

# Dilemmas of Institutionalised Adult Education

by

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# The Institutionalisation of AE

Traditional AE was not totally institutionalised

But with the growth of Continuing Professional Education it became mainstreamed.

# No AE in UK

- It is often claimed that that there is no AE in UK but there is education of adults and NIACE has started calling it Adult Learning and Education

# Universities Change

- Universities and colleges were forced to change the way that they operated and so higher and further education changed to meet the demands of the emerging information and knowledge society. Universities, for instance, offered more masters degrees and more doctorates, and so on. Higher education became more vocational and lifelong.

# Universities Change

- This process became more complex with the emergence of information technology and so education also became both open and distance with new universities being formed and the more traditional universities and colleges being forced to change the way that they operated. Delivery became possible around the world – distance education, overseas campuses , etc

# Risks of the new Developments

- Education of adults assumed global significance - but also risks – or advantages emerged :
- Standardisation in education
- Commodification

# Commodification

- However, not all of this education could be provided by the State, or even by the profession or the employer – indeed, it was no longer supply-led - and it had to be offered on demand, marketed and paid for by a wide variety of means:
- Structure of the courses had to be modularised
- An accreditation system was introduced so that learners could enter and leave courses at any point throughout the course and still get credit for it, and so on. Education became a commodity to be purchased on the learning market and for which the learners receive a ‘receipt’ (credit/certificate) for studies undertaken.

# Institutionalised AE

- Adult education has become institutionalised as the knowledge society emerged
- Adult education was not the cause of change only an outcome of it since it has been demand-led because of the nature of the knowledge society,
- We are confronted with a number of dilemmas – some of which have been well discussed by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2005), although some far-sighted scholars discussed some of the initial ones long before the process was underway (e.g. Kerr, *et al*, 1973).
- That adult education is now demand-led raises a number of problems some of which I want to discuss briefly under four headings: society; knowledge; distribution and access; the learners and education.



# Part 1 Society

- As the UNESCO (2005, p.27) report explains:
- The new information and communication technologies have created new conditions for the emergence of knowledge societies. Added to this, the emerging global information society only finds its *raison d'être* if it served to bring about a higher and more desirable goal, namely the building, on a global scale of *knowledge societies* that are the source of development for all.
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# The Potential - but

- Here UNESCO outlines the potentialities of the contemporary society: we could possibly see global development and a better world for all. This is the potential – but it is a capitalist society in which the producers of commodities for the market seek to maximise their profits through low-cost production and marketing at the highest price/profit.
- In the same way new goods have to be produced for the market which demands new knowledge and technologies of production, which in turn means more research and rapidly changing knowledge. The goal of maximising profits means that knowledge produced will be regarded as the property of the producers and will not be shared with those who cannot afford the commodities produced nor will they be able to learn the new knowledge: as a result, the rich get richer and the poor remain poor.

# The Potential - but

- The world remains divided although the possibilities actually exist to make the world a better place by sharing the knowledge and encouraging its usage throughout the world – some of the drug companies have been confronted with this problem in a major way in recent years.

# Adult Education – potential but

- In this sense, the knowledge produced can be regarded as useful and relevant knowledge and because of its use-value people want to learn it: we know that one of the factors that motivate adults to return to learning is the relevance of what is offered to the learners – adult education has always been needs-meeting or at least wants-meeting. Potential learners will purchase it if necessary. The fact that adult education is wants-meeting, or demand-orientated, is one of its attractions **but it also creates one of its largest dilemmas: adult education now reinforces the social and cultural inequalities in both the global world and the local societies. It is contributing to the economic development of the wealthy but offering little or no reflective critique on the world in which it functions.**

# The Problem for AE

- But one of the traditions of non-institutionalised adult education in the past has been that it has always had the potential for a reflective or a radical stance – the history of this form of adult education is replete with stories of reflective thinkers and radical educators, such as Paulo Freire. Indeed, education itself has always encouraged learners to stand back and reflect upon their learning experiences – to be independent learners able to be critically aware of their situation and to act upon their deliberations.

# The Problem for AE

- Consequently, we are now confronted with a major philosophical question – a major dilemma: **is the learning that we are experiencing in demand-led vocational education really education at all, or if it is, is it rather an anaemic version of what education might be?**
- Not really a question of training – CPE is a different species

# Part 2 Knowledge

- From the very earliest of times in the history of adult education there have always existed societies concerned with really useful knowledge
- By the time of Knowles' (1980) popularisation of andragogy, usefulness had become relevance to the learners, but in social terms usefulness became subject-orientated.
- Consequently, Kerr *et al* (1973) postulated that because education had become more vocational there would be a decline in the humanities and a greater emphasis placed upon science and relevant social sciences.

# Knowledge

- By the time the knowledge economy was really functioning Stehr shows that the dominant knowledge was scientific and that some other forms of knowledge are almost irrelevant to the demands of society/industry.



# Knowledge

- He (1994, pp.10-11) suggested that the advance of science into the life-world and the economy can be described in various ways:
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- The penetration of most of most spheres of social action;
- The displacement, but not elimination, of other forms of knowledge
- The emergence of science as a productive force;
- The differentiation of new forms of political action;
- The development of new sectors of production;
- The change of power structures with the creation of technocracy;
- The trend to base authority on expertise;
- The shift in the nature of social conflict from allocation o income to generalised human needs.

# Knowledge

- Science is at the heart of the knowledge of the knowledge societies and that other forms of knowledge have been displaced – he is careful not to say eliminated, although in some cases it might be argued that certain forms of indigenous knowledge have actually been eliminated.
- Science, however, offers great opportunities for society – it offers many opportunities of economic development and in areas such as medicine it offers enhanced and enriched life for many more people.
- In this sense it is easy to understand why science has been adopted in such an uncritical manner since with it there rests a chance of creating a much more wealthy society and, perhaps a better one.
- **This was the promise of the Enlightenment.**

# Knowledge

The study of the humanities in general has declined but many of these disciplines are quite central to the creation of the new society that the Enlightenment offered.

However, there is another form of knowledge disappearing as a result of this emphasis on scientific knowledge: this is the potential loss of indigenous knowledge, as the UNESCO report makes clear:

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- As we have seen, the information revolution clearly reinforces the supremacy of technological and scientific knowledge over other kinds of knowledge, local knowledge, oral traditions, daily knowledge, and so on. Oral and written traditions correspond to different knowledge systems, and this plurality mainly accounts for cognitive cultures. (UNESCO, 2005,p.148).
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# Knowledge/Language

- the UNESCO report makes this clear claiming that **‘one language becomes extinct every two weeks on average’** (UNESCO, 2005, p.154). But the knowledge vital to the functioning of that society is contained within the language and so it is not just words that are disappearing, **it is the culture of a whole people that is being lost and a people losing that knowledge vital to the continuity of their civilisation.**

# Scientific Knowledge

- The dominance of scientific knowledge carries with it another major problem: this is the problem of objectivity. Knowledge is claimed to be objective, policy is made on objective knowledge but objectivity is actually very problematic since it puts a gulf between us and our world.
- In a sense we become theorists of our world but we need to recall that a theorist in ancient Greek thought was a spectator (Palmer, 1993, p.23) – but increasingly **we are learning that knowledge is not totally objective.**
- Data and information may be objective but the meaning we place upon it is far from objective – knowledge is personal and learned and, as Polanyi (1962, p.3) made clear: **‘Any attempt rigorously to eliminate our human perspective from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity’.**
- We call data and information knowledge – but knowledge is human and learned and it is subjective. It is our world and it is infused with our meanings – it is a human world that we learn and theory follows experience rather than precedes it.

# Scientific Knowledge

- We are not mere spectators to our world but we need the objectivity of theory to guide us as we seek to understand our world: but theory does not determine our actions only help us understand the world in which they are performed: our world is human, every meaning we give it and every interpretation of information that we make is personal.
- **Personal knowledge is something more than just objective knowledge and it is something more than just subjective intuition - it is interacting with our world in a combination of objectivism and subjective meaning: we need to put the human back into knowledge and even to recognise that ultimately truth is personal. In this sense objective knowledge is not a commodity that can be purchased in the market place of learning it is something gained by the learner in the process of learning.**

# The Nature of Education

- Once we say that the educational programme does not offer the whole spectrum of knowledge then we are forced to ask questions once again about the nature of education but, at the same time, we have to acknowledge that adult education need not have the broad spectrum of knowledge of initial education since as we get older so we need to specialise and learn that which is appropriate for our life and our life-world. In this sense, we need expertise and even expert knowledge to function in today's world and we know that knowledge workers are those who manage today's world. We might often regret the apparent narrowness of their knowledge and this is one of the dilemmas of institutionalised adult education.



## Part 3 Distribution and Access

Today, as in the past, the control of knowledge can go hand in hand with serious inequality, exclusion and social conflict. Knowledge was the exclusive domain of tight circles of wise men and the initiated few. Secrecy was the organizing principle of these *exclusive knowledge societies*. (*Italics in original*) (UNESCO 2005, p.17)



# The Hope - but

- The UNESCO report dares to hope that in this new world the barriers of secrecy of these exclusive society will be broken down and we will have the possibility of a world in which knowledge and information will be shared, open and free for all.
- We certainly have the technologies to do this. Indeed, with open learning and new technologies of distribution of knowledge there exists the potentiality of global openness, but do we have the political will or the financial capital? Indeed, there are many advances in open and distance education and it is now being accepted and beginning to reach some people who would never have been exposed to these learning opportunities previously

# The Hope - but

- Lyotard (1984, p.5) suggesting that:
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- It is conceivable that the nation-states will one day fight for the control of information, just as they battled in the past for the control over territory, and afterwards for the control of access to and exploration of raw materials and cheap labor.
- ...For the mechanization of knowledge is bound to affect the privilege the nation-states have enjoyed, and still enjoy, with the production and distribution of learning.
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- He extends this analysis in the following page to indicate that he anticipated a global learning market to which there will not be equal access: indeed, we have witnessed the validity of his analysis.

# The Beneficiaries

- There have clearly been players in the market that have benefited from this situation – both the rich countries and countries such as India and China, but at every level there have also been those who have lost out.
- Overall, however, the North has benefited and the South has not yet done so although there are some indications that it might do so in the future. This is clear in all forms of educational provision – such as school education, higher and vocational education.
- Many of the programmes offered by such organisations as the World Bank have been aimed at increasing access to education in developing countries.

# The Non-Beneficiaries

- A gender divide although the UNESCO report is clear that while some women are benefiting from knowledge societies many others are not.
- An age divide: most of the European Commission's policy statements on lifelong learning stressed work-life learning but not lifelong learning despite the fact that we live in an ageing world – 50% of the population of the UK will be over 50 years old in twenty years time but it was not until the last report (EC, 2006) that the Commission mentioned the elderly.

# The Inequalities

- Education is not the cause of these inequalities, the social and cultural conditions to which people conform are. However, a scientifically orientated educational system is more concerned with the way that it produces workers who can fill the jobs required by the system than it is with producing learners who are aware of the demands of citizenship and who may also be critical of the system.
- In this sense, institutionalised adult education is vocational: it reinforces the social and cultural system in the same way that Bourdieu, amongst others, have argued for traditional education.
- **The mainstreaming of adult education has taken from it the critical and radical perspective that some, but by no means all, adult education fostered in earlier days.**

# Part 4 The Learners

- In the early days of adult education the ideal motives for adult learning were learning for its own sake – there was a sense that adult learning was liberal and general and it enabled learners to complete the breadth of their education in their leisure time – in this there was a sense of traditional romanticism or idealism about it. But this is not the ideal of institutionalised adult education. **Institutionalised adult education is instrumental and so are the majority of its learners**

# Motives for returning to AE

In research in the UK, three of the four main motives for returning to adult learning and education are vocational and instrumental (NIACE, 2008, p.60).

However, it must be pointed out that the remaining motive specified was ‘interest in the subject’.

That people wish to improve their position in society and become more expert in their work is commendable in itself **but what we can see is that the nature of traditional adult education has changed**

# The nature of traditional adult education has changed

The recent UK government White Paper and the preceding consultation paper (DIUS, 2008, 2009) that **traditional adult education had been relegated to non-formal education and linked to other leisure learning pursuits and denied access to most educational funding**



# Instrumentality

The problems of access to traditional adult education and the dilemma, if it may be so-called, for institutionalised adult education is the sheer instrumentality of many of its learners.

# The Hope for the Future

- We have already pointed out that a dilemma for institutionalised adult education which follows from this discussion is that **older people are less likely to want to pay fees to study vocational subjects, especially once they have left employment,**
- But they may not always be in a position to pay the high fees demanded by informal adult education and so
- **We are beginning to see new voluntary movements emerge offering adult learning opportunities to retired persons – organisations such as the University of the Third Age: these are growing extremely rapidly and they not only encourage seniors adult learning but they serve a number of other functions in their social groups – such as preventing isolation as people age, and so on.**

# Re-Discovery

**Institutionalised adult education has lost a traditional welfare function that it has provided in the past but the development of these new organisations can restore something of its welfare function.**

# Concluding Discussion

- Throughout this presentation I have suggested a few times that institutionalised adult education raises questions about the nature of education and educated persons and so I want to conclude this paper by asking the question:
- **Does institutionalised adult education, as we know it today, produce educated persons?**
- Now, however, with people continuing their education for much of their working life, can we now say that we are producing educated persons?

# An Educated Person

- Is someone who has pursued their vocational education and achieved a doctorate necessarily an educated person?
- But the PhD might actually be about a very narrow subject and if the person has gained a PhD but knows little beyond that topic, then the very nature of the narrowness might preclude such an accolade being conferred.

# An Educated Person

- We might, therefore, ask whether breadth of knowledge lies at the heart of this question.
- We can then extend this topic and ask if someone who has studied the sciences widely is necessarily an educated person – since it is the sciences that constitute the basis of knowledge in the knowledge society,
- But it might be claimed that since the spectrum of knowledge is far wider than the sciences, someone who has followed their vocational route through institutionalised adult education still might not achieve the accolade.

# An Educated Person

- Thus our concept of the educated person is of someone who is capable of delighting in a variety of pursuits and projects for their own sake and whose pursuit of them and general conduct of his life is transformed to some degree of all round understanding and sensitivity.
- Pursuing the practical is not necessarily a disqualification for being educated; for the practical need not be pursued under a purely instrumental aspect. This does not mean that the educated man is oblivious to the instrumental value of pursuits – e.g. science. It means only that he does not view them purely under this aspect. Neither does it mean that he has not specialized knowledge; it only means that he is not a narrow-minded specialist (Peters, 1977, pp.13-14).

# Conclusion

- Both institutional adult education and traditional adult education can cater for people who just love learning irrespective of the subject, its breadth or depth, or the motive and so perhaps it is not the form of education that is the major problem but the prevailing culture that limits our perspectives on lifelong learning. **While many societies of the world have developed as a result of these changes, it would be hard to claim that they are better and institutionalised adult education still has its dilemmas.**





**Thank you for listening to me**