980; Westwood 1990). Emphasizing adult education theory and practices in the United States during the present century[1], the following pages will trace the comings and goings of change-oriented social action.

> Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.
> Karl Marx
> *Selected Writings*

[1] It can be argued that there are compelling examples of adult education linked with social change even before the 20th century, especially evident in the rapid growth of labor organizations. Without denying the significance of these precedents for the topic at hand, these reflections begin—as argued in the text—at the time adult education became self-conscious, recognizing itself as an identifiable and uniquely defined area of study and practice.

On Center Stage: A Rose by Any Other Name

Attempts to define the field of adult education practice have generally floundered on the rocky shores of political expediency. To define is to set borders, to delimit, to exclude—to clarify what a given reality is and is not. Like the ground and field of an Escher sketch, what we see depends as much on what we choose to ignore (the ground) as on what we choose as our focus.

Since the formation of the American Association for Adult Education in 1926, the net for gathering adult educators has been cast ever more widely, excluding less and less until almost everything is "adult education," encompassing educators of adults who work toward diametrically opposed social and political purposes. The term "adult education" is applied to highly manipulative and participatory pedagogies alike, from courses designed to correct deviant behavior to workshops supporting the social change agendas of oppressed communities. In the face of such diverse political goals and value assumptions, the search for a definition has usually either been abandoned or preemptively concluded with catch-all banalities.

Although work now considered to be "adult education" has undoubtedly been a critical element in human history since before history began, it is worthy of note that the identification of that work as a field of study and as "adult education"—and the corresponding need for a definition—is astoundingly recent. Stubblefield and Keane (1994) place it in the 1920s in their history of the field, claiming that discourse linking "adult" with "education" gained momentum in the United States through a rapid sequence of publications and events which later some called an "adult education movement."

That such discourse began in the 1920s evidenced a need at that point in U.S. history to distinguish "adult education" from other forms of educational work. It is the nature of that distinction which provides focus for early literature in the field. Eduard Lindeman was one of the first to elaborate the distinguishing characteristics of this newly identified field of practice in his

seminal work, *The Meaning of Adult Education* (1989), first published in 1926.

The Lindeman Legacy

Among the earliest visionary reflections on adult education were the writings of Lindeman, marking what many would identify as the self-conscious beginnings of adult education history in the United States. The first quarter of the 20th century was especially marked by the idea of progress—an idea wholly consistent with notions of the "American dream." Progressivism embraced the project of modernity—a hope in the future with confidence in the present. It affirmed that, "even if present conditions are less than favorable, they are at least better than previous ones, and it is only a question of time until the situation will improve" (Bernier and Williams 1973, p. 290). The idea of progress encompasses an understanding of both history and social action. Of history, progressivism posits a succession of change and growth in a desirable direction; of social action, it assumes human capacity to control this change.

Pragmatism provided the philosophical foundation for the idea of progress. Pragmatism extended by analogy 19th-century developments in science and technology to social and ethical problem solving. In this tradition, the "truth" of the matter is determined not by reference to abstract, *a priori* principles, but to practical consequences. As stated by William James (1955):

> Grant an idea or belief to be true, (pragmatism)
> says, what concrete difference does it make in
> anyone's actual life? How will truth be realized?
> What experiences will be different from those
> which would obtain if the belief were false? What,
> in short, is the truth's cash value in experiential
> terms? (p. 133)

Whereas James argued for a highly individualized interpretation of the consequences of belief, John Dewey believed that those consequences should be "publicly verifiable" and judged by collective consensus. Dewey placed the philosophy of pragmatism at the core of democracy.

Grounded in the progressive and pragmatic tradition and building on the work of his colleague and friend, John Dewey, Lindeman observed the interdepende ce of an informed public

and democracy—a relationship at the core of Dewey's philosophy of education—and expanded Dewey's notions about school-based education for democratic participation to adults who throughout their lifespan struggle to participate in social and economic decisions affecting them. The effectiveness of widespread participation in decision making, such as democracy requires, demands ongoing and timely strategies for adults to reflect on and learn from their experiences and the experiences of others (Boggs 1991). For Lindeman, what distinguished adult education from other learning activities is the fact that its purpose is definitely social and that "adult education is integral to the democratic struggle" (Brookfield 1984, p. 190). Adult education is an essential factor in the creation of a democratic society. Its absence leaves critical decisions in the hands of an educated elite, promotes a cult of experts, and erodes democratic social order.

The Play's the Thing:
Putting Thought into Action

Such a view was not academic speculation, prescription, or prophecy. It reflected the spirit of the times, the spirit of possibility and confidence that inspired both "grassroots" learning and action exemplified in experiments ranging from Highlander to the transformation of formal, higher education at Black Mountain College (Paulston 1980). The emerging vision of adult education as a field of practice and as a field of study found voice in the writings not only of Lindeman, but others such as Ruth Kotinsky, for whom the workplace was a critical site for addressing social problems. Rosenblum (1987), reflecting on the significance of Kotinsky for contemporary adult educators, notes that the role of adult education in *Adult Education and the Social Scene* (Kotinsky 1933) was to identify social problems and deal with them in such ways as to make the participants intelligent and responsible planners, rather than merely drifters and sufferers, or ruthless schemers for personal advantage. "(Kotinsky's) major thesis was that education which does not look toward control of experience through action is pointless" (Rosenblum 1987, p. 116).

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For many educators, action to change and sculpt social conditions was the point—the redeeming social purpose that inspired the fledgling, newly identified field of adult education.

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For many educators, action to change and sculpt social conditions was the point—the redeeming social purpose that inspired the fledgling, newly identified field of adult education. Foremost among the stages of learning identified by Dewey is action in which the learner has the opportunity and occasion to test ideas

by application, making their meaning clear and discovering their validity in direct experience (Bullough 1988). Lindeman, like Dewey, advocates education through problem solving and action. In a summary of *The Meaning of Adult Education*, Stubblefield (1987) states:

> The adult, Lindeman believed, confronted the world in the form of situations or occasions that required action. Adult education was a method that gave these situations a setting in which they could be analyzed and actions planned and in which adults could discover the meaning of their experiences. (p. 115)

"Adult education turns out to be the most reliable instrument for social actionists," since it ensures that any action undertaken would be authentically democratic (Brookfield 1984, p. 192). Like Dewey, Lindeman believed that action would stimulate genuine involvement, but he recognized that action is actually nurtured through participation in sculpting the social order because, after all, "intelligence is consciousness in action—behavior with a purpose" (Bullough 1988, p. 295). In Lindeman's words, "Every social action group should at the same time be an adult education group, and I go even so far as to believe that all successful adult education groups sooner or later become social action groups" (cited in Brookfield 1984, p. 192).

For those without privilege or wealth, the power to influence social policy is the power of numbers. Adult education is not only self-reflection, but equally it attends to the common and shared experiences of the group, identifies agreed-upon meanings related to those experiences, and leads toward strategies that transform both individual and collective behaviors. Lindeman argues that individual interests must be aggregated in collective action or suffer the defeat of those interests (Wilson 1992b, p. 184). "Collectivism is the road to power, the predominant reality of modern life" (Lindeman 1989, p. 153).

It is in this sense that adult education is about the building of democracy for early framers of the field. It aims not only to *inspire* individual learners who acquire the knowledge needed to navigate the tumultuous waters of day-to-day life, but also to enable those learners to *conspire*—to unite, melding their individual agendas in collaborative planning and collective action. Clearly, the tenets of pragmatism derived from Dewey and

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Lindeman have remained relatively constant in adult education, whereas the relationship between adult education and social action has been far more variable (Wilson 1992b, p. 182).

The publication of a defining text is, of its very nature, a political act. Lindeman, influenced by John Dewey, identified adult education as linked with democracy, social action, and the achievement of control over decisions affecting day-to-day life; he also demarcated those educational activities which are excluded from the field—most notable among these being vocational training (Lindeman 1989, p. 5). Adult education was simply about the business of social change. Of course, the borders defined by Lindeman were quickly and predictably challenged, especially by those who had been excluded.

The Plot Thickens: Embedded Contradictions

Even a cursory review of select developments in U.S. adult education reveals that the social significance and purposes of adult education practice have been varied and, at times, contradictory. Divergent histories highlight the contrast in political commitments. Three forms of social engagement are especially worthy of note.

Adult educators have frequently engaged in a largely adaptive practice with a focus on bringing learners into conformity with mainstream roles and expectations. Preparing "good citizens" can mean "conformity with majority or, rather, hegemonic ways of thinking and behaving" (Newman 1994, p. 25). Here adult education has been pursued as the great equalizer, providing equality of opportunity, if not results—a doorway to the "American dream."

At other times and places, adult educators have deemphasized their role in "leveling the playing field" and maintaining social conformity in favor of selecting the brightest and the best, developing their potential for leadership and validating the privileges of an educated elite.

And on the margins of these contradictory purposes, there has been from the beginning a consistent effort on the part of some adult educators, both in theory and practice, to link adult education with social change, transforming conditions through reflection and action.

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Education as Doorway to the American Dream

The commitment of federal and state governments was redoubled in the 1960s with the development of Human Capital Theory, according to whic. "education is not a form of consumption, but an investment" (Schultz 1961, p. 2). Since the 1930s, adult programs in the form of schooling and training had been thought to increase individual and collective productivity, a conceptualization that led to a continuing vocationalization of adult programming. Although many recent theorists have abandoned Human Capital Theory and considerable research casts doubt on the relationship between education and job performance (Berg 1971), public policy pundits—as reflected in *Workforce 2000* (Johnson and Packer 1987)—continue to favor specifically job-related learning over other educational purposes.

It was observed by Warren Haggstrom (1966) that the purpose of adult education was not to transmit knowledge and skills, "but rather the development of assumptions of knowledge and skill which enable those educated to define their situations clearly enough to allow action to proceed" (p. 151). Adult education for powerless groups—the losers in a rigged competition for economic advantage—has largely been developed from the top down, better serving the "needs" of employers than supporting self-help initiatives from the bottom. They have represented what Saul Alinsky (1946) called "welfare colonialism."

Educational proponents of work-skill learning who had hoped equality of opportunity would alleviate unemployment were disappointed. Persons with comparable education were not by that fact alone enabled to achieve equal results in economic terms, in part because jobs have been lost t th to technology and to low-wage nations, but, more important, because of instrumental understandings of work and the reduction of productivity to jobs (Hart 1992). The gap continues to widen between rich and poor, especially among African-American and other minorities.

Education as Validation cf Privi"e,e

Beyond these misplaced hopes for mass education, there have always been those who steadfastly argued for education, not as the "great equalizer," but rather as the "great selector"—the dispenser and authenticator of skills and knowledge required for leadership. This point of view was well expressed by David Starr Jordan, president of Stanfo d ji ry the turn of the

century and a founding board member of the Carnegie Foundation, who said in support of adult education—

> The great danger in democracy is the seeming predominance of the weak. The strong and true seem to be never in the majority. . . . If collective action is to be safe, the best thought of the best men (sic) must control it. (Goodwin 1973, p. 69)

He also observed that Anglo-Saxons were a hearty race not easily kept down and that "the victims of oppression must be of some other stock." Similar assumptions guided Charles Eliot, president of Harvard in 1908, who exhorted educators to sort learners "by their evident or probable destinies" (Perkinson 1968, p. 145). The selection of the "strong and true" has evidently also provided a purpose and mission for adult educators whose programs unquestionably attract those who have already most benefited from formal schooling. The conviction that there is limited room at the top of the social and economic ladder has been an underlying assumption behind the constant demand for increased terminal education—education that results in a termination of education itself—and finally a dead-end job for some.

Reconstructing Social Purpose

Other adult educators have espoused an educational practice consistent with Dewey, Lindeman, and other progressive educational reformers—"a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes" (Dewey 1916, p. 99). A critical outcome of progressive practice was the movement for social and educational reconstruction led by progressivists George Counts and Theodore Brameld, and later joined by Myles Horton and other activist adult educators in the American Association for Adult Education. These reconstructionists sought to rescue progressivism from reduction to methodology that too easily created an illusion of neutrality and indifference toward, if not rejection of, social action.

The reconstructionists joined learning to social action. They laid claim to a middle ground between social functionalism, with its emphasis on preserving and maintaining existing social institutions, and a neoprogressive emphasis on securing personal uniqueness and individuality. This middle ground, within the tradition of Dewey and Lindeman, emphasized the transactional interplay between society and the individual. In this

transaction, individual growth is possible only with a concomitant modification and development of society, and the purpose of adult education is thus both to announce and transform the world (Brameld 1970, 1971; Counts 1965). Reconstructionism, with its roots in the reformist, post-Depression era, echoed the distant, revolutionary work of Paulo Freire in Brazil and Chile.

To the Wings: Moderating Runaway Democracy

The history of adult education in the United States, which be-
gins with those who initially staked a claim to its territory and
established its meaning, is quickly overshadowed by the reac-
tions that ensued to temper and contain a movement linked
with (and some would say limited to) the desire to expand par-
ticipation in the formation of public, democratic policy.

That history is complicated by the fact that there are embedded
deeply within the national psyche contradictory values that have
moderated (some would say stalled) the development of democ-
racy in the United States. Podeschi (1986) identifies mainstream
beliefs in progress and individualism, among other values, as
antithetical to Lindeman's philosophy, as well as to the more
"radical" philosophy exemplified in the writings of Paulo Freire
(1974). Such philosophy—

> runs against the current of American value pat-
> terns. Pushing for political consciousness and so-
> cial action, Radical philosophy emphasizes knowl-
> edge as power and a partnership between teachers
> and students. This political thrust wants more
> than the mainstream belief in "equality of oppor-
> tunity," resting heavily on pure hope through
> education and individual achievement. . . . They
> want an "equality of social conditions." (Podeschi
> 1986, p. 6)

Notions of "progress" have taken a technological turn, empha-
sizing the mechanical, instrumental components of educational
practice to the exclusion of content and social vision. Thomp-
son (1993) observes that adult educators now talk "about stra-
tegic plans and targeting techniques, about franchising and
credit transfers, about twilight shifts and accelerated degrees"
and they speak "with a kind of tenacity devoid of passion that

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characterizes automatons released from business training schemes" (p. 244).

From Decision Making to Acquiescence

There is a cartoon showing a man caught, immobilized in the grip of a vise. The caption reads: "What I lost in control, I gained in security."

The nature of public participation in the formation of public policy and the vision of a democratic society on which such participation is based has changed dramatically since Lindeman and others proposed their action-oriented notions of the meaning of adult education. Certainly from the end of World War II until the early '70s, new emphasis was placed on guaranteed social security and the welfare-state—both of which were readily accepted by organized labor and otherwise activist organizations in exchange for conceding fundamental control over decisions of public policy to an elite, notably management and government bureaucrats (Welton 1993). Emphasis shifted from the common concerns of community and nation—now largely the domain of government—to the "private" and generally consumer-oriented concerns of individuals and families.

> Trade unions watched over their workers and represented their interests in institutionalized collective bargaining processes and political parties acted as brokers in the limited sphere of electoral politics. Civic culture deemphasized political participation, and elites in the United States for example, cared little for the vast numbers of Black illiterates who could not even vote. The emancipatory vision (economic democracy, active citizenship) so dear to the progressive adult educator's heart was rendered virtually insignificant as the values of social mobility, private life, consumerism, authority and order ruled the day. (Welton 1993, p. 154)

Welton further notes that welfare-state capitalism has been singularly incapable of "providing a collective identity for its citizens or . . . a common political will," instead producing "egoism, particularism and self-interest" (p. 154). Public administration and service agencies—mental health workers,

social workers, and adult educators—invaded and sought to colonize the lifeworld.

Meanwhile, as Law and Sissons (1985) noted:

> The foundations of the liberal progressive tradi-
> tion in education—the tradition from which adult
> education derived its social commitment—are
> shattered. Reformed capitalism has not provided
> a basis for economic and social justice; access to
> education has not provided working class people
> with either "equality of opportunity" or political
> empowerment. If anything, there is overwhelming
> global evidence to suggest that democracy and
> capitalism are incompatible. (p. 60)

From Learner to Consumer of Education

The impact of these developments on the practice of adult education has been dramatic and was evident even in the founding of the field. Carnegie, fortunes intact but reputation sullied by the bloody Homestead Steel Strikes of 1892, sold Homestead in 1901 and established the Carnegie Institute— which later became the Carnegie Foundation for the Advance-ment of Teaching. It was the avowed purpose of this philan-thropy to harness the power of education in both public and private schools by investing in institutions that adopted stringent conditions imposed by the foundation and involving curricular conformity and adoption of the Carnegie Unit of credit (D. Smith 1974, p. 97).

Subsequently, Carnegie's philanthropic arm helped establish the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) in 1926. Luke (1992) notes that Morse Cartwright, former member of the Carnegie staff, became executive director of the AAAE and quickly established a tight organizational structure with a "top-down mission" (p. 92)—a structure challenged by the National Education Association's (NEA) Department of Education in 1942 as "nondemocratic" (p. 120). Activist adult educators, once prominent as section leaders in the fledgling AAAE—Eduard Lindeman and Myles Horton of Highlander among them—left the organization in frustration.

Especially noteworthy in the literature of the field during these early years was the shift from Lindeman to Knowles—a shift

characterized as a transition from concern for social context to a concern for technique (Brockett 1987). Lindeman was grounded in the tradition of pragmatism and attributed to adult education a learner-centered, problem-solving focus. Knowles, despite his overt claims to a Lindeman lineage, provided a technological emphasis. As Collins (1991) observes:

> The transformation of autonomous learning into a methodology for self-directed learning undoubtedly can work to the advantage of management in business and industry. . . . In such contexts, the rhetoric of self-directed learning . . . supports a misleading scenario of adult men and women effectively shaping an important dimension of their everyday working lives while, in fact, the attendant methodology places the direction of their learning subtly, but firmly, in the hands of experts who serve predominantly institutionalized interests. (p. 24)

The subordination of education to the workplace and learning to the development of job-related "competencies" has privileged instrumental knowledge and the techniques by which such knowledge is transmitted. Such knowledge and pedagogical forms maintain the appearance of neutrality, seemingly unencumbered by social or political values. They are, nonetheless, expressions of political processes that subordinate individual citizens to the prior and undemocratically conceived demands of capital. For example, adult education "empowers" workers to "keep up" with changes in the conditions and nature of work over which the worker has no power or influence. In the resulting "new" understanding of adult education, Beder (1987) observes that—

- critical understanding, central to Lindeman's understanding of adult education, was replaced by developing skills,
- the remnants of humanist concern found in Knowles' conceptualization of andragogy were replaced by the adult learner as consumer, and
- adult education became systematized and institutionalized—in a word, it was reduced to a form of schooling. (p. 109)

Ironically, the emergence of adult education as a field of study, specifically within an academic milieu, has also contributed to these changes. An absence of impetus for social change goals within adult education as a field of practice finds legitimation within the race, gender, and class bias of the knowledge base on

> **An absence of impetus for social change goals within adult education as a field of practice finds legitimation within the race, gender, and class bias of the knowledge base on which that practice is now defined.**

which that practice is now defined (Bailey, Tisdell, and Cervero 1994; Group for Collaborative Inquiry 1993; Hugo 1990). Although adult education has remained theoretically committed to democratic values, its knowledge base reproduces the structures and values of a culture that privileges the practices of an educated elite over the grassroots and academically untrained educators of adults.

Academia exerts its influence not only over practitioners, but over learners as well. As the costs of learning are increasingly passed on to learners, the gap in educational consumption widens. Kulich (1992) concludes that conservative trends in the late 1980s have "turned adult education from a significantly publicly supported social vehicle into a largely self-supporting enterprise" (p. 43)—an observation equally true in the public sector. In industrial as well as in Third World countries, in public as well as private schools, those who already have successful formal educational experiences are now the ones most likely to afford and benefit from adult education (Hall and Stock 1985).

Under the expanding influence of capitalism, Human Capital Theory became the dominant rationale for most public adult education—a theory which "holds that long-term benefits or rate of return from an individual's investment in education are superior to other forms of investment" (Schied 1995, p. 287). Learners became "human capital" and the function of adult education was instrumentally reduced to the development of human (as distinct from natural or technological) resources.

Courtney (1994) notes that, in the transformation of modern nation-states under capitalism, education became linked to economic and technological goals. Adult education no longer emphasized reflection, but rather the diffusion of knowledge. "Adult education, which was first conceived as a tool for social change, became a more functional tool. It became an enterprise determined by the market, without clear social goals" (Proulx 1993, p. 34). Business and industry interests achieved dominance, with learning needs ascribed to the knowledge and skill needed to provide employment and serve individual ambition. Even "social purpose" was quickly construed to mean adaptation to the social order that prescribed this domination (Fieldhouse 1993).

Technological concerns overdetermine educational practice, as noted by Cunningham (1988) in an indictment of current practice:

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Adult education as practiced in North America by those
persons who identify themselves as adult education pro-
fessionals is, for the most part, simply technology that
can be bought in the marketplace by the highest bidder.
Any ethical concerns expressed by those professionals as
a group are tightly framed within "standards of practice"
and "codes of ethics" whereby the starting points of the
argument assume that the way the world is organized is
natural and the appropriate role of educators is to use
their knowledge and skills in behalf of that order.
(p. 134)

From Vision to Polarization

Divisions in the field of adult education practice become evident
as an educated and increasingly pin-striped elite claimed the
field. Front-line, grassroots educators of adults, once at the fore-
front of an adult education movement, now, for the most part,
no longer identified themselves as adult educators. Voices from
the field—the *Voice of Fulano*, as captured in the title of Tomás
Kalmar's (1983) remarkable collection of writings on a literacy
campaign—are difficult to hear in the halls of academia or in the
meeting rooms of costly professional conferences, having been
excluded from legitimate discourse. Adult education history wit-
nessed further atomization. Just as worker education separated
from mainstream adult education (Schied 1993), now educators
for democratic social change were being driven off stage—expell-
ed from the ranks of legitimate adult education practitioners.

The embedded contradictions in contemporary practice and the
marginalization of activist/educators is reflected in an emerging
framework for locating adult education—a three-dimensional
matrix (see figure 1) based on polarities in understandings of the
appropriate subject of adult education (the individual or the col-
lective), of the purpose of adult education (defining a skilled elite
or building democracy), and of the nature of change (a given to
which learners are adapted or a future that learners are empow-
ered to create).

The first of these polarities (subject) reflects varying inter-
pretations of the individual and individualism. Although all
agree that the individual is the subject of learning, some care-
fully attend n c cc textual way in which the individual is
socially procured and emphasize an essential link between the

individual/collective

SUBJECT

adaptation/
participation

NATURE OF CHANGE

meritocracy/
democracy
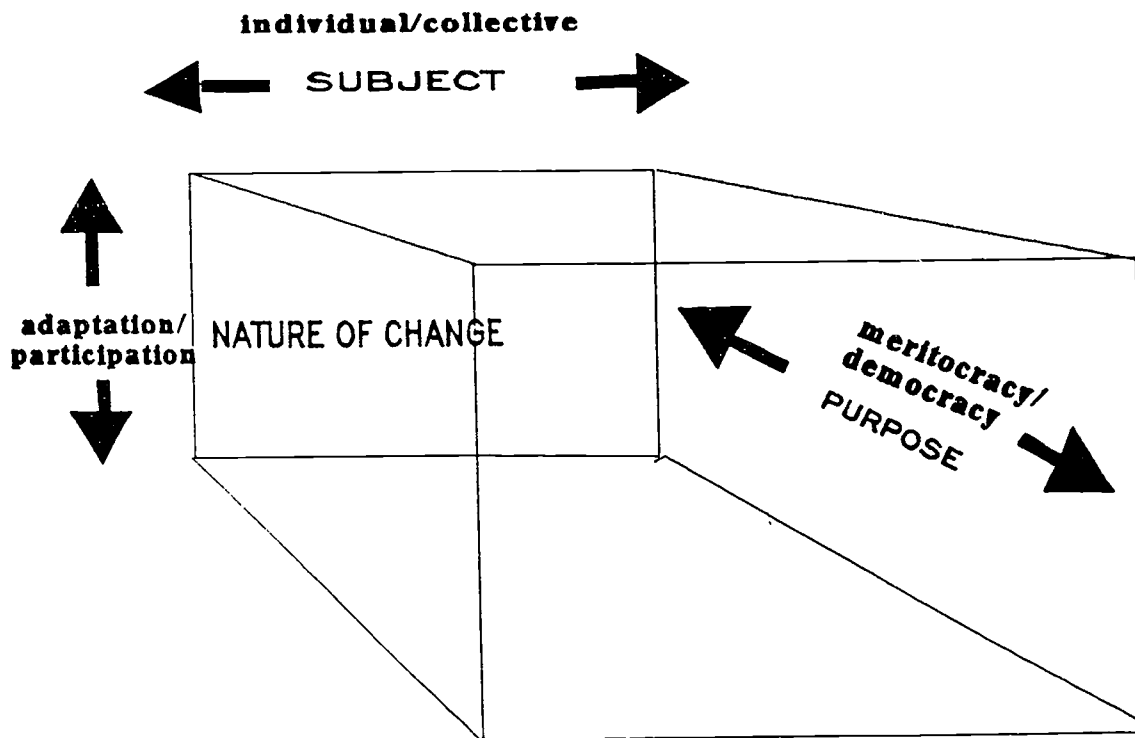
PURPOSE

Figure 1. Situating adult education practice

transformation of social conditions and the liberation of the
individual. Others view the individual as autonomous.

The second polarity (purpose) involves functional arrangements
in the context of adult education practice and is dictated largely
by dominant interests served by that practice. Adult education
practice ranges from activities that serve democratic purposes—
consensus building, critical thinking, collaborative leadership,
community problem solving—to other activities that effect and
legitimize hierarchy and unequal relations of power.

The last of the polarities (the nature of change) is in many ways
the most engaging and has to do with our understanding of hu-
man agency and the mechanisms by which culture and social
institutions are produced. Adult education ranges from learning
to make change to learning to adapt to change.

These three polarities are more fully explained next.

The Subject of Adult Education:
Autonomy vs. Social Responsibility

Dividing the individual from society results in a groundless, albeit politically potent abstraction. By emphasizing individual over social interests, individuals are effectively divided from their sole source of power to transform social institutions—namely, the power of numbers. The structural determinants of the individual and the individual's perceived "needs" for learning are obscured; and a conservative political agenda is disguised, maintaining the status quo and creating an illusion of neutrality by merely responding to putative individual needs. With such an emphasis, the social order, which is legitimized and strengthened through the development of individuals, is neither an intended goal nor is it, apparently, even an object of attention except insofar as it dictates the agenda for adult learning.

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The practice of adult education, which once prided itself on "self-directedness" as the hallmark of its independence from school-based education (which was teacher directed), has largely come to emulate the demands of lifelong schooling.

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The practice of adult education, which once prided itself on "self-directedness" as the hallmark of its independence from school-based education (which was teacher directed), has largely come to emulate the demands of lifelong schooling (Ohliger 1974). Individual learners are recruited one by one, their only assumed common experience being the classroom in which they gather, their only assumed common goal personal advancement in a competitive occupational environment. In fact, the schooling model, with its reformed emphasis on "learner-centered" instruction and the attribution of "needs" to individual students, is wholly consistent with so-called self-directed adult education.

For Malcolm Knowles, "self-directed learning" became the shibboleth of adult educators. This catchphrase assumed an unambiguous concept of "self"—an autonomous individual whose "felt needs" emanated from self alone and could be determined reflectively without undue influence or determination by external factors. A worker, for example, who felt the need for upgrading occupational skills to adjust to changes in the workplace would be self-directed. "This assumption sits awkwardly with the view . . . that adults' readiness to learn is the result of the need to perform externally imposed social roles" (Tennant 1986, p. 117). The conceptualization of self-direction ignores the social construction of self—the myriad ways in which "self" is shaped by family, the workplace, and society.

> (I)ndividuals are pictured abstractly as given, with given interests, wants, purposes, needs, etc.; while society and the state are pictured as sets of actual or possible social arrangements which respond more or less adequately to

> those individuals' requirements. . . . The crucial point
> about this conception is that the relevant features of
> individuals determining the ends which social arrange-
> ments are held to fulfill, whether these features are called
> instincts, faculties, needs, desires, rights, etc. are assumed
> as given, independently of a social context. (Lukes 1973)

Despite this facile reduction of social, political, and economic
institutions to a backdrop for individual development, the po-
tential for conflict remains. Whether between worker and em-
ployer or citizen and society, such conflict could not be ignored,
even by Knowles for whom the learning contract became a
means of reconciling individual needs with organizational goals.
Tenant (1986) points to this feature of andragogy as "another
illustration of Knowles' emasculated self-directed learner"
(p. 115).

In contrast, both Dewey and Lindeman built on a tradition of
American individualism, which defined "self" within a context of
public ideals. Whereas earlier forms of adult education based on
this tradition emphasized development of individuals as partici-
pants in a democratic process of self-determination and social
formation (Pratt 1993), Knowles reflected a more contemporary
and decontextualized version of individualism (Fisher and
Podeschi 1989, pp. 351-352).

This transition, which echoes deep and profound changes in the
national psyche (Bellah et al. 1985), has been accomplished, in
part, in the name of preserving the rights of the autonomous
individual. Programs for adult learning are constructed on the
basis of assumed "consumer demand" and "felt needs." Unques-
tioned is the way in which "need" reflects dominant ideas in the
wider society, understandings about socially sanctioned pursuits,
and workplace skills and knowledge ascribed as needs to the
worker (Law and Sissons 1985, p. 72). Knowles sees autonomy
in Maslow's sense of self-actualization (Tennant 1986, p. 113),
whereas others—Brookfield, for example—see autonomy in a
more critical sense of making valid choices among alternative
courses of action (Wilson 1992b, p. 187). In either case, how-
ever, the emphasis remains largely on individual thought and
action. The danger here is that adult education organizations
and institutions will operate as socialization agencies in much
the same way as formal schooling (Lovett 1988; Lovett et al.
1983). They use an approach that disguises individual remedia-
tion with an emphasis on human relations, personal interaction,
group work, counseling, and empathy.

A narrow, decontextualized concept of the individual becomes a hermeneutic principle in Finger (1989) who writes, "Social transformation is entirely linked with personal transformation" (p. 20). He argues that new social movements—concerning the environment, peace, and issues of gender, for example—replace collective goals with individual survival. Others argue that separation of personal fulfillment from collective action is a prescription for failure on both counts (Welton 1993).

The ideology of individualism is implicit in liberal adult education (Lawson 1985). As that ideology has undergone transition, so also has liberalism's influence on adult education, on the one hand reinforcing the privilege of dominant classes, on the other linking education to the notion of an equal society (Lieven 1987). For Beatty (1992), individual change is the necessary and-sufficient beginning, ending, and focal point of adult education. Welton (1995), reflecting on the limitations of transformative learning in Mezirow (1990), counters:

> In contemporary discussions of critical thinking or critical educational practice the prevalent tendency had been to identify critique with a cognitive process of reflections upon an individual's taken-for-granted assumptions, values or roles and then to propose techniques for fostering individual reflectivity. The consequences . . . are enormous, inevitably binding us to an individualistic model of learning—even if we label it "transformative" and add "action" as outcome. (Welton 1995, p. 19)

The choice here is not between the individual and society, but rather between individualism narrowly conceived and a concept of the individual that embraces a dialectical relationship between self and society. Some would argue that our special challenge is to make sense individually of discordant experience. Carolyn Clark (1992) argues that—

> meaning-making is a highly personal process, and while we can objectify it and study how the process works abstractly, the best learning comes from within. For that reason I believe we must first attend to our own struggles to make meaning of our experience in these disruptive times and learn from our own learning process. (p. 17)

Others would add that such learning is but the first step in recognizing that our most critical struggles are not ours alone that major disruptions to our individual well-being are social in

nature and require mutually agreed-upon strategies for change and collective action.

Purposes: Professional Status versus Social Responsibility

By the time of the formation of the AAAE a significant shift had already occurred from identifying adult education as an activity in which one engaged outside the tutelage and supervision of either workplace or government toward seeing it as institution based (Rose 1989, p. 144). The former conceptualization, which was linked to the building of democracy and social action, became increasingly marginalized as "adult educator" became a form of salaried employment and employers, generally not "adult educators" themselves, increasingly gained influence over the practice of adult education.

Whereas the former conceptualization emphasized the capacity of groups to be reflective and knowledgeable participants in decision making and thus encouraged democratic leadership, institution-based education fostered the development of a special class of leader—well described by Young (1958) in his futuristic essay *The Rise of the Meritocracy.*

> In our day . . . we are often asked to support, in the
> name of liberal education, a form of education fashioned
> to differentiate the superior person from the uneducated
> and to accommodate the demands of superior social
> classes. (Liven 1987, p. 226)

In the context of a meritocracy, the aim of adult learning for leadership is not to take action, but to compete for predefined positions of leadership in a corporate or professional environment. Emphasis here is on predefined, which precludes the shared, democratic ideals otherwise characteristic of leadership. Action resulting from this model of leadership is individual and involves a prior determination of the organization's direction, then standing in front and marching in the same direction. The focus within leadership development, thus conceived, is unlikely to be on problematizing practice, even less on challenging institutional constraints or the conditions of employment.

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Adult education becomes an essential element in the creation of a professional class. Professionalization inevitably results in the clientization of everyone else—adults who are increasingly disempowered, not only in relation to the technology of their

learning (being dependent on the skilled application of andra-
gogical principles), but also as to the content of learning (being
subjected to content determined through "needs assessment" and
program development engineered by experts) (Collins 1991).
Not only is social action an unlikely outcome of the professional-
client encounter; the dependency inherent in such an interac-
tion dictates that any action would be at the discretion of the
professional, prescribed and in all likelihood therapeutic.

Rockhill (1985) demonstrates that the boundaries of adult educa-
tion as a field of study were redrawn during the 1930s and 1940s
deliberately to exclude any progressive agenda that included so-
cial action. A more recent study of the adult education hand-
book series, published from the '30s until the present decade,
revealed—

> a virtual absence of any critical knowledge until the last
> two editions in the 1980s, along with the pervasive
> dominance of empirical-analytical knowledge, [which]
> indicates that evidence for connecting the field of adult
> education to emancipatory interests has no presence in
> the adult education handbooks. (Wilson 1992a, p. 265)

Clearly the dominant practice, as well as theories of adult educa-
tion, have favored the development of a professional class to
which both educators and learners belonged.

The Nature of Change:
Challenge versus Adaptation

Arguments favoring the expansion of support for adult educa-
tion frequently point to an "information explosion," the "rapid
pace of change," constant shifts in the global economy, "run-
away" technology, and escalating transformations of the work-
place. Change is every-where and it is cause for concern, espe-
cially for those individuals whose knowledge and skills have not
kept up. Everyone needs adult education "suited to the de-
mands arising from the changes occurring in our societies . . .
everyone needs this educational re-socialization" (Bogard 1992,
p. 6).

Discussions of the U.S. work force have spoken of a need for
workers to "run faster, just to stand still"—to maintain at least a
stable position relative to the pace of workplace technology and
employer expectations. As a consequence, training for work
(and training for lifelong training) now dominates educational

practice from childhood through adulthood with billions of dollars committed to training and retraining each year.

This understanding of change represents a radical departure from the social purposes ascribed to adult education by Lindeman. Ignored is the 180° shift from belief in humankind's ability to direct and harness change through democratic action to belief in the necessity of "run-away," out-of-control change and the corresponding legitimation of an adaptive and socializing role for adult educators. As O'Sullivan (1991) noted in an article originally published in 1980,

> much of what passes for adult education involves routine maintenance of reality in that the assumptions and objectives underlying many courses exist against the background of a world that is silently taken-for-granted . . . (and is) implicitly ideological in (its) maintenance of the institutionalized reality. (O'Sullivan 1991, p. 224)

Almost all models of adult education, even those which purport to contain social change elements, are inherently adaptive (Law and Sissons 1985). Environmental scans, work skill inventories, and life-skill analyses define the agenda for learning. Whereas Lindeman emphasized adult learning to change and transform the social order, Knowles emphasized learning to adapt to change (Fisher and Podeschi 1989, p. 348). Although Knowles accepted that social action groups could provide a setting in which adult learning could occur, he did not see such groups as learning sites by their very nature.

Consistent with Knowles, it has become commonplace to speak of the "empowerment" of learners—"power" indicating personal capacity (or the neologism "competency"). Whereas in the context of people's lived experience power is exercised in conflict over goals, decisions, strategies, and position, the power in "empowerment" is a euphemism for adaptation and conformity. an ability to speak in harmony with a normative grammar and to act in a manner consistent with dominant mores.

In Knowles, the dynamics of progressivism are reversed. Whereas in Lindeman the power of adult education was evidenced by individuals who through their learning worked both individually and collectively to transform reality, now the "reality" of dominant institutions and structures determine the purposes of adult learning. Humanism and behaviorism are rendered consistent with a new, internalized view of progress based on confidence in the operating social and economic

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Whereas in Lindeman the power of adult education was evidenced by individuals who through their learning worked both individually and collectively to transform reality, now the "reality" of dominant institutions and structures determine the purposes of adult learning.

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principles and in technology. These two elements—humanism and behaviorism flourish—in contemporary adult education practice, while "few adult educators have taken up the social thrust of the progressive education movement" (Elias and Merriam 1980, p. 68).

In contract, Newman (1993) reminds us of educators marching to a different drummer, trade-unionists who develop programs for workers—

> to explain the political, economic, social and industrial imperatives behind industry development, award restructuring and strategic unionism; . . . to help members appreciate the challenges, dangers and opportunities involved in implementing new technological processes. (p. 165)

Many adult educators adjust minds and hearts to unquestioned changes in the structuring of civic society and the workplace; others commit themselves to developing citizens and workers to be full participants in shaping the decisions that affect their day-to-day lives.

... And Back Again: Learning Social Action

At a 1984 conference titled "Rekindling Commitment," the International League for Social Commitment in Adult Education was formed—with the special support of Rutgers University and Teachers College, Columbia University, in the United States and the Stockholm Institute of Education in Sweden. Educators and activists at the conference expressed "grave concern over the social inequality and social injustice which exist in nations throughout the world" and affirmed their "belief in adult education as a powerful force for social change." In the introduction to the proceedings of that conference, they noted:

> Although in recent years the field of adult and
> continuing education has grown significantly, .
> there has been a decline in the social commitment
> and intellectual leadership that were once the
> heart of our profession. In many industrialized
> countries focus on technique has replaced concern
> for the learner and for society. Economic profit
> has replaced human growth and justice as the
> predominant professional value. (Hoghielm 1985,
> p. 3).

Building on these concerns, Aimee Horton (co-founder of the Lindeman Center in Chicago) and Jack Mezirow (professor of adult education at Teachers College) convened two critical meetings of educators of adults 4 years later, one during the annual meeting of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education, the other at the subsequent conference of the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE). The purpose of those sessions was to discuss how to reclaim the once vital role of the adult education movement during the '30s, '40s, and '50s in fostering democratic social action. Participants included a diverse group of professors, students, and community-based adult educators. Out of these meetings came many expressions of discontent with what Rev. C. T. Vivian, during the Civil Rights era, called "the status crow" and a proposal that a separate, more inclusive planning workshop be held to develop strategies for action (*Wings of Change* 1990, p. 1).

That workshop was finally convened on March 23, 1990, when
25 North American adult educator/activists representing both
academia and grassroots organizations gathered at the High-
lander Research and Education Center in the foothills of Ten-
nessee, where so many groups over the previous 60 years had
gathered, where labor and civil rights movements had their be-
ginnings, and where history had been written. The rich and
ongoing history of Highlander, linking adult education to the
varied struggles of the South since the 1930s, heightened com-
mitment to move beyond the rhetoric of discontent toward ac-
tion. In its statement of mission, published in French, Spanish,
and English, those gathered proclaimed:

> We are living in a time of great questioning.
> Much that we have taken for granted is now
> uncertain. Everywhere in our world men and
> women are rebelling against injustice and exploi-
> tation. Old orders are trembling; new ones wait
> to be born. In North American liberal democracy
> a new spirit of insurgency is emerging as people
> contest a society with deepening and persistent
> multiple crises and injustices. Within this context
> there are many diverse social activist initiatives.
> We seek to provide the common ground in the
> development of the process of education for social
> action, especially with respect to those injustices
> relating to race, class and gender. . . . We hold
> that revitalized democracy is based upon informed
> and active participation of its citizens. Demo-
> cratic participation means that citizens learn to
> become critically reflective through dialogue on
> public issues and to take effective collective action
> to effect change in policies and practices inimical
> to freedom, democracy, social justice and human
> rights. (*Wings of Change* 1990, p. 2-4)

The Critical T⋅ ⋅ ⋅

Despite an illusory emphasis on the individual, despite the
tendency to reproduce roles rather than set goals in the devel-
opment of leaders, despite the unchallenged acceptance of
technological change, many educators have continued to con-
cede with Bogard (1992) that—

adult education remains one of the pre-eminent means by which societies and citizens can stimulate, direct and control structural change in the systems of economic, political and social regulation. (p. 8)

(Adult education) is to provide people with greater continuous control over their personal, professional and social lives, thereby enabling them to make an effective contribution to the social and economic progress of the community. It should focus not only on professional qualifications but also on social, civic and cultural skills which used to be adequately covered by basic education but now need permanent updating. (p. 48)

Unquestionably, most work involving the education of adults now focuses on "professional qualifications," intentionally reproducing the social order with all its inequities intact. However, adult education is also "the learning component, both individual and collective, of democratic development and social transformation" (Hall 1992, p. 6). The historic tradition that promoted democracy through social reconstruction in the workplace of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Zacharakis-Jutz 1993) and found eloquent expression in Lindeman (1989), Freire (1974), Brookfield (1987b), and others, maintains its grasp on the imagination of adult educators. This tradition challenges them to define the social relevance of their work—not because they respond to the demands of business and industry, not because they are problem solvers, not because they are tailors who take in here and let out there to enhance an individual's fit to the social body, but because they facilitate the envisioning of society and equip learners to reconstruct the social order and make history (Wildemeersch and Leirman 1988). In the words of C. Wright Mills (1959),

> Many personal problems cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues—and in terms of the problems of history making. . . . The human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles—and to the problems of the individual life. (p. 226)

The primary task of adult education in democracy is to facilitate citizen understanding of problems and participation in solutions

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Unquestionably, most work involving the education of adults now focuses on "professional qualifications," intentionally reproducing the social order with all its inequities intact.

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(Boggs 1991) and "to work for a political community in which democracy has some meaning" (M. Smith 1994, p. 4). Underlying such an educational practice is the "overall awareness of the potential of adult education to enable people to understand the realities of power" (Scribbins 1987, p. 245) and the fact that "we do live in a world where we have harsh and unpalatable conflicts of interest, and where we have real and tangible enemies" (Newman 1994, p. 31). Although Mezirow is correct in his argument that action is not an inevitable consequence of coming to understand the realities of power, it is equally true that "transformative changes occur when learning is an integral part of a series of other social movement processes" (Hall 1992, p. 11). As Paulston (1980) and Schied (1993) have pointed out, the history of adult education—too often ignored or distorted—is embedded in the history of social movements.

In his call to action at the conclusion of *Adult Education as Vocation*, Collins (1991) urges adult educators to—

> establish connections with social change move-
> ments in the wider community and be alert to the
> emergence of vital issues that call for emancipa-
> tory strategies. Their role as adult educator is not
> so much to stir up an issue from scratch as it is to
> join forces with an emerging or on-going concern
> that has already energized a significant group of
> people. (p. 111)

In 1985, at a general session of AAACE, several recommendations for the transformation of practice and the revitalization of social mission were approved. Among these recommendations were the following:

- Encourage those who plan national and state conferences to provide some focus on informing adult education of crucial social issues (and)

- Encourage persons involved in the education of adult educators to emphasize the "change agent" role of their students. (Apps 1985, p. 28)

A Call for Transformation

Dysfunctions within higher education—otherwise the capstone of professionalization and harbinger of an educated elite—

provide occasional "open spaces" for critical reflection on prac-
tice and revisionist interpretations of history. Discourse in the
field of adult education is now lightly seasoned with critical
theory (Welton 1995), deconstructionism (McLaren 1995), and
postmodernism (Usher and Edwards 1994). Within academic
discourse have emerged voices of dissent, calling for a radical
overhaul of the field's purpose and mission—voices variously
identified as those of "popular educators," "feminist educators"
(Stalker 1996; Tisdell 1993), "local educators" (M. Smith 1994),
"political educators" (Scribbins 1987), "critical adult educators"
(Collins 1991; Welton 1994), and educators who have learned to
"define their enemies" (Newman 1994).

> Critical adult educators work with oppressed peoples,
> intensely aware of their own locations, privileges and
> identities, to help create the structural conditions and
> pedagogical processes which enable them to determine on
> the basis of dialogic reflection the sorts of policies and
> practices they will follow. . . . To be able to command
> our life situation as social individuals challenges the field
> of adult education to burst through its present profes-
> sionalized boundaries and practices. (Welton 1994,
> p. 284)

A revised and revitalized adult education curriculum looks to
the social context and transformative impact of practice, at times
calling for direct engagement in projects, the purpose of which is
to change, not merely individual attitudes and understandings,
but social conditions as well. Collins (1991), weaving adult edu-
cation into the total fabric of social and political history, seeks
to inspire as well as conspire toward building a better, more
democratically participatory world:

> Adult educators, as the primary agents of a transforma-
> tive pedagogy, need to follow the examples of those who
> implement strategies for change and resistance justifiable
> in terms of their understanding and analysis. (p. 119)

Foremost among the influences on the field in reintroducing
debate over social purpose and mission has been Jack Mezirow,
whose writings on perspective transformation have both focused
attention on "transformative change" as the appropriate goal of
adult education practice, as well as opened the door to lively
discourse concerning the role of adult educators in social and
political action. For Mezirow (1989) "social action is crucial, but
it is not the only goal of adult education" (p 172), except a. .´. .

later clarified (1994), to the extent that "action . . . means mak-
ing a decision, not necessarily an immediate behavior change"
(p. 226).

Mezirow has frequently addressed the issue of social action. He
insists that the real task of the adult educator is to facilitate
learning conducive to perspective transformation—and in this he
is in accord with Brookfield (1987a)—but Mezirow (1985) "also
sees the critical process necessary for such change as leading the
learner to take action to change social practices and institutions
which implement and legitimate the distorting ideologies which
enthrall us" (pp. 147-148).

Mezirow includes both individual and collective action as pos-
sible and even desirable out-comes of transformative learning,
but adds that the role of an adult educator is not that of the
leader or organizer of action (Mezirow 1991, 1992). Collective
social action is only a "contingent and instrumental goal"
(Mezirow 1989, p. 172).

Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation has had many
critics specifically concerned with the individualizing and inter-
nalizing of transformation without accounting for social conse-
quences through direct action (Clark and Wilson 1991; Collard
and Law 1989; Hart 1990; Tennant 1993). To many, the theory
fails to account for context, locating perspective transformation
in the individual and basing it on a decontextualized concept of
rationality. Thus, it ignores the relationship between individ-
uals and sociocultural, political, and historical contexts (Clark
and Wilson 1991). The concern here is that even though indi-
viduals may be "transformed," nonetheless "oppressors may go
unchallenged and the society these oppressors continue to act in
may go unchanged" (Newman 1994, p. 45).

Learning to Take Action

Critics of adaptive and selective adult education have broadened
their political base to include adult educators in formerly colon-
ized nations as well as U.S. activist/educators. An emerging
consensus was voiced in a seminar at Persepolis where educators
unanimously approved a declaration on the purposes of their
work and the structures appropriate for the development of
lifelong learning. Appropriate structures were—

- Those which from the political point of view tend to bring about the effective participation of every citizen in decision making;

- Those which from the economic point of view aim at harmonious development of society and not at blind and dependent growth;

- Those which from a social point of view do not result in making education a class privilege and a means of reproducing established hierarchies and orders;

- Those which from the professional point of view provide communities with genuine control over the technologies that they wish to use; and

- Those which from the institutional point of view favor a concerted approach and continuing cooperation among all authorities responsible for basic services. (J. R. Kidd 1978, p. 8)

To this list, the 1976 conference at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, added the resolution that adult education "contributes decisively to the full participation of the masses of the people in their own development and to their active control of social, economic, political, and cultural change" (J. R. Kidd 1978, pp. 8-9).

Despite the grand plans and intentions of such resolutions, adult education practice continues to reinforce, rather than challenge, dominant institutions and social practices. Even for those who perceive adult education as a vehicle of social action, the means for taking action must also be at hand. Educators who facilitate reflection on experience, problem solving, and strategy building are nonetheless powerless to accomplish social change through learning alone. To act requires a political apparatus, the agency—an organization, collective, or social group—through which action flows. The creation of agency is not in the hands of an educator alone.

> **Educators who facilitate reflection on experience, problem solving, and strategy building are nonetheless powerless to accomplish social change through learning alone.**

Freire (1978) observed in a letter to educators in Guinea-Bissau: "Where the conditions for change do not exist, the possibility of failure accompanies the literacy struggle from the beginning" (p. 113). Literacy campaigns have succeeded when organized in the co n xt of social revolutions in which new possibilities for freedom were supported by new social agencies. They failed when such agencies for self-help governance were withheld, as in

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Guinea-Bissau (Facundo 1984). Horton (1973) echoes this point:
"We have repeatedly found that education alone cannot counter-
act the influence of the establishment on individuals" (p. 328).
Technical adult education, lacking a theory of political action, is
doomed to lifelong schooling—an endless mastery of instrument-
al tasks that fail utterly to challenge the conditions that demand
recurrent adaptation to the demands of capital production.

If social action has been deemphasized in dominant practice, it is
unquestionably in part because the instruments for independent
political action are not available. Even the forums for free and
open debate of public issues—formerly evident in institutions
from the Junto to townhall meetings—have yielded to televised
debates of candidates for office. The primacy given to parlia-
mentary means in effecting social change resonates with a con-
servative and unquestioning acceptance of the permanency of
contemporary political options and institutions. The affectation
of "neutrality" that permeates all education is legitimized by the
reduction of the political options to those of partisan politics.

The consequence has been a separation of education from
action—and adult education from social change. The struggle
for justice, equity, and democracy continues, but too often with-
out the accompaniment of critical reflection and systematic
learning. Saul Alinsky, Chicago organizer and a close friend of
Myles Horton, made the development of political options his
life's work. He did not think of himself as an adult educator,
but he facilitated learning that both preceded and followed
action. His linking of reflection and action in a liberatory
praxis, reminiscent of the work of Freire, was expressed in
Reveille for Radicals (1946):

> A People's Organization is constantly searching and
> feeling for methods and approaches to make the com-
> munity climate receptive to learning and education. In
> most cases the actual procedures used to further popular
> education will not be independent projects but simply a
> phase of every single project which the (organization)
> undertakes. (p. 159)

Despite the marginalization of social activists by profession-ized
adult educators—or perhaps because of this—a resolute and per-
sisting practice of adult education for social change has contin-
ued at the margins. Two influential educators have exemplified
and, to a large degree, inspired this practice: Myles Horton and
Paulo Freire.

Myles Horton:
Learning to Control Democratically

Myles Horton's work was grounded in the writings of John Dewey, George Counts, and Eduard Lindeman, as well as Marx and the Christian scriptures. He was a radical thinker, an intellectual who valued action over theoretical discourse and espoused a theory of political action that depended on learning. Theory helped him to understand oppression in the Appalachian region of the United States, giving him a framework for critical analysis and establishing global relationships with oppression everywhere. But theory was valued only as the prelude to taking action. Once Horton was accused of having gone to college and hence being irrelevant to the Appalachian community. A colleague and friend defended him. "Myles has never been to college," he said, actually believing this to be the case. "He's one of us." Horton responded, "I always knew (college) was a handicap, but I was sure I could overcome it" (M. Horton 1981).

Horton published his thought in action—creating the Highlander Folk School in 1932, an adult education center committed to social change in the impoverished and racially divided South (Glen 1988; A. Horton 1989; M. Horton 1990). In the '30s and '40s, Highlander was a focus of labor organizing, especially in the textile and mining industries. In the '50s and '60s, Highlander was a school for workers and leaders in the Civil Rights Movement, having among the participants at its workshops Rosa Parks, Septima Clark, Andrew Young, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Sixty-five years later, the story of Highlander remains linked with struggles in the South and constant in its belief that education is not primarily a function of formal learning, but of the total social environment (A. Horton 1989). The programs of Highlander in recent years have supported area-wide initiatives against strip-mining, toxic dumping, the globalization of labor markets, and other incipient and ongoing movements for change. Highlander has always aligned its program with the larger goals of social movements, while at the same time challenging these movements to remain consistent with democratic ideals. Heaney (1992b) points to two elements at the core of adult education for social change, well exemplified in the work of Highlander:

> First, such education must be grounded in the real and realizable struggles of people for democratic control over

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their lives. Its programs are both a product of those struggles and a critical factor in defining and giving shape to the strategies by which the struggles are advanced . . .

Second, it never simply reaffirms present experience, goals and concerns, but always challenges participants to move forward, to experience in new ways, to rethink goals and concerns. This challenge of education for change emanates from the convictions of the educator and requires political clarity about the vision upon which the program is built. (p. 54)

The Highlander understanding of adult education incorporates this critical-analytic approach to learning from experience (Bell, Gaventa, and Peters 1990), which begins where people are, reflects on their concrete experiences in community, and derives a sense of meaning and possibility from those experiences in discourse. The content of learning is provided by the participants. In Horton's (1981) words, everyone comes to Highlander with a "slice of pie," but everyone "goes home with the whole pie." A distinguishing characteristic of adult education for Horton, as for Lindeman (and to a much lesser degree, Knowles), is its emphasis on adult experience as content and on reflection and dialogue as dominant processes of adult learning.

Clark (1978) identifies five elements in the Highlander approach to adult education:

1. Democratic decision making is the medium and the message of learning. The aim is to arrive at shared understandings so that agreement can be reached as to appropriate strategies for solving problems and resolving issues.

2. Groups, rather than individuals, are the key to any educational forum having transformative consequences in relation to social conditions. All "boot-strap" theories to the contrary, people seeking to change society need support and reinforcement in their encounter with power—those whose interest is to maintain the status quo. The development of individuals (narrowly conceived) is unlikely to result in social change.

3. The aim of reflection is to identify barriers to democratic participation in decisions affecting day-to-day life—both political and economic—and the conflicting interests that buttress those barriers. The point is to identify effective means for resistance and overcoming oppression. An

overarching theme of every Highlander workshop is "for every
act of oppression against people there is an equal reaction which
can be used positively to fight oppression" (Clark 1978, p. 46).

4. Residential learning, an approach Horton learned from the
   folk schools and farmers' cooperatives in Denmark (Hamil-
   ton 1992, p. 14), became a hallmark of Highlander. Stepping
   back from daily experience in order to reflect upon it and
   finding space and time to build alliances with others who
   have similar experiences were found to be essential to build-
   ing the base of a people's organization that would become an
   ongoing instrument of social change.

5. Finally, the full involvement of all participants in reflection
   was demanded if all were to follow up learning with action.

Action is the goal of learning at Highlander. The last moments
of a Highlander workshop are generally given over to the ques-
tion, "What are you going to do when you get home?" Al-
though the answers are not always precise—Rosa Parks, at a
Highlander workshop prior to starting the Montgomery bus
boycott, is reputed to have replied with unanticipated irony,
"I'm just going to go home and sit down"—but the commitment
to hammer out strategies and take next steps in the community
is unwavering.

Paulo Freire:
Naming the World

Paulo Freire, whose practice of adult education has developed in
revolutionary struggles of the Southern hemisphere, first became
known in the United States when visiting Harvard in 1970. He
had demonstrated through his work in Brazil and Chile that
illiterate peasants could quickly learn to read and write if the
words they learned were charged with political significance and if
literacy was accompanied by opportunities for changing daily
life—land reform and other transformations of economic and
social conditions. Adult education could best succeed, especially
in situations of oppression, when it was consciously a political
act, the aim of which was not merely conscientization—raising
oppression to consciousness—but reflection on experience that
would ultimately inform social action.

Despite a convoluted and frequently opaque writing style, Freire
(1974) was widely read, not only in academia, but, more impor-
tant, in the barrios and inner cities where activist, grassroots

adult educators began to adapt this "pedagogy of the oppressed" to urban North America. Throughout the United States and Canada, hundreds of "Freirean" adult education centers opened in storefronts, churches, neighborhood organizations, and community colleges. The principal challenge in each instance was the adaptation of pedagogical forms developed in the cauldron of revolutionary change—nations where political will was accompanied by public policy supportive of people's initiatives—to the functionalist domain of capitalism and parliamentary democracy.

Attempts to adapt the work of Freire, for the most part, occurred in the context of adult basic education programs (literacy, English-as-a-second-language, GED preparation, adult high schools) and have therefore faced head-on the structural limitations of schooling. Learners were recruited one by one, without a common goal other than the limited learning goal of language acquisition or certification—both assumed to determine an individual's ability to find employment. This schooling model imposed by federal and state agencies that provide most of the funding for adult basic education frequently mandated a narrow, instrumental curriculum. As Heaney (1992a) notes:

> When grants have been made available, the cost has often far outweighed the benefits. It is not surprising that grantors frequently place demands on those they fund which subvert any local agenda for change. Even private philanthropies such as United Way and other combined charities have been eager to stabilize and regularize community initiatives and use the leverage of funding to revise by-laws, force staff and board into adapting corporate models of organization, and play a role in the selection of board members. (pp. 10-11)

Freire-inspired projects, no matter how grounded in the local community, have always found themselves at risk in the competition for funding. In the name of accountability, funding sources exert control and claim ownership. Those programs which have most successfully applied Freirean pedagogy and principles to the U.S. scene have been those that have rejected governmental funding and carefully built a broad base of private and community support (Heaney 1984).

Although successes have been modest and compromises many, popular education in the United States and Canada has taken on Freirean contours and Freire continues to exert considerable

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influence among those seeking alternatives to the social-adaptation and social-selection models of adult education. Freire provides educators with a strong sense of individual and personal identity without compromising the social and historical dimensions of self. Reflection and social action are dialectically related in Freirean pedagogy. As Freire (1993) states:

> Such a pedagogy recogr. .es that identity is always personal and social and that while we cannot predict the path of historical action or name human agency in advance, we can never give up the struggle for self-formation and self-definition such that domination and suffering in this society are always minimized. To invent new identities as active, cultural agents for social change means to refuse to allow our personal and collective narratives of identity to be depoliticized at the level of everyday life. (p. xii)

The Legacy Continues

In the past 2 decades, popular education—bottom-up, adult education for social change—has continued to thrive in the United States and Canada, albeit well on the margins of the adult education mainstream. Examples include the Moment Project of the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice in Toronto (Davis 1993; *Naming the Moment* 1989) and the Lindeman Center for Community Empowerment through Education in Chicago (Zacharakis-Jutz et al. 1991). Practical publications related to adult education for change range from case studies (Arnold et al. 1985; Heaney 1984; R. Kidd 1982; Merrifield 1991) to manuals for community-based educators (Arnold and Burke 1983; Auerbach and Wallerstein 1987; GATT-Fly 1983; Hope and Timmel 1984). Highlander Center in Tennessee and the Participatory Research Group in Toronto are bountiful repositories for such materials.

The meetings initiated by Horton and Mezirow in 1988 have led to the formation of the North American Alliance for Popular and Adult Education (NAAPAE), a coalition of organizations that now represents North American popular educators in the International Council for Adult Education. Information on member organizations and activities can be obtained by contacting NAAPAE, 6 Mildred Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6N 4H9, Canada.

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Conclusions:
A Critic's Review

A romantic view of adult education history conjures images of a movement driven by social commitments to improve the lot of the less fortunate. But this was never a movement and, although social commitments undoubtedly exist, they neither dominate nor prevail in the emerging academic pursuit of adult education as a field of study. Some, wishing it were not so, overemphasize the significance of Eduard Lindeman, Myles Horton, or Paulo Freire and rage against the tide of professionalization that distances the field from social action. Hence the debate over adult education and social change. Similar debates occur—with as little impact—among social workers who, like adult educators, are often employed to adjust minds and behavior to a "real," already constituted world.

Adult education is big business, its academic programs attracting primarily those who aspire to well-paid, managerial responsibilities for educational enterprises that are socially respected. It would be useless to fault this goal—it is, in fact, an intended consequence of the professional mantle that many adult educators now wear. One can hardly imagine an aspiring professional class committing its energies to remedying social inequities, and thus sabotaging professional privilege. The political choices of graduate students and faculty, therefore, are more likely to favor social stability—calm waters in which to navigate one's professional career—rather than a maelstrom of muckraking and conscientization leading to social discontent and engagement.

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"Social change" is an essentially contested term that, like "empowerment," is easily coopted. Disputes over definitions of such terms are less over meaning and more over the values and commitments of the persons using them. In the end, such terms can mean everything or nothing. Social change, as seen in the writings of Lindeman and in the work of Horton and Freire, represents not merely an alteration in the way an individual thinks about the world, but a transformation of the lifeworld itself—of conditions under which life is lived.

Social change refers to a redistribution of power and wealth favoring the disenfranchised and poorer classes and tending toward political and economic democracy. Social change aims

Conclusions

at a shift in the relative position of classes, not in the position of individuals within one or another class. Social change is not what happens when the offspring of a working class family joins the newly emerging professional classes. It is what occurs when workers, women, or other oppressed groups organize to overcome the hegemony of professional educators or bureaucrats and reclaim control over their own lives. It should be noted that social change is inconceivable in a classless society and that the illusion of classlessness in the United States serves as a most formidable obstacle to social change.

It is no wonder that social change emerges as the purpose of adult education only in unusual and transitional historic moments—at times of upheaval, great questioning, and revolution. Models for such change-oriented adult education derive from Third World countries in transition or from widespread movements for change in the United States—the workers' movement in the '30s and '40s or the Civil Rights Movement in the '50s and '60s. However, even in such turbulent times, most educational institutions and the educators employed by them continued to reproduce the dominant social order, not to transform it.

"

To the extent that adult education is an instrument for the legitimation and protection of class divisions, it is inimical to social change.

"

The gap between professional adult educators and educator/ activists who promote social change—now coming to be called "popular educators" (Arnold and Burke 1983; Chené and Chervin 1991)—is maintained by the profession's subjugation to market-driven institutions whose avowed purpose is providing new classes of professionals with knowledge and skill that legitimate the latter's disproportionate right to wea h and power. To the extent that adult education is an instrument for the legitimation and protection of class divisions, it is inimical to social change.

Although adult educators maintain their hegemonic status as defenders of the status quo, the education of adults in relation to liberatory, social purposes continues to be facilitated by activists, organizers, and indigenous leaders who carry forth the traditions of Lindeman, Horton, and Freire without benefit of (or despite) academic or professional certification. So successful has the professionalization of adult education been that many of these latter activists no longer think of themselves as adult educators. Hence the frustration of those who, marching to a different drummer, attempt to link learning with democratic social change and, without forsaking the status of their profession, forge a bond with social activists whose unacknowledged educational work challenges and illuminates the labor of mainstream adult education.

The search for common ground is more complicated than anticipated. The culture of academic professionalism—of what Jack London once called "our trained incapacity"—strains to balance the rigors of science with the day-to-day political demands of justice and democracy. Most front-line activists are too committed to local struggles, too preoccupied with the high energy cost of organizing and educating to divert time to "dialogue" on what might ultimately be an academic issue. The sense of alienation that academics sometimes experience as a result of professionalization and isolation within the ivory tower is simply not experienced at the grassroots. At the base, a different set of problems are experienced—problems that academics, by reason of their training, are not able to solve.

Those adult educators seeking to build a bridge to social action are seeking a redefinition of the boundaries of their professional class—seeking to both weaken the classification in order to include those engaged in social action and change, while at the same time strengthening the classification in regards to political purposes and outcomes (Cervero 1992). Such a task inevitably requires rebuilding the foundations of and possibly renaming the field of practice and study.

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