

Skills for what kind of life?

John Arnett

Recently I was reading with my adult literacy class a short description of the history and development of London. At one point it made reference to the Roman occupation and the “legions” - I thought I’d find out if they had any knowledge of this. “Do you know who was in charge of this country nearly 2000 years ago?” I asked. There was a pause before one of the students replied, quite emphatically, “Dinosaurs”. This was a young woman who had been through secondary school in this country and is generally quite bright and quick on the uptake (she wasn’t joking either). Other key moments in London’s history were met with equal incomprehension - the various invasions, the Great Fire, the Black Death (that took some explaining). For a long time it has been my belief that the old appellation ‘adult basic education’ was a great deal closer to the mark than the much more functional ‘Skills for Life’ in terms of what these students most lack and most need - education.

It is now ten years since the Moser Report: *A Fresh Start - Improving Literacy and Numeracy* was published, so a re-evaluation is perhaps timely. The core curricula for literacy and numeracy followed in 2001 and the learner materials in 2003. The writing, production and distribution of these to colleges and centres throughout the UK, along with the concomitant staff development and training was a massive operation costing some £5 billion between 2001 and 2007, and a projected £11 billion by 2011. Even so, according to a National Audit Office report of June 2008, ‘the true impact of the Skills for Life programme on the nation’s skills base is not known’.

The creation of an adult national curriculum for literacy and numeracy brought with it many benefits and undoubtedly represented a very sizeable step forward. In terms of literacy, Skills for Life did exactly what was required, which was to set down, for the first time, a detailed analytical framework of the language components of literacy. It tried to answer the question what is it that a literate person is able to *do*, in terms of reading and writing, that a less literate person cannot. There was at last a recognition that there are many *levels* of literacy and this was codified and explained in a developmental way in the curriculum, from Entry level up to

Level 2 (roughly equivalent to GCSE). The distinction between word level skills (spelling), sentence level skills (grammar, sentence structure) and text level skills for reading and writing was both fundamental and extremely helpful for teaching and learning. It was now clear also that effective teaching of individuals with literacy or numeracy difficulties would have to be based on very careful initial and diagnostic assessment.

Implicit in all this was an understanding that the teaching of basic skills is complex and demanding, requiring careful thought and planning - effectively putting an end to the idea that because it is basic, anyone can do it. Crucially, it was also a *national* curriculum, which meant that the same standards of rigour and parity in teaching and assessment that applied in other sectors of education across the country, should now apply to adult literacy and numeracy. The Skills for Life initiative was certainly successful in raising the profile of basic skills and making people aware of the extent of the problem in the UK, and in that sense it was both necessary and overdue.

Even a cursory skim through the Skills for Life learner materials leaves you in no doubt that the emphasis is firmly on functional literacy and numeracy, in work and everyday life situations - shopping, going to the doctor’s or Jobcentre, health and safety at work. This approach continues to be the dominant one, as evidenced in developments such as Functional Skills, Train to Gain, employability, and the fact that college departments such as my own have rebranded themselves as Skills for Life Faculties rather than, in our case, Languages and Humanities. This is very much in line with government funding priorities.

Literacy of course has many uses and applications, the functional being just one of them. The problem is that, necessary as it may be, it is not the most interesting one, and the exclusive focus on functional skills which is enshrined in the Skills for Life materials - reading and writing official letters, filling in forms, using punctuation or a range of conjunctions correctly - is ultimately narrow-minded, uninspiring and deadly. There is nothing in it to really engage the interest and imagination of the learners. So to just use those kinds of materials,

which many literacy teachers do, and indeed were encouraged to do by the whole SFL training programme, is to do the students a great disservice. It may well be counterproductive; students need and generally want to be challenged, to be encouraged to think, to be creative, to interact, to enjoy learning. Reading stories, plays and poetry, biography and autobiography can do this, reading and learning about history can do it, quizzes and games to broaden general knowledge also, not to mention writing because you want to say something, to express yourself - and it is perfectly possible to do this with literacy classes. More often than not students have extraordinary stories to tell. To assume that this is somehow beyond them is misguided and patronising. If you were doing a beginners art class you would still want to paint and draw; if you were starting to learn an instrument you would want to be making music - nobody says it has to be perfect. Reading some literature, albeit simplified, and doing some expressive writing is just as important at this level as it is at higher levels - arguably more so - just as it would be with emerging literacy in primary education. A broader range of materials and activities of this kind will of course serve to develop functional skills, but it will do something else as well, something educational; it doesn't just have to be about reading your payslip and going shopping.

This broader conception of literacy that I am advocating is not only going to be more interesting and stimulating for the learners, but for the teachers too. We all know that where a teacher is passionately involved in and knowledgeable about their own subject - let's say English or maths - that enthusiasm will be passed on to the student. Too many teachers of basic or key skills don't actually see themselves as teaching a *subject* and it seems to me that this is a real weakness (in many cases this may well be because they don't have a degree in English or Maths and, say, a PGCE in how to teach the subject.) This is brought into sharp relief for me every year when I attend the standardisation meeting for GCSE English, run by the exam board at a hotel in London. Attendance is compulsory and delegates are sometimes disgruntled at having to be there. However, it is never very long before this turns into animated and impassioned debate about the subject and how best to teach it. Pretty soon it is hard to get a word in. Sad to say, I've never seen this happen at a Skills for Life meeting.

A recent headline in the *London Evening Standard* (9th April 2009) suggests a growing recognition of these issues in the school sector too - "Literacy lessons have been fatal for English, says teachers' leader". Mary Bousted, general secretary of the ATL, warns that "pupils no longer read whole

books or write in class for pleasure, but instead analyse 'extracts' for tests . . . while Michael Rosen, the Children's Laureate, has criticised the government for failing to promote reading for fun'. (Echoes here of the national literacy tests for adults at level 1 and 2 which test only a very narrow range of skills, and those just in reading.) As for adult education, Professor Alison Wolf has recently delivered a powerful critique of the present government's view that "economic prosperity is not one, but the *only* legitimate reason for subsidising education". She concludes "If we want to stop, and reverse, the destruction of adult education perhaps we have to start here; with the mysterious fact that our concept of education is more narrow and impoverished than in any previous generation" (*Adults Learning*, January 2009). So, when we talk about skills for life, what kind of life do we have in mind? If the best we can provide in the way of education, for millions of people, is at the level of mere subsistence or social survival, what kind of success is that? We can surely do better.

CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

- ◆ campaigns against the decline in standards
- ◆ defends individuals against victimisation
- ◆ gives moral support and legal advice
- ◆ investigates malpractice and publishes findings
- ◆ seeks to develop a support network with unions and other organisations.

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News update: August - October 2009

Week beginning 31/8/09

[Previous week] UCU members at Tower Hamlets College start an indefinite all-out strike in response to cuts and sackings initiated before the summer by principal Michael Farley.

Brunel University council chairperson Tom Webb describes as 'aggressive and unhelpful' comments by lay governor John Murphy about the vice-chancellor, Chris Jenks. In a letter to Webb, Murphy had maintained that councils exist 'to curtail the powers of megalomaniac vice-chancellors' and that the Brunel council's failure to do this with respect to Jenks makes them 'about as effective as a bunch of stuffed donkeys'. (Jenks has led Brunel into a £30m 'Eastern Gateway' building project.)

Reading University researchers present to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) conference the findings of a survey of 412 school students conducted at the start and end of their Year 11 about post compulsory qualifications. 81 per cent thought that having a vocational route was important, but the proportion with no knowledge of 14-19 diplomas - 37 per cent at the start of the year - was still 25 per cent at the end.

Times Higher Education (THE) figures showing the amount of

research funding won by universities in 2008-09 from six of the eight research councils (excluding the Science and Technology Facilities and Economic and Social Research Councils) show that the top ten institutions (University College London [UCL], Cambridge, Oxford, Imperial College, Manchester, Edinburgh, Nottingham, Leeds, Bristol and Sheffield) won amounts ranging between £81,365,000 (UCL) and £36,133,000 (Sheffield), while the bottom ten (Wolverhampton, Greenwich, Middlesex, Bedfordshire, Teesside, Glamorgan, Sunderland, Bournemouth, Anglia Ruskin and London Metropolitan) won amounts ranging from £16,000 (Wolverhampton) to nothing (London Met.) Institutions making fewer than ten applications were not included. In 2008-09, 23 per cent of all applications were successful, down from 28 per cent the year before.

There is evidence that lack of funding is causing some sixth form colleges to turn away would-be students, despite the Government's 'September (2008) guarantee' which purportedly ensured a place in education or training for all 16- and 17-year-olds.

An advert for the post of 'Vice-Chancellor & Chief Executive' of London Met., placed in the *THE*

by the Perrett Laver agency, says that the institution: 'combines an inspiring mission of widening access to higher education with a passion for the highest standards of academic delivery'. Furthermore, 'The University's mature and nuanced understanding of its mission brings the elevation of students' personal aspirations together with the fulfilment of business needs'. (Management at London Met, which has more black and ethnic minority students than all the elite Russell Group universities put together, is trying to sack around 500 staff.)

UCU launches an academic boycott of London Met. over management's insistence on job cuts.

Points in a *Times Educational Supplement (TES)* update on the FE colleges building fiasco include: 12 of the 13 colleges given the go-ahead are due to start building within September; each of these colleges has been required to make an average 'saving' of £3.6m in the costs of their projects; one college, Sandwell, has cut its costs by £8m (to £77m); one project - at the newly merged The Manchester College's Wythenshawe site - has been delayed by the LSC pending further details; one extra project, the proposed £41m new campus of Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College has been approved as a 'special case'

'outside of the public process' (Skelmersdale is a subsidiary of Newcastle upon Tyne College, headed by union-bashing principal Jackie Fisher); Grimsby Institute of FHE is threatening to seek a judicial review of the LSC's handling of the crisis.

There are anecdotal indications that the fall in first year degree students from outside the EU resulting from the Government's clampdown on visas could be as high as 20 per cent.

Association of [private Ed.] Learning Providers (ALP) chief executive officer (CEO) Graham Hoyle claims that a decision by the Government to restrict to colleges a facility by which other 'adult-responsive' funding can be temporarily moved into supporting Train to Gain provision: 'will skew the market in a totally unacceptable way'.

New Association of Colleges (AOC) president, St Helens College principal Pat Bacon announces that the scheme proposed by her predecessor, David Collins, by which a National Skills University would accredit two-year, low-cost degree courses run by FE colleges, is to be axed, in favour of heavier lobbying for direct HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding of HE courses run in FE (ie as opposed to their being franchised from universities). 269 colleges now do some HEFCE-funded work.

Nottingham University Samworth Academy (NUSA), in Bilborough, takes its first students. This is a tie-up between the university and a 'local businessman' [THE] David Samworth, who is also sponsoring two other academies locally. From 2010 NUSA will be accommodated in a new £24m government-funded building.

Birmingham Metropolitan College, formed from the merger of Matthew Boulton and Sutton Coldfield Colleges, opens.

Week beginning 7/9/09

The annual conference of the vice-chancellors' organisation Universities UK (UUK) begins in Edinburgh. A *Guardian* interview profile of incoming UUK president, Exeter University vice-chancellor Steve Smith reminds us that he previously made the news for closing the chemistry department at Exeter, and that in 2003, when the Blair government was imposing tuition fees, he said: 'We can and will charge the full fee. They are the only proposals that will give universities the money they need. This is genuinely a progressive social move.'

Two *TES* articles allegedly reflect the views of 'Tory insiders' and promote the idea that if the Tories come to power in 2010 'the status quo [ie with respect to 14-19 diplomas] is not an option'. According to results announced in August for the 212 students who have so far completed 'high-level' diplomas, over 25 per cent did not achieve a grade, and that 'a major reason for this' was the functional skills tests.

Unison launches a campaign to defend university nurseries, more than 20 of which face closure.

An advertisement for the 'Principals Qualifying Programme: Executive Leadership Development' run by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) includes a list of the 16 principals who completed this in July 2009. One of these is Paula Whittle, identified here as principal of Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College. (Whittle recently moved to EHWLC from Barnsley College, where she tried

to sack UCU management spine rep Bob Willerton for 'gross misconduct'. Willerton's 'crime' was that he refrained from victimising one of his own staff under Whittle's 'zero tolerance' policy on staff disciplinarys.)

Earth sciences tutors at Bristol University are investigating ways to go on running lifelong learning courses despite management's decision to shut them down following the Government's cuts to the funding for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQ).

City of Sunderland College (of FE) has entered a partnership with the Inner Mongolia Business and Commercial Vocational College in the regional capital, Hohhot, where 'about 60' [TES] students are this autumn to start Sunderland's 'Higher Diploma in Business and Global Trade'. It is doing this as the pilot for a move by the 157 Group [of large colleges with good Ofsted results Ed.] to validate and quality assure their own diplomas both abroad and here, thereby undercutting awarding bodies such as Edexcel, City and Guilds and AQA. Other 157 Group colleges, including City of Bristol and Matthew Boulton in Birmingham, are seeking partners in China. (It would require a change in the regulations for college-validated diplomas to be run here.)

Points to emerge from an AOC-sponsored analysis of the results achieved for A-levels and other level 3 qualifications in 2008 (except in private schools) as expressed in UCAS tariff points include: students in school sixth forms with less than 50 students averaged 561 points; in sixth forms with 101-150 students the average was 657; in those with between 151 and 200 it was 700; in those with 201 to 250 it was 773; in those with over 250 it was 802; the average in colleges,

none of which had fewer than 350 students on the relevant courses, was 794.8; the average across all types of institution with more than 250 relevant students was 802.

According to OECD figures for the numbers of 15-19 year olds not in employment, education or training, the average across all 19 EU countries surveyed is 6 per cent of the age group. In the US the average is 6.3 per cent; in Britain 10.7 per cent.

HE minister David Lammy tells the UUK Conference that: 'Universities have had it good for more than a decade . . . it's no secret that current levels of public investment are unlikely to be sustainable in future. . . . Any sensible analysis can only conclude that you need to find new ways to leverage private money into the system . . . We are working with HEFCE to look at how we can develop the funding model to help the sector further increase its economic contribution . . . That may mean making a larger proportion of funding contestable . . . [this will mean Ed.] greater emphasis on economic outcomes . . . [and] 'a disciplined approach to pay and pensions'.

Week beginning 14/9/09

The National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) publishes *Learning Through Life*, the 280-page final report of its Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning, which was initiated by NIACE director Alan Tuckett in 2007. NIACE claims to have spent £1m of its 'resources' on the inquiry, which has been chaired by Sir David Watson, professor of HE management at London University Institute of Education (who during the same period also chaired the Nuffield

inquiry into 14-19 education), and directed by Tom Schuller, formerly head of the OECD's centre for educational research and innovation.

The report's authors set out what they regard as a framework for adult education over the next ten to fifteen years. Their recommendations include: a single government department with responsibility for lifelong learning; a Cabinet committee (*THE*) or an independent 'high level commission' or joint parliamentary committee' (*Guardian*) to monitor progress towards targets for this; a further report every three years; individual learner accounts to cover all age groups; the reorganisation of education funding to give £3.2bn at current rates to post-25 education; raising the 'standard end of working age' to 75; making lifelong learning a compulsory element in all teacher training courses (ie including for school teachers); treating FE colleges as 'the institutional backbone' of lifelong learning; and an entitlement to time off work for learning 'which professional and trade bodies would be encouraged to require as part of their industry standards, just as FE lecturers are required to carry out continuous professional development' (*TES*). (NIACE director Alan Tuckett is married to Institute for Learning [IFL] CEO Toni Fazaeli.)

HEFCE issues its report *Selection of Staff for Inclusion in RAE 2008*. This reveals that 67 per cent of permanent male academics were included by their university in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (ie the main means by which HEFCE allocates research funding to those judged 'research-active') whereas only 48 per cent of females were thus included. Only 40 per cent of black academics of either sex were included.

Research by Cambridge Assessment, in which 12 examiners were asked to mark a sample of GCSE English Literature scripts both by traditional means and on-screen, suggests that on-screen marking of essay questions is as accurate as traditional marking but imposes an 'additional cognitive load' on examiners. (Cambridge Assessment controls the OCR awarding body, which, unlike both AQA and Edexcel, has so far not used on-screen marking for such questions.

Points in *THE* coverage of the report by an internal investigatory panel at Cardiff University into the role played by 'key individuals at the university' in the award of an honorary fellowship for his work in public healthcare policy to Gerard Walsh include: during 2006-07 these 'individuals' formed the opinion that Walsh possessed 'considerable wealth'; in October 2007 Walsh hired premises at the university to hold a birthday party for himself, collection of the payment for which had to be handed to a debt collection agency; in April 2008 Walsh signed an agreement to provide £2.5m to fund the Cochrane Chair at the university; in July 2008 he was awarded the honorary fellowship and defaulted on the first payment towards this Chair; soon after, it emerged that Cork City Football club, owned by Walsh's Arkaga investment fund, was in financial difficulty; in October 2008 it became apparent that in 1997 Walsh had been ordered by the high court to pay the equivalent of £786,000 in damages after he passed himself off as the owner of a Lamborghini dealership and took deposits for cars that were never delivered.

Aspects of the situation at Brooklands College (in Surrey) include: principal Colin Staff claims the LSC pressured him

into a merger with Spelthorne Sixth Form College (in Ashford), and also into spending £11.5m in preparation for inessential new buildings at that site; Brooklands' annual turnover is £23m; it is now 'technically insolvent'; it may have to close the Spelthorne site, which is oversubscribed and currently caters for 3,000 students, within two years; it is in talks with the LSC about measures to prevent overall bankruptcy by the end of 2009.

In a speech at the London School of Economics (LSE), Lord Mandelson announces a review of all HE funding agencies, including HEFCE, aimed at cutting 'overlapping bureaucracy'.

The TUC annual conference, in Liverpool, agrees unanimously to support a UCU motion, moved by UCU president Alastair Hunter, which condemns the continuing drive to privatise education and calls for proper funding for FHE.

An 'independent' review, conducted on behalf of Leeds Metropolitan University by accountants KPMG, into expenses claimed by former vice-chancellor Simon Lee and his wife Patricia, finds that 'only' £7,509 of the £72,923 of non-fuel expenses claimed by Lee himself between August 2006 and February 2009 was not supported by receipts, and even this was 'related to university business' (*THE*). There were also £22,746 of other management claims that were not backed by receipts. However, KPMG found 'evidence that the university had accepted' Patricia Lee as an 'informal ambassador', thereby justifying the additional £35,608 spent on letting her accompany her husband on trips abroad. They found a 'lack of evidence of formal approval' for three trips she made on her own, including a visit to Ethiopia which cost

£3,573, but Lee is 'delighted . . . that we have been vindicated'.

157 Group founder Ioan Morgan announces he will stand down as principal of Warwickshire College in August 2010.

Week beginning 21/9/09

Strike action by UCU members at Doncaster College seems likely as management tries to overcome a £2.8m deficit by sacking nearly 120 people.

HEFCE publishes the last of its consultation documents on the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which from 2014 will replace the RAE as the means of allocating about £2bn of research funding per year. The 56 page document proposes a model based on 60 per cent for 'output quality', 25 per cent for 'impact' and 15 per cent for 'environment' [not in the usual sense Ed.]. Contrary to previous suggestions about the likely use of 'bibliometrics' (measuring the value of research by, for example, counting how many times one research paper is cited in others), the 'output quality' element will, with exceptions in the sciences, be determined, as hitherto, by peer review panels. Hence the main change proposed is the weight that may now be given to 'impact' (ie the supposed practical benefits from the research), as demanded by the Government.

The Learning and Skills Network (LSN) releases *Beyond Leitch: Skills Policy for the Upturn*, the first paper by its Centre for Innovation in Learning. Due to be launched on 30/9/09 at a Labour Party conference fringe meeting, this argues that employers should pay for company-specific training, with the money thus saved going to fund broader training for young people in colleges.

The CBI issues *Stronger Together - Business and Universities in Turbulent Times*, a document in which its HE task force recommends that all HE students except 'those most in need' pay the full cost of borrowing for tuition-fee loans, with tougher means-testing, and that companies sponsor more students, pay for courses, provide more internships and the like. Steve Smith for UUK and Russell Group [of posh universities] director-general Wendy Piatt welcome this approach.

The Association of Learning Providers demands that the LSC move money from the mainstream FE budget to support Train to Gain, and that the entire year's T2G budget be disbursed in one go rather than in two instalments as now.

Only 64 of the UK's 116 universities will, from 2010, offer German as part of a degree.

Asked by a *TES* interviewer about FE capital funding, business, innovation and skills minister Pat McFadden reveals that: 'Of course I regret the fact that the spending controls on this programme were not as good as they could have been . . .'

The Future Directions academic restructuring plan issued by management at the University of Stirling, where a voluntary severance scheme aimed at cutting up to 140 posts in order to eliminate a £4.4m deficit has just closed, notes that the 'financial return per academic' there varies from £30,000 to £139,000, and comments that, while academics are 'wary of thinking in terms of productivity . . . the development of a culture that can accommodate such thinking is essential'.

UCU seeks to involve ACAS in the Tower Hamlets College dispute, in which at least 130 out of 180 lecturers are still on all-out strike. (30 staff have already gone through redundancy or natural wastage, and the college has reserves of £6m.)

The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) issues a report on the use of student vouchers to fund HE (as tried for example in Colorado, considered in Australia and advocated in *The Mobile Economy*, a document produced here in 2008 by the rightwing Reform thinktank), concluding that: 'Whatever benefits the introduction of a voucher scheme would bring would be more than offset by the disadvantages'.

The publishing group Pearson, which owns the *Financial Times*, Penguin Books and Edexcel, is to launch on 26/10/09 its Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic) in at least 20 countries including the UK, the aim of which is to allow universities to assess applicants' English language abilities. This will include essay questions marked by 'robots'. Commenting on this, Cambridge Assessment research director Tim Oates, says: "It's extremely unlikely that automated systems will not be deployed extensively in educational assessment. The uncertainty is 'when' not 'if'." (In the early 1990s, as an employee of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications [NCVQ], Oates was largely responsible for creating Core, now Key, Skills.)

Birmingham University is conducting an internal review, due to report in October, on whether to close its sociology department.

The AOC's capital task group puts forward proposals for dealing with the FE capital projects fiasco which include

easing targets intended to cut the environmental impact of new buildings, and a scheme linked with Barclays Bank by which colleges with large reserves could lend them to others. (Union bashing Oaklands College principal and former treasury civil servant / college finance officer Mark Dawe, chairs the group.)

About 20 schools are complaining about poor results in AS-level drama, alleging that Edexcel artificially reduced scores to prevent a new version of the exam from looking too easy.

NUT and NASUWT members in several Tamworth schools take strike action over plans to close sixth forms at Belgrave High, Wilnecote High and The Rawlett School and replace them with a single sixth form centre. This centre is due to be formed within the present Woodhouse Business and Enterprise College, which is to be re-organised under the name Tamworth Academy. Parents from the group Hands Off Tamworth Schools lobby DCSF minister Vernon Coaker in support of this action.

Edexcel managing director Jerry Jarvis is to be replaced in January by operational manager Ziggy Liaquat.

Lifelong Learning UK, the sector skills council covering FE, publishes figures showing that: 60 per cent of FE staff are part time; 64 per cent of FE staff are female; 45 per cent of FE senior managers are women.

After 18 hours of talks at ACAS, UCU calls off the strike at Tower Hamlets College.

Week beginning 28/9/09

Among the private training companies referred to in a

Guardian feature on the effects of the Train to Gain overspend is Qube Learning, said to have grown 300 per cent in the last three years, and last year to have turned over £4m. Qube provides training in 'basic skills such as literacy and numeracy' to staff of firms involved in Train to Gain.

HEFCE publishes the report of its Teaching Quality and Student Experience sub-committee, set up in 2008 to investigate standards in universities, and chaired by Essex university vice-chancellor Colin Riordan. It includes recommendations about the role of external examiners and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and about what institutions tell prospective students, including from overseas, about course requirements.

In a *TES* profile, shadow secretary for universities and skills David Willetts: expresses support for the LSN's proposal that Train to Gain funding be refocused on apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship courses (ie and away from training that companies would provide for themselves anyway), intimates that a Tory government would be 'highly unlikely to find the money' to cover outstanding FE college building projects, suggests that sector skills councils, rather than regional development agencies as proposed by the Government, should define the Skills Funding Agency's strategy, and confirms Tory scepticism about the return of FE 16-19 funding to LEAs.

Management at Derby University is requiring lecturers to complete a register of students present at each lecture by scanning their ID cards with a hand-held device.

The LSC announces that only institutions which are more than 10 per cent above their recruitment targets for 16-19 year olds

will be eligible for the 'limited' extra funding made available to the LSC by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to cater for the rise produced by the recession in those who want to continue or restart study. (There is a suggestion that this will disproportionately reward schools with small 6th forms, which can more easily show a percentage increase, and penalise unemployed people seeking to re-enter colleges.

UCU members at five of the colleges where management has failed to implement the pay scale harmonisation arrangements agreed by the AOC in 2004 (the so-called 'IOU' campaign) - Doncaster, Rotherham, Greenwich, Suffolk and Leeds College of Art and Design - take a day of strike action. Action at Askham Bryan College is called off after both sides agree to enter talks at ACAS.

It emerges that in year since FE lecturers were compelled to 'join' the Institute for Learning (IFL), this body has received 16 complaints against lecturers, has not yet held any trials, but has processed three cases to the stage of its 'investigation committee'.

A UCU FE sector special salaries conference votes to reject the AOC's 1.5 per cent offer for 2009-10 and to ballot for strike action. (Unison, the GMB, Unite, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers [ATL] and the ACM have accepted the offer.)

Construction of a new building begins at Barnsley College, one of the 13 for whose projects funding has now been made available.

Birmingham Metropolitan College management circulates with immediate effect a staff dress

code containing the following clause: 'Where a member of staff disregards this policy [ie of presenting 'a professional and corporate image' Ed.], and his/her dress and/or appearance is, in the college's view, unacceptable, he/she will be required to return home to change and make up the time lost while absent from work and may be subject to disciplinary action'.

The UCU branch at Wolverhampton University issues a statement demanding that vice-chancellor Caroline Gipps 'take public responsibility for a serious mistake' in student completion data submitted to HEFCE. Features of the situation there include: HEFCE has accused Wolverhampton of misreporting student completion data and has threatened to claw back up to £3.5m it says was overpaid between 2007 and 2009, and to cut the recurrent grant by £2m a year; in August 2009 management told staff of its plan to cut 250 jobs in order to reduce an £8m deficit; meanwhile executive pay has been increased and performance bonuses paid.

Week beginning 5/10/09

At the Conservative Party conference, David Willetts unveils plans which include: setting up a 14-19 technical school, funded as an academy, in each of the twelve biggest conurbations; authorising FE colleges to set up their own internal 'technical schools', linked to or supported by universities and/or businesses, which could recruit students from age 14; providing full funding for 30,000 young apprenticeship places each year. Willetts says all technical schools would offer 14-19 (vocational) diplomas, but 'shadow minister for children,

schools, families and universities and skills' Baroness Verma tells a fringe meeting that: 'At the moment, they [diplomas Ed.] are this back-door route into getting a qualification'.

The Futuretrack study, based on a survey conducted in 2007 by the HE Careers Services Unit of almost 50,000 students then in their first year or starting their second year in HE, reveals that nearly two thirds had not visited their university's careers service.

The IFL has responded to a DCSF consultation on teaching qualifications, due to end in January, by proposing that Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status should be recognised as a qualification to teach in a school.

A study by the Sutton Trust of the scholastic backgrounds of over 1,700 fellows of the Royal Society and British Academy finds that only 0.5 per cent of them were educated in a non-selective state school.

West Midlands UCU publicises the case of a Birmingham Metropolitan College lecturer sent home to change under the new dress code.

In a joint HSBC/NUS survey of HE students, 33 per cent of those polled stated that their basic costs while at university exceed the amount they could borrow and that they took on paid work 'to pay for books and other equipment'. 32 per cent worked in term time, and those who did so for worked an average of twelve hours a week.

Wolverhampton University vice-chancellor Caroline Gipps issues a statement insisting that the alleged misreporting of student completion data there is due purely to the difficulty of under-

standing HEFCE's definition of 'completion', and that there is no parallel with London Met., as: 'London Met. was claiming for students that didn't exist, in the sense that they had enrolled but were not active students. [But Ed.] Our data are completely clean.'

David Willetts tells a Tory conference fringe meeting that a Conservative government would scrap the 'impact' criterion for funding HE research due to be introduced under the proposed Research Excellence Framework (REF). In the conference itself, he also announces a plan to fund 10,000 extra HE places by offering incentives to graduates to make early repayments of student loans. Shadow DCSF spokesperson Michael Gove implies that a Tory government would put universities, schools and colleges back together in a single government department.

Figures obtained by the THE under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) reveal that, as of 4/10/09, the Student Loans Company had failed to process 16 per cent of this year's applications (equating to up to 175,000 students.)

HEFCE CEO Sir Alan Langlands tells an Association for University Research conference that: 'What we might be seeing in the UK is not just a temporary fall in public spending due to the recession and the economy, but a bit of a recalibration, making it likely that there will be difficulties for the next eight to nine years'.

Week beginning 12/10/09

The Institute for Learning (IFL) admits to honorary membership Bill Rammell, who in 2007-08 as skills minister showed himself unable or unwilling to resist

principal Colin Hindmarch's attempts to destroy the college in Rammell's constituency (Harlow), and former AOC deputy/acting CEO Sue Dutton, who after incorporation in 1993 conspired with Roger Ward, corrupt CEO of the College Employers Forum, and his cronies to set up the Education Lecturing Services (ELS) agency, now part of Protocol Professional, to recruit people to scab on lecturers' resistance to deteriorated contracts.

Art for the Few, a study carried out for the National Arts Learning Network, which comprises 19 providing institutions, by Jane Burke (Roehampton University) and Jackie McManus (University of the Arts London) reveals evidence of racism in the recruitment of students to HE courses in art and design.

The 157 Group publishes its new 'manifesto', a key point in which is the call for a joint HE and FE funding council as a replacement for existing quangos and as part of a general move to recreate a polytechnic sector.

The AOC issues its 'manifesto' at a principals' policy forum meeting held in London. This calls on a future government to increase the extent to which HE courses run in FE are funded directly, and to allow colleges to recruit 14 year olds as students.

In an HE Policy Institute (HEPI) report, *Proposals for the REF: a Critique*, HEPI director Bahram Bekhradnia urges HEFCE to think twice about plans to allow the 'impact' (ie the immediate practical utility) of research to constitute 25 per cent of the basis on which funding is to be allocated, and in particular urges the inclusion within this of 'academic impact' (ie impact on other academics' work).

An LLUK survey reveals that 48 per cent of those currently employed in FE are aged between 45 and 64.

Points to emerge from the Student Loans Company (SLC)'s annual report for 2008-09 include: in that year the SLC spent £331,000 on first class rail travel, £100,000 on 'team-building events' and £780,000 on external consultants; the last of these figures includes £62,000 paid to a single company of 'business psychologists'; the SLC's overall admin expenses rose to about £80m from about £70m the year before.

It emerges that out of 188,000 'members' of the IFL (ie FE lecturers compelled to 'join' this quango, with their fees paid from public funds), 78,000 have so far not registered the details of the 30 hours (or pro rata for part timers) 'continuing professional development' (CPD) which the IFL demands from them, and which it told them they 'must' do by 31/8/09. This deadline has now been extended to 31/12/09. Meanwhile, IFL CEO Toni Fazaeli says the IFL is in talks with the Department for Business, Information and Skills (BIS) about sanctions against those who still fail to comply.

A survey of university librarians, carried out for the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) reveals that, under the impact of the recession, many expect to curtail opening hours, cut journal subscriptions and sack staff.

Dennis Marsden, co-author with Brian Jackson of the influential 1962 book *Education and the Working Class*, dies at 86.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) publishes 'limited confidence' audit reports on two universities, Leeds Metropolitan and Greenwich. With Greenwich it criticises new assessment procedures, while with Leeds Met. it indicates that procedures used for changing courses are 'putting standards at risk'.

Following the expression by Ofsted inspectors of concerns about the way in which some colleges are reporting their success rates, a joint Ofsted/LSC review recommends that procedures for this be tightened up and threatens with sanctions colleges which fail to conform.

UCU's HE Committee (HEC) votes to reject the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA)'s 0.5 per cent 2009-10 pay offer. Unite and the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) have also rejected the offer, while Unison has accepted it after a ballot. The GMB's response is expected shortly.

Leeds University vice-chancellor and Russell Group chairperson Michael Arthur tells a HEPI conference, held in London, that the REF should reverse the trend arising from the 2008 RAE, in which there was a slightly wider distribution of research funding than hitherto, and return to the situation following the 2001 RAE, in which the top 20 institutions would receive 75 per cent of all quality-related research funding, the top 10 52.5 per cent, and the top 5 35 per cent.

In a Lords debate on the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning (ASCL) Bill, BIS minister Lord Young reveals that although, as previously announced, the Government still intends to allocate to Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) the responsibility for determining

skills strategies, anything they decide will now be subject to approval by 'local authority leader boards'.

Week beginning 19/10/09

In a *TES* feature on 'failing' colleges, former Manchester principal and AOC CEO David Gibson, whose most recent post was acting principal of City of Birmingham College, says of such institutions: 'Almost always there has been a failure by senior management to concentrate on student achievement'.

Following campaigns by students and by the UCU branch, Sheffield University's senate rejects a faculty of arts and humanities plan to axe undergraduate courses in biblical studies.

Points in *Should We End the EMA?*, a report written for the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) Education Trust by Mick Fletcher, now a visiting professor at London University Institute of Education, include: there will be pressure to reduce or abolish EMAs, both because of public sector cuts and because the Government's plan to force everyone to stay in education or training to 18 would supposedly render the EMA incentive redundant; on this latter point, Fletcher says EMAs should be retained because 'No serious commentator believes that legislation by itself will achieve 100 per cent participation'; child benefit and child tax credit should be means-tested on the same basis as EMAs; the top rate of EMAs should be increased to £40. (EMAs are currently paid to about 526,000 16-19 year olds each year, at an annual cost of around £549m. They are means-tested and organised in three bands: £10 a week for those with family incomes between £30,180 and

£20,522 £20 for those between £25,521 and £20,818 and , and £30 for those below this last figure.)

Hidden Talents II: Getting the Best Out of Britain's Young People, a report produced by the Local Government Association (LGA - representing local authorities) and the Centre for Social Justice (a thinktank set up by former Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith) argues that the funding currently directed via EMAs should be transferred to local partnerships, including voluntary organisations, but 'led by democratically accountable local government' (*TES*), which would then direct bursaries and other 16-19 student support as they judged appropriate.

In a speech to the CBI's 'higher education summit', held in London, Lord Mandelson says that his new HE Framework, scheduled for publication of 19/10/09 but now postponed to November, will 'directly address' his decision that: 'we do need a greater degree of competition between institutions' and that the key to this is student choice. He says: 'We are going to have to be more demanding and monitor more on behalf of students'.

ALP CEO Graham Hoyle claims that ALP's membership includes 60 FE colleges.

Maurice Glasman, director of the faith and citizenship programme at London Met. University and prominent in the London Citizens coalition of mainly 'faith-based' organisations which has campaigned successfully for improved pay and conditions for cleaners and security staff at universities in London, argues that UCU should itself discipline those of its members who are found not to be providing a good service to students.

In a joint letter to the *TES* about the granting by the IFL of honorary membership to Sue Dutton and Bill Rammell, UCU past president Sasha Callaghan, UCU Education Committee chairperson Maire Daley and UCU FE Committee chairperson Alan Whitaker maintain that: 'Any reasonable teacher in the [FE Ed.] sector could be forgiven for casting the IFL as an agent of the Government and management, rather than one for teachers. So if you are listening, IFL - these honours are not ours and cannot be awarded in our name'.

Liverpool University vice-chancellor Sir Howard Newby announces that he has made a deal with the private company Laureate Education Inc, by which the latter will offer Liverpool degrees via five other universities (one each in Mexico, Spain, Chile, Peru and Turkey).

The Commons Public Accounts Committee alleges that local authorities and the Connexions (formerly careers) Service are failing to pass on to colleges and other post compulsory providers adequate details of the estimated 20,000 people under 25 who are subject to autism.

The Government issues a response to *Spend, Spend, Spend?*, the skills select committee's July report on the FE capital spending fiasco, in which it announces that: there will be no compensation for colleges which have lost money spent on preparing building bids; no further action will be taken against the LSC's ruling council and chairperson Chris Banks; ministers had no knowledge of the impending debacle until the building programme was suspended in December 2008.

The IFL announces that on 17th and 18th November it will con-

duct its first three disciplinary hearings against lecturers. Those involved are charged respectively with threatening language and assault, plagiarism and accessing 'adult' websites.

Union members at Barnet College begin a work-to-rule in protest at management's attempts to impose worsened contracts.

Barclays and the European Investment Bank have signed a deal which will reportedly allow 24 colleges to borrow £200m towards restarting building projects paralysed by the FE capital projects fiasco.

In *Towards Ambition 2020: Skills, Jobs, Growth*, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) calls for the abolition of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, of Standards Verification UK, and of the FE role of the IT body BECTA, and also for the IFL (which currently receives £5m a year from the Government) to be made self-financing, with the money thus released being used to create a form of league table, administered by UKCES, which would enable students and employers to choose which college to use.

Week beginning 26/10/09

In its response to *Students and Universities*, a report issued by the Commons IUSS committee in August, the Government rejects their proposal that the QAA be re-established as a standards as well as a quality agency, that would monitor the supposed 'dumbing down' of assessment criteria on degree courses.

In a *TES* article, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) general secretary John Dunford welcomes the Tories'

likely policy towards 14-19 diplomas, by which the obligation on partnerships to offer all 14 diplomas at all three levels would be dropped.

Swansea University management is considering a plan which would lead to 12 compulsory redundancies in the School of Environment and Society there.

Research into the Skills for Life programme, carried out for the Government and announced this week by BIS, reveals that for the 2,000 students on basic skills courses in 2003, 2004 and 2005 who were studied, there was no evidence that the programme had improved their chances of finding employment.

Warwick University vice-chancellor Nigel Thrift is said to be considering a briefing paper by sociology professor Steve Fuller, in which the latter proposes that all students be required to follow two 'general education' modules, taught through digital technology, alongside specialist modules in their first year, with an option to change their major at the end of that year in the light of this 'general education' and to use a topic from within these modules for their final-year dissertation. Fuller argues that such 'general education' 'extends beyond vocational training to training for life itself, especially a life in which one is expected to change jobs every year'.

There is strong evidence that FE colleges everywhere are either turning both 16-19 and adult students away or admitting them without adequate funding.

Points in an analysis by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) charity of HE Statistics Agency (HESA) figures on degree attainments between 2003-04 and 2007-08 include: in 2003-04,

63.1 per cent of students defining themselves as white achieved a first or 2.1, as against 35.5 per cent of those defining themselves as black; by 2007-08, these percentages were, respectively, 66.4 per cent and 37.7 per cent; in 2003-04 46.9 per cent of those defining themselves as Asian achieved firsts or 2.1s; by 2007-08, this figure had risen to 48.8 per cent.

An AOC report on 14-19 diplomas, written mainly by AOC senior policy adviser Debbie Ribchester and based on a survey of 133 general, sixth form and specialist colleges, alleges that schools are undermining diploma consortia by seeking to retain good students on A-level courses, and calls for a review of functional skills requirements within diplomas on the grounds that these are too demanding.

50 HE institutions have so far agreed to a QAA request to include students as full members of institutional audit teams, but 11 have refused to do this.

UCU says a dispute 'seems inevitable' after Leeds University vice-chancellor Michael Arthur sends to all heads of school an email asking each of them to submit plans for 20 per cent 'savings', which are to result in 'significant' job reductions. (Following a £20m financial planning error, Leeds management now wants to 'save' £35m year by 2011, said by UCU to imply the loss of up to 700 posts. (This follows large numbers taking voluntary redundancy earlier this year.)

In *Funding Upskilling and Reskilling in the 21st Century*, a report written for the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) Education Trust, consultant Mark Corney proposes that adult training be funded by analogy

with pensions, by raising the National Insurance contributions made by the individual, the employer and the Government.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) upholds a complaint against Government advertising for 14-19 diplomas, on the grounds that the claim that diplomas 'can get you into any university' is false.

Professor David Blanchflower, until recently a member of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee, tells a National Young Volunteers Service conference that: unemployment is likely to go on rising well into 2010, probably reaching 3.4 million; attempts to cut public spending too soon could push it to 4 or 5 million; youth unemployment in particular is about to rise very sharply; it will have effects lasting 25 years; employers should be given wage subsidies to take on young people; the school leaving age should be raised to 18.

In a speech at Newham Sixth Form College, Nuffield 14-19 Review contributor Ann Hodgson argues that Tory support for apprenticeships is in reality a means of segregating vocational and academic routes at 16-19.

The NUS claims that, as of 18/10/09, 146,000 HE students with approved loan applications had still not received any money, and a further 141,000 applications for loans had been received but not yet approved. It calls for Student Loans Company CEO Ralph Seymour-Jackson to resign.

Where we stand:

Post-16 Educator seeks to defend and extend good practice in post compulsory education and training. Good practice includes teachers working with students to increase their power to look critically at the world around them and act effectively within it. This entails challenging racism, sexism, heterosexism, inequality based on disability and other discriminatory beliefs and practices.

For the mass of people, access to valid post compulsory education and training is more necessary now than ever. It should be theirs by right! All provision should be organised and taught by staff who are trained for and committed to it. Publicly funded provision of valid post compulsory education and training for all who require it should be a fundamental demand of the trade union movement.

Post-16 Educator seeks to persuade the labour movement as a whole of the importance of this demand. In mobilising to do so it bases itself first and foremost upon practitioners - those who are in direct, daily contact with students. It seeks the support of every practitioner, in any area of post-16 education and training, and in particular that of women, of part timers and of people outside London and the Southeast.

Post-16 Educator works to organise readers/contributors into a national network that is democratic, that is politically and financially independent of all other organisations, that develops their practice and their thinking, and that equips them to take action over issues rather than always having to react to changes imposed from above.

Why we need Freire now

Tim Herrick

The work of Paulo Freire offers many questions and tools for educators concerned with power, justice and ethically-responsible learning and teaching. His writing - especially the 1968 book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* - is familiar to many, and has had great influence in education and beyond. It has prompted innovative ideas and ways of working from teachers and students over the last fifty years and across the world. My argument in this piece is that Freire's work is still valid and relevant today, and suggests insights throughout post-sixteen education, from the highest levels of policy to the deepest aspects of classroom practice. One particular thread I will follow is citizenship education, as this is a space shared across sectors of practice where Freire's work can offer an effective intervention. First, however, it will be helpful to explore where that thought came from, and how it has been developed by others.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) spent his early life in Brazil, teaching adults, frequently the rural poor, to read and write. Through this practice came the concepts he would name the 'pedagogy of the oppressed', a pedagogy that "makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed" (Freire, 1970, p30). Working in the field of adult literacy, Freire recognised how important it was for the socially marginalised to access language and concepts that could explain their situation of social exclusion. Explain, but not justify; ideological narratives about divinely ordained social structures, or the ineffectuality of seeking social changes, were held up to scrutiny by individuals and groups of learners. Learners were allowed to share their own knowledge and worldviews, and to bring these into dialogue with other stories of their social positioning. This collective pooling of personal experience allows all knowledge to be exposed as socially located, and the ways of understanding the world presented by those in authority as only one possibility among many.

"From that reflection" on oppression, argued Freire, will come "[the oppressed's] necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation" (Freire, 1970, p30).

Freire opposes this progressive, dialogic pedagogy to "banking education", where knowledge is regarded as fixed and stable. The learners' success is judged by their ability to reproduce the information that their teacher has given them: 'instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat' (Freire, 1970, p53). While this vision of learning may be chillingly familiar, it is, as Freire emphasises, a highly impoverished vision of the knowledge worked out in "the restless, impatient, continuing hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other". In Freire's progressive pedagogy, the teacher's role is to facilitate this inquiry and encourage learners to recognise the limits of all knowledge, including their own. Because "*Starting* with the 'knowledge of experience had' in order to get beyond it is not *staying* in that knowledge" (Freire and Freire, 1994, p70), the teacher is responsible for supporting learners in contextualising their own knowledge. In time, they also support learners in translating their deeper knowledge into social actions that materially affect the circumstances of knowing.

Inequality

Changing what happens in the head of a single learner, or even in the heads of a group of learners, is, for Freire, a good start, but not enough. The end-point of his pedagogy is change to the social structures in which that knowing takes place, which means an end to structures of inequality and oppression. In Freire's early work such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, this takes place in an

explicitly Marxist framework, whereas in his later writing, it is a looser, more humanist structure, where multiple inequalities require multiple forms of redress. What remains constant throughout his writing is a confidence in the privileged space of formal education as a critical lens on the rest of society. What goes on within individual classrooms, learning institutions, and systems of education shapes social beings, and this can be done for better or for worse. Individual teachers have the capacity to make a difference at all of these levels, and realise a vision of education that actively empowers learners. The very fact that this is not easy is proof of how important a task it is. As Freire puts it, "I cannot make education into an indisputable instrument of social transformation just because I desire it", but, by the same token, neither "can it be made into an instrument for the perpetuation of the status quo just because the powers that be so decree" (Freire, 1998, p110).

Dialogue

Critically engaging with Freire's work is best done in the spirit that it represents: that of dialogue, debate and hope. His ideas are not unproblematic; for example, the articulation between shifts in the consciousness of individual learners, and how these changes are made manifest in social actions is never entirely clear. Through an emphasis on hope and positive social change, Freire perhaps neglects the capacity for individuals and societies to tolerate contradictions in their thinking and action. Freire also struggles with some of the core questions about the teacher's response to the students' knowledge. For example, some critics have suggested that in order to recognise the different knowledge learners present, the teacher needs to translate those differences into forms he or she can understand; in other words, to jeopardise the very things that make them different. One of the strengths of Freire's work is that rather than a dogmatic set of procedures for facilitating learning and teaching, it is an open-ended set of questions, attitudes, and locally-responsive practices that can be adapted to multiple circumstances. Yet this leaves Freire's work potentially vulnerable to recuperation by other ideological factions, and the replacement of an ethos of progressive practice by the language of the same. From one point of view, 'training for skills' can be seen as a Freirean response to learners' immediate economic needs, and a positive attempt to begin with what they need to know. Freire would be quick to remind us that education should not end with the addressing of

immediate needs, but in the continual flux of policy and funding, this is a challenging ambition to realise.

Yet this open-ended adaptability is rewarded by the development of Freire's thought by other scholars. I'd like to spend a little time exploring the ideas of the African-American feminist, bell hooks (1). She makes creative use of Freire's work, and, by bringing it into dialogue with theorists of race such as Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon, addresses some of the blindspots of sexism and racism that several commentators have identified (hooks, 1994, p50). In Freire's early work, there is seen to be one homogeneous category of "the oppressed", to which you either belong or you do not. While his later works are more sensitive to multiple forms of oppression, each "grounded in the particularity of suffering and struggle in concrete, historical experiences" (Freire, 1993, px), this does not entirely address the early insensitivity to categories of oppression other than class.

Hooks seeks to make good this insensitivity, and in the same gesture, reinforce the importance of class and race to discussions of gender (Hooks, 1982). All for her are categories by which social inequality is perpetuated, and all can be held up for scrutiny under the critical lens of education. The role of education in identifying, examining and changing these structures of oppression stretches from the level of policy to classroom practice, and her delight in the potential of teaching is palpable: "Teaching is a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom" (hooks, 1994, p11). Hooks is committed to a notion of educational practice that believes in the transformation of learners, not just in terms of their knowledge, but in terms of their thinking, behaviour and social responsibility. By extending Freire's commitment to "education as a practice of freedom" (Freire, 1970, p62) to encompass race, gender and multiple forms of oppression, hooks makes clear the relevance these ideas have to contemporary educational practice.

Power

The ways in which Freire's and hooks' ideas can be applied are numerous, and I seek here only to sketch out a few that strike me as relevant to the current pedagogical and political climate. To begin with, it is bracing to remind ourselves of the classroom as the site of power, contestation and debate. The policy and institutional structures in which we

work can never offer entirely free rein for the classroom critique of social injustice, but neither can they entirely prevent it from taking place. It is also helpful to see the classroom as a semi-public space, a microcosm of and lever on the social forces by which it is constituted. Because “every educational practice implies a concept of man and the world” (Freire, 1972, p21), we are reminded that education is a social, not private, good, an especially important idea at this historical moment. A Freirean perspective helps us navigate questions of curriculum design, asking what we are teaching, and in whose interest; and can contribute to debates about the shape of the post-sixteen education sector as a whole. Where, for different learners, are the most effective sites for learning? How can we ensure they are supported but not trapped there? And how can national policies be best interpreted and mediated to meet the specific needs of local situations?

This shuttling between local and global brings me to my final point, about the role Freire’s ideas can play in current debates about citizenship education (2). This topic cuts across all sectors of post-sixteen education, and is the focus of particular policy demands and cultural anxieties (as represented, for example, in the three DfES reports on this subject between 2004 and 2007). Osler and Starkey helpfully review the history of citizenship education in the UK, and identify the multiplicity of drivers and pressures that, unsurprisingly, lead to multiple interpretations of what is required (Osler and Starkey, 2006). The recent impulses behind using education to promote good citizenship are numerous: a desire to reunite a post-Cold War world, fears of young people’s apathy and their political extremism, and an economic impulse to ease global social mobility are just a few. Similarly, the ways citizenship education is realised in different contexts are highly diverse: does being a good citizen mean respecting and upholding the laws, traditions and rites of contemporary society, or locating values and ideas that can critique them?

This contested situation is one in which Freirean politics, and individual teachers, can critically insert themselves. Recalling Freire’s point about all knowledge being socially located, part of the learning conversation about citizenship education could become precisely these questions about from where the policy drivers have arisen, and what exactly is trying to be achieved. No notions of citizenship can be taken for granted under this framework, but rather should be brought into dialogue with one another and related to the lives of individual learners. Responsible citizenship, like Freire’s pedagogical theory as a whole, cannot

remain purely on a theoretical level, but must be felt, lived and realised by individuals and communities. It is an active commitment to social justice that can be phrased, as Freire does, both in political terms - “The democratization of the school is not a sheer epiphenomenon, the mechanical result of the transformation of society across the board, but is itself a factor for change” (Freire and Freire, 1994, p88); and in humanist terms - “Humanization [is the] ontological vocation of human being” (Freire and Freire, 1994, p98).

Richer

Citizenship education is one space for dialogue within the process of learning and teaching, and a space that can make us all richer. Freire’s is one voice within that debate, and all our learners and colleagues bring their own as well. Together, in concert, we can begin to build the fairer world and more satisfying existence that comes through living in the “plenitude of the praxis” (Freire, 1970, p112).

1. Bell hooks’ given name is Gloria Watkins. However, she largely writes under the pseudonym ‘bell hooks’, names taken from her mother and grandmother, and written in lower case to encourage the reader to focus on what is being said rather than who is saying it.

2. A more detailed exploration of what Freire may bring to debates about citizenship education can be found in McCowan, T. 2006. Approaching the political in citizenship education: the perspectives of Paulo Freire and Bernard Crick, *Educate*, 6, 57-70

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Good and bad

Philippe Harari

Teleological theories say that the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of a particular action is determined by whether the consequences of the action are 'good' or 'bad'. This is a theory of right and wrong based on utilitarian principles.

Deontological theories say that certain actions are always 'right' or 'wrong', whatever the consequences. This is a theory based on universal laws.

So, for example, is it wrong to eat too much pudding because the consequence is that you will feel sick, or is it wrong because gluttony is morally wrong? On a more serious note, is incest wrong because in-breeding can lead to genetic defects, or does it violate some kind of natural law? On a more topical note, was it the right thing to invite Nick Griffin onto BBC Question Time because freedom

of speech is an inviolable principle, or because the consequence would be that he would lose support? If you believed it was wrong to invite him, was it because you feared he may gain support (ie negative consequences) or because we should not give free speech to people who themselves do not agree with the principle of free speech (ie on principle)?

This session was written for use with a group of 13-16 year olds. They are all school-refusers as a consequence of being bullied, and were being taught in a small specialised unit in Cambridge.

You will have to start off by explaining to the students the difference between teleological and deontological theories. You can then use the following worksheets as appropriate.

Worksheet 1:

List four qualities of the human character that you think are 'good', and four that you think are 'bad'.

For each quality, say whether you think it good or bad for deontological or teleological reasons.

GOOD QUALITIES: D or T?

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....

BAD QUALITIES: D or T?

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....

J'accuse . . . UCU

We print here the text of an email sent by the author, who wishes to remain anonymous, to other UCU activists in the same Region. The author, who later apologised for the 'heavily loaded' and 'unnecessarily confrontational' stance taken against the UCU 'hierarchy', 'still believes that the comments as to the present malaise facing the running of FE colleges up and down the country are valid views that may well articulate the views of many front-line teaching staff' and 'therefore wishes this to be circulated to the wider readership of PSE in order to encourage more dialogue and debate on some of the issues raised'.

Dear fellow union officers:

This third email letter to you this weekend is one I was initially reluctant to write, mainly because it involves taking a broad swipe at the UCU and what I see to be its heavy politicisation and its self-serving lethargy with which it seeks (and fails) to address the core problems we are facing in further education.

For the past five years, as [] branch secretary, I have had to be an apologist for actions of my predecessors in respect to our unique pay calendar date, and I suppose the best form of defence is now one of attack.

With the present proposed balloting of members on whether to enter into industrial action over the latest AOC pay award, our College UCU membership is yet again placed in an ignoble position of finding itself not being able to enter into this national ballot. Our predecessor union officers, whether known to the regional official at the time or not, allowed for our pay calendar to start from March the 1st of each year rather than the traditional college pay calendar date (September the 1st?).

The rationale given at the time, and which continues to be given despite our protestations, is that a 1st of March pay calendar better facilitates the College's budgeting and accounting systems. Sweeteners were given at the time to help get this through the membership but I know it has left a bad taste in the mouths of our colleagues in other colleges when they learn that we have to opt out of the ballot each year. The principal continually says he is not bound by the recommendations of the AOC (he is active in the 157 Group in any case) and that his stewardship of the college's finances depends on local pay bargaining.

The noble attempt to get colleges signed up to the UCU/AOC 8-point harmonisation pay scale is one he

will not countenance either. To some extent and because of incorporation status, the law is on his side and he is perfectly entitled to steward his ship as he sees fit.

However, what frustrates me as well though is that, whether on a local or national level, we all have to go 'cap in hand' each year for minimum cost of living increases when schools and sixth form colleges get their pay increases automatically from central government. This is why I am partially pointing the finger of blame at the UCU, when under one of its previous incarnations (NATFHE) it allowed for incorporation to take place back in 1993. It now seems to accept the status quo and is prepared to go through this annual ritual of putting out the begging bowl for more crumbs when really it should be actively campaigning and lobbying the Government to de-incorporate us, so that we can focus on the more important issues facing the parlous state of further education.

I would rather spend my time striking over excessive pay awards to principals and senior management than go through these pay rounds every year. Looking for pay increases in this economic climate will not sit well with those out to set a divide between 'greedy' public sector workers and a private sector workforce that often has to accept either a pay freeze or pay cuts.

What I am trying to say here is that we need to get the Government to 'de-incorporate' us again so that colleges are not running themselves like autonomous little fiefdoms, with little accountability and a virtual blank cheque to spend taxpayers' money. If the Government is prepared to award pay increases to teachers, the police and nurses etc, then why not us as well, since we are public sector (in all but name)? It seems ludicrous that each year so much of our time and energy is spent on trying to secure average cost of living increases when so much more could be done to address concerns such as the following.

1. The way above-inflation pay increases are being given, year on year, to principals and senior executives and which are not being disclosed to the front line staff when asked for such figures. Sean [Vernell]'s email to us last week, which highlighted college principals' salaries across all FE colleges, just goes to show how we have taken our eye off the ball. Principals' salaries, pre-incorporation, were believed to be no more than 2.5 times that of an average lecturer's salary at the time. Now, they are approaching 6-8 times, to say nothing of vice-principals, deputy principals and faculty directors.

2. The sheer wastage and financial mismanagement that can sometimes be evident within our colleges. Covering up is endemic. Boards of Governors are often clueless or ineffective, and the Ofsted inspectorate will often only rule on what they are presented with, and for a quiet life will not look deeper behind the cracks.

3. Probity of the appointments systems within colleges, where often senior managers with sometimes appalling track records move around from college to college. Too often, such people are paid off handsomely because of failings in their post, only to re-emerge elsewhere in another FE college to wreak havoc there.

4. Probity of the promotions systems within colleges, where favouritism is often rife and where individuals are promoted way beyond their abilities. How often do we come across cases of colleges preferring to recruit an unknown and untested manager from outside rather than someone who has given many years quality service to their college? In terms of favouritism, how often do we see good quality members of staff being passed over for promotion, because of perceptions of them being 'awkward' to control, in favour of sycophantic, under-performing lecturers who are anxious to get out of teaching in favour of far better pay and working conditions.

Of course, all of the above is rife across all areas of public service provision, but that should not mean we acquiesce to it as just an immutable 'fact of life'.

All the talk now at party conferences is of 'front-line' versus 'back-line' staffing within the public sector, and how we need to trim the back-line in order to provide greater financial support to our teachers, nurses and police officers etc in the front line. Well, what we need is a machete to cut the excessive pay awards of college principals and senior management salaries, as well as hold up to the spotlight so much of the financial wastage and mismanagement that seems to take place in our colleges. I am not referring to the low-paid back-line business support staff who often do tremendous work, and we should always support GMB/APEX and Unison in their efforts to secure better terms and conditions for such staff.

I am instead referring to the bloated amount of peripheral staff (including 'consultants') in our colleges who are on middle and senior management scale salaries and who very rarely have any direct teaching input to make but seem to sit behind computers all day or attend endless meetings and then pass down unworkable and often educationally unsound initiatives for the

front line to carry out. A giant beast has been spawned in the name of targets and evidence-gathering. It is now a beast out of control that even its inventors cannot rein in. It does not trust our professional integrity and judgement in how we teach our students and, just as it is with other public sector front-line staff, we are reeling from the ever-increasing amounts of paperwork we are required to produce.

When this 'paperwork' is gathered, it rarely gets looked at, but at least those boxes get ticked, and then they get stored somewhere in rooms full of cupboards until the Ofsted inspectorate arrive. Of course, Ofsted only get to see the 'cleaned up' versions anyway, and for want of a quiet life will just pass everything. Not to do so will require extra time and effort to dig deeper, which HMIs may be reluctant to do, since they have their own targets to meet as well! It is all one big merry-go-round that serves no other purpose than to perpetuate itself. Certainly, I see the biggest losers in all of this as the students themselves, who should be much better served by our publicly-funded institutions.

Another 'elephant in the room' issue is the actual quality of the course curriculum content that we are asked to teach. Too much of it is highly prescriptive and lacking in promoting creative thinking. Because our colleges are under pressure to achieve ever-increasing MLPs (minimum levels of performance or success rates) then this puts pressure on front-line teaching staff to pass everything through, even if the source of that student's input is highly questionable. What is the UCU doing about this malaise in our education, because our students are not being well served if they go on to higher education and fail at the first hurdle? Much more could be written on this topic of curriculum quality but we'll leave that for another day.

I realise we all have limited time to read through emails such as these, so I will summarise by saying that the UCU needs to get with the bigger picture here, ie get us back to pre-incorporation days so that we can spend more of our time and energy on challenging the mess that our FE colleges are in, rather than relying on the meagre crumbs that fall our way in these pay-round negotiations.

I have attended some regional meetings and have benefited greatly from the support and guidance given by some of the 'older' seasoned and wiser heads among you, but I am neither a political activist nor an SWP member. I am a passionate trade unionist seeking to improve the working conditions of those I am responsible for. I happen to believe that the UCU hierarchy have got themselves tied up in knots over their political allegiances, at the expense of addressing issues that really concern the rank and file members. Is it any wonder that UCU ballot turnouts are so low when members feel sometimes so alienated from the modus operandi of their union?

I expect repercussions to follow from this swipe at the union, but if so, then so be it. Members are crying out for effective leadership from their union - in our hour of need, don't let us down please!

The Nuffield Review: for Bruner, against Tawney?

Colin Waugh *suggests an approach to the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training*

Richard Pring, Geoff Hayward, Ann Hodgson, Jill Johnson, Ewart Keep, Alis Oancea, Gareth Rees, Ken Spours and Stephanie Wilde, *Education for All. The Future of Education and Training for 14-19 Year Olds* (Routledge, 2009), 243pp

The above is a book-form version of the conclusions of the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training, which was conducted between 2003 and 2009. Pring, Hayward, Oancea and Wilde are or were at Oxford University, Hodgson and Spours at London University Institute of Education, Keep and Rees at Cardiff University and Jill Johnson at UCAS. Pring was overall director. An appendix lists about 350 other contributors. A launch event was held at the Institute on 22 September 2009, which this reviewer attended.

The authors put forward five 'over-arching demands':

- 'The re-assertion of a broader vision of education in which there is a profound respect for the whole person (not just the narrowly conceived 'intellectual excellence' or 'skills for economic prosperity'), irrespective of ability or cultural and social background, in which there is a broader vision of learning and in which the learning contributes to a more just and cohesive society.
- System performance indicators 'fit for purpose', in which the 'measures of success' reflect this range of educational aims, not simply those which are easy to measure or which please certain stakeholders only.
- The re-distribution of power and decision-making such that there can be greater room for the voice of the learner, for the expertise of the teacher and for the concerns of other stakeholders in the

response to the learning needs of all young people in their different economic and social settings.

- The creation of strongly collaborative local learning systems in which school, colleges, higher education institutions, the youth service, independent training providers, employers and voluntary bodies can work together for the common good - in curriculum development, in provision of opportunities for all learners in a locality and in ensuring appropriate progression into further education, training and employment.

- The development of a more unified system of qualifications which meets the diverse talents of young people, the different levels and styles of learning, and the varied needs of the wider community, but which avoids the fragmentation, divisiveness and inequalities to which the present system is prone.'

These 'demands' are backed up by well-directed critiques of existing provision and more specific recommendations, which include that: 'the impoverished language of 'performance management' needs to be challenged'; 'the essential contribution of the further education sector should be recognised through performance indicators which reflect FE's distinctive aims'; 'assessment for learning should be separated from assessment for accountability'; 'teacher judgement . . . should be integral to summative assessment'; continuing professional development should be an entitlement and located . . . in professional development centres, run by teachers'; 'the growth of independent entrance tests by universities needs to be curbed'; '14-19 education and training should be organised through 'strongly collaborative local learning systems' involving schools, colleges, work-

based learning providers, HE . . . and employers'; and 'initiatives by central government should be scaled down and changes . . . made only after full consultation with representative professional bodies and democratically elected representatives at the local level'. The Review's publication coincides with that of another broadly similar report - the Cambridge Primary Review, and with that of *Learning Through Life*, the report of the NIACE Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning.

The present article aims to assess the validity of the authors' overall approach and the role their proposals may play.

Support

From the 'demands' quoted above it can be seen that the Review advocates changes which many of those who read and write for *PSE* would support. At the same time, some readers may be struck by how much of the Review could have been written - and in fact was written - in the early 1970s, or even the 1950s. For example, those who are old enough will recognise links with the Nuffield and School Council's Humanities Projects, as well as the Crowther Report, to which explicit reference is made. This does not in itself invalidate the Review, but it does raise an issue about what it means to say such things now, in circumstances which are very different - which are, for example separated from that earlier period by the watershed of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike. At any rate, the question arises: what, if anything, can be done to give effect to these proposals, and who might do this?

Some may look upon the recommendations as an offer made by the authors to the powers-that-be of an acceptable facade behind which the latter can push ahead with the assault on working-class young people by which, with other measures, they will try to make working people in general pay for the recession. Others may agree with the proposals but dismiss them as unattainable. However, I feel that a more critical and proactive approach would be better.

We can be as certain as we can be of anything that the recession will lead - indeed, is already leading - to a squeeze on 14-19 funding and to a drive by the Government to reshape this provision to control and camouflage youth unemployment - in short, to take things in the opposite direction to that recommended by the Review. Further, it is far more likely than not that from the Spring of 2010 there will be a Tory government, pursuing policies which will be even more anti-working class than those of Blair and Brown. In that situation, many trade union

leaders and left-talking Labour MPs and councillors will face a key challenge: how to stop rank and file workers fighting back effectively. And one of the main tools available to them for this will be to announce an anti-Tory programme of their own, as part of an attempt to put themselves at the head of the fightback in the hopes of diverting it up a cul de sac. They will look, then, for a ready-made programme with which most activists will agree, and which is at the same time elastic enough to suit their purposes. In the field of youth education and training the Nuffield Review, whatever its authors' intentions, offers such a programme. Therefore we can expect to hear a lot about it - or at least about elements picked from within it - over the next year or two.

We cannot counter this by dismissing the Review as platitudinous, which in any case it is not. The only effective strategy will be to look within it for those elements which represent working people's real needs, and then try to make our would-be leaders provide real - as opposed to pretended - support for them. Can the Review's core values sustain such a strategy?

The Review contains two mutually contradictory worldviews, drawn from two pre-existing thinkers, one of whom has something valid to say in the present situation, and one who does not. The first of these thinkers is the US psychologist Jerome Bruner, cited explicitly on pages 18, 68 and 107. The second is the English Christian Socialist economic historian R.H. Tawney (quoted on pages 20 and 38).

Bruner's key ideas are as follows. First, educators must focus primarily on students' conceptual development. Secondly, there is no subject matter, however complex, for which a way cannot be found at least to introduce to it every student, however low his/her prior attainments. Bruner has spent a lot of time trying to state these two ideas apolitically, but carried to their logical conclusions they are revolutionary and socialistic. This is the side of the Review which we can, should and must support, because in these respects Bruner was and is right where virtually every other thinker with a mainstream influence has been wrong.

R.H. Tawney belonged to a small group of young Oxford University tutors who in the early 1900s founded the Catiline Club, the aim of which was to convince the management of Oxford University, and the ruling class more generally, that they should support the project of the founder of the WEA, Albert Mansbridge. Mansbridge believed that adult education 'tutorial' classes could be used to create from amongst trade union activists a compliant layer who, by becoming union officials, Labour

MPs etc, would blunt the edge of class struggle. The Christian Socialist assumption behind this - that harmony between the classes is both possible and desirable - underlies key passages throughout the Review, and is made explicit in the quote from Tawney's book *Equality* printed on page 38. This reads: *'In spite of their varying characters and capacities, it is the fact that men possess in their common humanity a quality which is worth cultivating, and that a community is most likely to make the most of that quality if it takes it into account in planning its economic organisation and social institutions - if it stresses lightly differences of wealth and birth and social position, and establishes on firm foundations institutions which meet common needs and are a source of common enlightenment and common enjoyment'*.

Rejected

From the industrial revolution onwards, workers have again and again seen through and rejected the attempt to foster class harmony through education. The fundamental interests of those who own the major means of production and of those who, not doing so, must work for them cannot be reconciled, by education or by any other means except the creation by the workers themselves of a classless social order. To pretend otherwise, and to attempt to convince working people of this, is in the end to try to mislead them. Just as we should organise in support of the element of the Review that stems from Bruner, then, so we should organise to explain to as many people as possible why the element stemming from Tawney is wrong. What would this involve in practice?

First, we need to be clear in our own minds that only the working class, acting independently of the capitalist class and their agents, can decisively change 14-19 education and training for the better. Secondly, we should try to build amongst activists and potential activists across the widest possible spectrum, including both in education unions and amongst shop stewards in unions more generally, a movement for independent working-class education which includes amongst its aims implementation of the Review's over-arching demands.



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