

# Open letter to parents and students

*From the National Technical University of Athens Assembly,  
6th September 2013*

## Dear parents, dear students:

We, the professors and employees of the National Technical University of Athens, welcome you to the largest and oldest Technical Institution in the country. We congratulate you, students and your parents who supported you, as we know well how hard you have worked to make your dream come true, to study in a good, public, internationally prestigious Greek University.

Today at our University, while we are preparing to begin the academic year, to register fresh undergraduate and postgraduate students, to say farewell to its successful graduates, to start the new curriculum, to open its classrooms and laboratories, something strange and dramatic happened.

The government announced that they suspend 550 of our administrative employees, that is 65% of our administrative staff. At the same time, they announce the labour reserve of 40% of the professors in the next year. To put it in a nutshell, it seems they want to reduce the size of the university in half. Our economic potential has already been reduced more than half, the funds for classes, buildings, libraries, salaries. At the same time, they have laid off the contract professors, they have been refusing for years to appoint the newly elected lecturers and professors, while our Schools have been bleeding from

retirements. Even worse than that, they have recently seized 30 million euros from the research reserves, money that had not been given to us by the government, but we had ensured ourselves, the professors, young researchers and our management, through European or Greek research programmes. Money, that is, that we had brought here and which we recycled on studies, on scholarships, on educational and research infrastructure.

And yet, the government does not want to reduce the size of the National Technical University in half, as they have increased the number of admissions of undergraduate students! They are planning something much worse: half of the administrative employees, half of the professors, with tiny budgets will have to educate thousands of students. How will that happen? Obviously, classes will be reduced, academic textbooks will cease to be free of charge, libraries will be closed (we possess the best technical library in the country), secretariats will dissolve, buildings will be left without maintenance (we possess some of the best university infrastructure in the Balkans, in Athens, an excellent technological-cultural park in Lavrion and an important research centre in Metsovo-Epirus), our pioneering web centre will dissolve, laboratories will be closed and postgraduate programmes will cease to exist.

Briefly, the National Technical University of Athens is being pushed into becoming a post-secondary training institution, a vocational training institute, with easy and fast-to-get certificates, for a future of certain unemployment, with few impoverished workers and professors who will not care about how to teach but only about how to survive. Then you will be asked to pay tuition fees. This will not happen in the distant future, it is happening now.

## Dear parents, dear students:

Under these circumstances, we have decided that we cannot function anymore, we cannot endure the downfall anymore. We cannot wait until our next colleague is fired, until it is our turn to be fired, until we do not have a computer, an office, a classroom, an auditorium, a research laboratory. Until the six out of the nine historical academic Departments of the National Technical University of Athens cease to exist, until our students are forced to pay tuition fees to get their education. We cannot imagine how it is possible that our colleagues, who on September 16th will be made redundant, young people with children, with other laid-off and unemployed members in their families, will work with a smile, just before they pick up their things from their offices for the last time, at the secretariats of

the Schools registering our students. We cannot imagine how it is possible that the professors who know that in a few months they will suffer the same fate, will find the courage to teach in the auditoriums, will stand upright and dignified as academics. And you will say: Greece already has one million of unemployed citizens, Athens has forty thousand homeless people in the streets, one third of households lives under the poverty line, the salaries of those lucky enough to get paid are reduced in half or a third. Yes, this is the reality. You are also in the same condition, any parent of you can be unemployed, any home can be in danger of being auctioned, your paycheck is not enough, your children's education is at risk. You do not know if and how they will manage to graduate with a degree.

We know that, too, we are people just like you, with families, with small children or with children who study. We grew up in the same streets, at the same school desks. We have been serving a great academic Institution with history, with prestige. We have received from our professors a Technical University of knowledge, scientific vanguard, innovation, research, democracy and dignity. If you shut your ears for a while to the low-level domestic media and search for the international rankings, you will see how high the National Technical University of Athens stands worldwide. You will see how important its courses are, how recognized its professors are globally, how its postgraduate students excel in European and American universities, how high the standards of our Greek engineers are.

**Therefore, for all these reasons, dear parents and students:**

The professors and employees of the National Technical University

of Athens have decided to stand up with our heads high, instead of remaining idle and hopeless. We will do everything in our power to deliver the Technical University as it is today, and even improved, to the next generations, as it has been delivered to us. We remember something else too: During two major and critical

times of History - the War and the Dictatorship - the flame of the Institution's emblem, Prometheus shone in the darkness. The Greek people took that flame in their hands and won. We do not forget and ask you to come here, with us, to stand by us in the noble struggle we begin.

# Unity needed in savage attack on public education

**Dionysios Gouvas** (*on 27/9/13*)

**T**hree out of eight universities affected by the changes (officially 'restructuring', but in reality lay-offs) have already suspended their operations for a week (others did that for 1-2 days), and they will file civil lawsuits against the Ministerial Decision at the Higher Administrative Court of Greece (they will seek to get an injunction in order to stop the immediate effects of the Decision). Their rectors will be convening the respective Senates every week, in order to assess the situation. Negotiations between the Rectors' Conference and the Minister of Education are underway.

Administrative staff and academics at other universities went on five day strikes last week. Students in some cases showed their solidarity, mainly through letters of solidarity voted for in their union meetings, but, in general, they are not very active (we're in the middle of the exams period, not to mention the registration of the new wave of entrees, ie high-school graduates). Occupations and/or sit-ins are rare and sporadically done. There is no movement whatsoever!

Only the Left parties (KKE and SYRIZA) have shown solidarity and active support to the university employees' actions (petitions, demos, strikes, sit-ins, lawsuits, contacts with MPs, parliamentary debates etc . . . ).

# Co-operative alternative model for academies

Ian Duckett

Government policy is currently committed to systemic change with a mixed economy of schools and a target of 2000+ academies in this parliament. By the end of 2012 they were well on schedule, with new school brands and chains, including the very influential Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) radically altering the education landscape, and in 2013-14 there is little indication that Gove's cavalry charge is slowing down. The secondary-driven revolution is its vanguard but primary schools are also a key target.

These reckless politics are likely to produce a fragmented schools system, resulting in quality assurance and equal opportunities regulations issues, changes in the local authority leadership role, a continuing strain on local authority resources, new drivers in education services and a mixed economy of providers.

In this frightening climate, local authorities have to grapple with managing up to 30 per cent revenue cuts in 2011-14, which impact on strategic and longer term planning capacity, as educational experience, expertise and historic relationships are eroded. This makes for difficulties in ensuring a responsive provision for more vulnerable pupils with SEN or safeguarding issues. Nonetheless, many have responded pragmatically to change as requiring a revised relationship with schools, new challenge and support for governing bodies, and remodelled support services using a client-based approach.

The Co-operative College and the Schools Co-operative Society are developing co-operative models for education provision and responding positively to the new education landscape in an attempt to: offer

diversity in delivery; embed key values and a share ethos within the system; provide a positive governance model for trusts and partnerships; empower and engage communities and stakeholders. Well over 300 schools are now engaged in their own local Co-operative Trust, set up under the 2006 Act and ensuring accountability at local level and a commitment to educational partnership, with many more at various stages in the consultation process.

The Co-operative College has also developed an alternative academy model, which was approved by the DfE after lengthy negotiations, and provides an alternative and highly principled approach to the new structure being promoted heavily by the DfE itself. Co-operative Trust and academy models directly engage key stakeholder groups, parents/carers, staff, learners and the local community through membership - strengthening local accountability in stark contrast to other models. They also embed an ethos based on the global co-operative values into the governance documentation.

An additional challenge for many co-operators is the appropriation of the language of co-operation and a narrowing of the focus of what it means by the Con-Lib coalition government. Speaking in May 2010, David Cameron said: 'We will support the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and enable these groups to have a much greater involvement in the running of public services' (The Coalition Programme for Government, May 2010).

Co-operative core values, of course, go much further and encompass: a globally shared set

of values and principles since the first co-operative set up by the Rochdale Pioneers in 1844; a billion co-operative members worldwide and 9.8 million in the UK alone; co-operatives provide retail, funeral, insurance, agricultural, industrial and manufacturing services; a history of community and co-operative education in schools and colleges, leading up to the 1944 Act; a shared commitment to raising expectations and achievement through democratic engagement.

These values are based on beliefs and actions that directly oppose the Government's 'big society' agenda, and focus on self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, solidarity, honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

In the present climate the co-operative model for education represents a principled partnership that provides a strong legal entity, creates a bar to external change and maintains a connection with the local authority, as a maintained school. In so doing, the Co-operative Trust school will hold major assets in trust, while sustaining a powerful set of core values and ethos. In such schools, you can expect to see the extension of learning opportunities, an affirmation of community commitment and a strong commitment to local accountability. The model engages all stakeholders in key decisions, and is in many ways very similar to the community school structure in sustaining the governing body composition and role, and leaving staffing conditions unchanged, which has led to increasing support from the major professional unions and associations.

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# Whose integration?

**Dermot Bryers, Melanie Cooke and Becky Winstanley discuss their English for Action research project**

## Introduction

For over a decade there have been fierce debates about the integration of ethnic and linguistic minority people in the UK. This interest has been driven by high levels of diversity in British towns and cities created by the processes of migration and globalisation. For some people this is a cause for celebration and for others it is just a fact of life. For some, though, the debate is framed in more negative, or alarmist terms. For example, some commentators have said that the UK is 'too diverse' or that multiculturalism has led to people in some parts of the country living 'parallel lives'. The debate has been heightened at times by reactions to happenings such as '9/11', the 2005 London bombings and the events in Woolwich in April 2013; Muslims in particular have been the focus of much negative attention in the media and in political discourse. Politicians of all persuasions have made 'integration' and 'cohesion' central to their policies and rhetoric, and on many occasions have laid the blame for a perceived lack of cohesion at the feet of migrants, in particular the perception that migrants fail to learn English well enough to integrate.

## The project

The first aim of the '*Whose Integration*' project was to ask ESOL students what they thought about integration. Working with two ESOL groups over five weeks, one an *English for Action* class in Greenwich and the other at Tower Hamlets College, we discussed the theme in depth. We started by simply posing the question, 'what is integration?', before moving on to more specific questions such as, 'what is British culture?', 'what facilitates migrants' sense of belonging in the UK?', 'what are the barriers they face?', and, 'what are their opinions about anti-migrant policy and rhetoric?'

The second aim was to examine the potential of 'participatory ESOL'. The underlying theory behind participatory pedagogy was developed by the Brazilian

Marxist educator, Paulo Freire, and adapted to contexts outside Latin America by educators such as Elsa Auerbach, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor and Peter McLaren. In his 1971 text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire theorised a bottom-up approach to education which opposed what he called a 'banking' model of education, in which the teacher deposits a predetermined body of knowledge in the mind of the learner. Instead, Freire advocated the use of dialogic methods which draw out and build upon the experiences of students to develop a shared critical understanding of language and the world. As ESOL teachers who have been working with participatory methods for some time, we wished to explore their usefulness for addressing complex topics such as integration in the classroom.

## The process

Rather than design a scheme of work at the beginning, the lessons were planned from class to class, picking up emerging themes that were significant to students and the language they needed to discuss them. Many of the topics which emerged might not have found their way onto a pre-planned scheme of work about 'integration'. For example, in session two at Tower Hamlets, gender ignited students' interest and became a theme for the following session. The discussion that ensued, about gender relations and culture, was one of the high points of the project in which students debated topics which were of immediate urgency in their lives and in the classroom. However, although the lessons were not pre-planned from the beginning, there was a deliberate process in the research design. The five sessions were divided into three broad stages: making meaning, going deeper and broadening out. The first two sessions were open and general, the next two homed in on issues that provoked the most discussion and not until the final session did we introduce views and theories about integration from outside the classroom.

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During the first two sessions a number of students were still asking 'what does integration mean?'. By the end of the project everyone had stopped asking this question, not because we had provided the answer but because it had become clear that there was no single answer. Students and teachers have multiple, shifting identities and allegiances which are national, local, gender based and religious and some of these were more salient than others at different times. We came to see integration to be dynamic rather than static and as a non-linear process of fleeting interconnecting moments rather than a final goal.

### Barriers to belonging

In our discussions, none of us were able to identify 'British culture', and students rejected the assimilationist rhetoric of politicians. However, they did have a strong desire to belong and operate effectively in their local communities. This was especially true in Greenwich where people did not belong to settled local communities in the same way as the students in Tower Hamlets. The process of adapting to a new environment requires time and the sharing of local knowledge and in this project the Greenwich class provided a useful site for people to do this. Our students experienced significant barriers to creating alliances with locals, with many of them having to contend with racism, anti-immigration policies and rhetoric, poverty and language difficulties. Racism was a particular concern to the Greenwich group and students in both groups shared experiences of not being able to work, low pay, benefit cuts and cuts to public services as examples of material impediments to integration. There was also anxiety about developments in the current climate. Recent changes to immigration policy and hostile rhetoric towards migrants were interpreted by students as a move away from multiculturalism and towards an assimilationist model. Although students were clear that migrants have responsibilities to adapt to the community they are settling into, they were concerned about impossible demands made of them to act and feel British.

### Integration as a process

Despite these barriers, though, during our project we all felt many moments of belonging and solidarity and experienced the classroom as an important site in which we could experience a sense of allegiance and something resembling 'integration'. During the project we discussed the fact that integration needs to be a 'two way street' where the onus should not be just on the migrant to adapt and understand the host nation.

We observed, though, that the reality of the integration process was more complex even than this. The more accurate metaphor to describe the process was 'Spaghetti Junction', ie a complicated, dense set of intersections, crossroads and junctions going in lots of different directions. Unexpected alliances were formed in the class, between students and also between students and teachers - for example, around questions of gender and parenting - which transcended the boundaries of culture, nationality, class and religion.

### Integration and participatory ESOL

The participatory ESOL class is a particularly important site for migrants to deliberate about issues which directly affect them. The project created a public space for dialogue about issues that affect people's everyday lives. At a time when such spaces in public life are declining, the participatory ESOL class is an example of a site for intellectual debate and shared understanding between people who may not normally share such conversations. Participatory education is based on rigorous principles and practices such as problem posing which aim to raise a critical consciousness - what Freire called *conscientizacao* - about the issues which affect students' daily lives, as well as their language and literacy learning.

We noted that the intensity of discussion in the classroom led some students to stimulate the same debates at home and with friends, and as teachers we found ourselves discussing the issues which arose in class long after the sessions were over. It has long been recognised that an effective ESOL class reflects the lives and experiences of students. Our project extends this concept further and shows that the participatory ESOL class itself is an important part of students' lives and is not just a rehearsal for 'real life'. As such, we suggest that it can play a part in shaping the life experiences of those who participate, and importantly, this can be done on students' own terms. In this way, participatory education can help teachers and students alike prevent ESOL from becoming an arena for top-down attempts to secure adherence to dominant agendas. Rather, it provides the tools to critically analyse these agendas, and where necessary, explores ways to resist them.

To read the report in full visit: <http://esol.britishcouncil.org/whose-integration-students-perspective>

To find out more about English for Action and participatory ESOL go to: [www.efalondon.org](http://www.efalondon.org)

# Society has to change education, but how?

*Reviewing Michael Apple's new book, Patrick Ainley revisits some of the discussion on education and social control in PSEs 71 and 72*

Michael Apple, *Can Education Change Society?* (Routledge, 2013) 188p £23.99 9780415875332

## Outline of the book

**O**n page two of his latest book Michael Apple disarmingly answers the perennial question of his title by saying: 'It depends'. What it depends on he develops over the next 187 pages 'from the position of *multiple* oppressed groups', rather than in terms of the orthodoxy that education can change society 'only if it overtly challenges class and capitalism' (p12).

In relation almost exclusively to schools, he first presents Paulo Freire as an exemplary critical scholar and activist in education before moving on to George Counts' efforts during the 1930s as campaigner and administrator to reform the USA's schools and thus - drawing on Dewey - to restore democracy to the country. This story is too little known elsewhere although it is foundational to what Diane Ravitch calls *the Great American School System* that is now being ripped apart by neoliberalism.

Likewise, the next chapter focuses on two representatives of the complicated strands within black radical traditions over a longer period than the 1930s but again with similarities to today. First W. E. B. Dubois, who moved from 'a nearly evangelical faith in education and its transformative power' (p77) to a position Michael considers similar to Antonio Gramsci's that 'the task is to reorient dominant

knowledge so that it is deeply connected to and helps solve pressing social, economic, political and cultural problems besetting oppressed communities' (p81). This is especially clear in Du Bois's challenge to Booker T. Washington's vocational education program. 'The dual task of recovering history and recovering agency' was taken further by Carter G. Woodson, who wrote *The Mis-Education of the Negro* in 1933 and by teachers and activists since then, whose many voices are also recalled, including those in the black churches which contributed crucially to building independent black culture.

These three examples of transformations of schooling that positively changed US society, presented to counteract today's 'historical amnesia', are complemented by a lesson from the global South in the participatory governance of Porto Alegre in Brazil which Michael has visited often to become involved in the problems of keeping alive the educational reforms that have been achieved. This positive example of schooling changing society is counterposed to the negative one of 'Wal-Marting America', where the shopping giant, in concert with evangelical groups and Tea Party Republicans, has changed 'our institutions . . . our common sense . . . the meanings associated with democracy [and] our identities' (p128) in a 'de-socialising' counter-revolution from above.

Michael pauses to reflect personally and movingly on his own growing identification with 'the power of rights claims by groups I had not thought adequately

about enough before' (p29) when he relates how he developed a disability. He puts himself on the line here, recognising how as 'a "distinguished professor" at a major and politically progressive university' (Wisconsin, Madison but also holding visiting appointments at London's Institute of Education as well as at Manchester University), he could easily indulge in the rhetorics of academicising the political - rather than politicising the academy. He sees this as a Bourdieusian 'conversion strategy', played by academics who 'resolve their own class contradictions' with work limited to 'writing in an elaborately abstract but seemingly "political" manner' (p26), for example by the 'Freireanos' of what he calls the 'Freire industry', in which words like 'postcolonial' become 'ceremonial slogans . . . offered so that the reader may recognize that the author is *au courant* with the latest linguistic forms' (p33). Instead, Michael Apple commits to radical democratic egalitarianism from the stance of a public intellectual, following Burawoy's prescription a 'public sociology' (see below).

The last chapter then 'answers the question', pointing out that educational institutions are not apart from society so that it is perhaps the wrong question to ask but that yes, education can change society. However: 'only if what we do is grounded in larger projects, respectful of our differences, connected to the process of building and defending decentred unities that will give us collective strength, and mindful that the path will be long and difficult' (p165). Have we got time for all this and is it possible when, as Michael admits: 'We are facing the possibility that any critical impulses . . . will be seen as "deviant" and where teaching is seen as being simply a set of technical and procedural skills that can be measured on easily scored standardized achievement tests' (p162)?

## Discussion

**P**erhaps the answer that Michael gives applies more to US realities than to English, even though he draws often upon the cultural politics of Raymond Williams's 1961 *The Long Revolution*. However, Williams was writing at a time when the project of social democratic reformation of society was still in the ascendant and, as far as schooling was concerned, urged a cultural and curricular change that would complement the comprehensive reorganisation of state secondary schooling, while indicating also further advance towards state control of the private sector. These opportunities were lost and subsequently reversed by an accelerating move towards privatisation of the state, leaving the private schools and antique

universities dominant over a competitive system in which today academic examinations act as proxies for more or less expensively acquired cultural capital. This is the contemporary context in which Martin Allen and I suggested that the education system is, in the absence of any practical application of its official knowledge, alienating pupils and students from real learning and functioning mainly as a means of social control.

If society is to reverse this reversal urgent action is required of the type that Counts engaged in as part of the US New Deal in the 1930s. More than this, it is widely recognised that today only a global Keynesianism can divert a moribund capitalism from the self-destructive path to which it has committed humanity. The moment when this seemed possible after the Crunch in 2008 has passed and bank/finance capital rules everywhere. In the UK, the supposedly oppositional Labour Party remains complicit in the Coalition's final dismantling of the welfare state as it hands over remaining public services to the private agencies of a new market state.

Colin Waugh in *PSE 71* is therefore right to ask how change is to be achieved. His answer of a revival of independent working-class education ignores not only the transformed means of communication worldwide but changes to the working class itself that converge with the situation in the far larger and more varied USA. In what can be described as an Americanised class structure, here 'hard working families' / there 'middle-class Americans' are divided from a section of the formerly and traditionally manual working class, racially and regionally segregated into a so-called 'underclass'. In a class structure gone pear-shaped however, there is no floor beneath the new middle-working / working-middle class and the 'underclass' below. As a result, those in the middle are left scrambling up a down-escalator of deflating educational qualifications in hopes of joining the contracting managerial elite and rapidly being proletarianised professions. The official education and training system is deeply implicated in this social transformation.

This reality is apparent to what Guy Standing calls *The Precariat* of dispossessed youth, in England fleetingly brought together in the Spring 2011 mobilisations against HE fees and the loss of Educational Maintenance Allowances. This was before the urban riots and subsequent apparent acceptance by indebted students of the new fee regime for depleted and deracinated university courses which - apart from the often equally phoney promises of so-called 'apprenticeships' - now seems to offer young people the only hope of eventual secure employment. However, such a constituency of 'angry and defrauded young' - even if it could

come together again - while capable as Paul Mason has said of *Kicking Off Everywhere*, lacks the organisation that sustained opposition requires. Martin Allen and I therefore argue that - in England at least - labour movement organisations will still be vital to the new alliances that must be forged.

Hence the importance of Apple's points about an engaged academia, espousing public sociology and science generally to develop a public university, as John Holmwood of the Campaign for the Public University has also urged. This is different from the independent working-class organisation that Colin seeks to revive, mainly because of change (outlined above) to the working class itself but also to the change and extension of its official educational experience. As this has become longer, it has become simultaneously a main means of social control over youth, beginning with the youth training of the 1970s and 80s but extending now to academic cramming as the means of confirming the selection of a minority while convincing the majority of their failure. Robin Simmons points out contra Colin in *PSE 72* that this social control is 'more evident than ever in low-level vocational education programmes aimed at unemployed young people today', or what in the USA Michael Apple calls the 'school to prison pipeline'.

## Conclusion

**W**hether the ruling class can relinquish direct control of the reproduction of subordinated classes through the indirect means of managing a market in education remains to be seen. Certainly, driven by free-market ideology, Michael Gove is moving rapidly towards a free market in schools - with or without vouchers, at the same time as fees function as paperless vouchers in a hierarchy of competing universities and colleges. Students and teachers can protest against these moves as the shared contradiction of supposedly learning and teaching in a more and more stupefying situation opens the critical and professional spaces remaining to them. Hence the importance, if it could be taken up, of the Council for the Defence of British Universities' 'Stop the Rot' campaign. Nevertheless, the market is insidious and there is a temptation for, for example, the NUS, to gain services for its members through exercising market power, or for teaching unions to encourage their members to take up offers from some academy chains that break public sector pay restrictions. As Apple says: 'For many people, their original impulses towards critical theoretical and political work in education were fuelled by a passion for social justice, economic

equality, human rights, sustainable environments, an education that is worthy of its name - in short a better world . . . that are increasingly difficult to sustain' (p30).

The nine tasks that he offers radical educators as a prescription in this situation are 'to illuminate the ways in which educational policy and practice are connected to relations of exploitation and domination', pointing to 'contradictions and spaces of possible action', 'broadening what counts as research' but 'not to throw out "elite knowledge", instead to reconstruct its form and content so that it serves genuinely progressive social needs', 'keeping the multiple traditions of radical and progressive work alive' (including the recuperation of histories such as those outlined in his first chapters described above), 'speaking in different registers to different audiences' while 'acting in concert with progressive social movements' to 'become an "organic" or "public" intellectual', a mentor who 'interrupts dominance' and, finally, for academics like himself, 'using the privilege to open the spaces at universities and elsewhere for those who are not there' (pp41-44). This does not necessarily mean more 'widening participation' to pack more people in but to go out to people in struggle.

Of itself, this will not be enough to change society or the education which is a part of it but it can contribute to the political and economic changes that growing numbers of people worldwide recognise are urgently required for human survival.

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# Putting the learner first

**Stephen Lambert** *argues that FE colleges and school sixth forms across the country need to raise their game and thus help working-class students achieve higher A-level grades*

Although most further education colleges and school sixth forms in the North-East are doing their best to meet the needs of students and boosting academic standards, there still remains evidence of 'poor practice', when it comes to teaching and learning in a quarter of all colleges in the UK, thankfully most of them outside of our region.

According to a recent Ofsted report, about 25 per cent of colleges have been deemed 'in need of significant improvement' or worse, 'inadequate'. Newcastle College and other key providers in the city don't fall into this category and have been awarded either 'good' or 'outstanding' by inspectors.

The key issue appears to be the standard of teaching and learning, as well as, to a lesser extent, the quality of college leadership. These institutions need to adopt creative teaching and learning strategies to achieve good or outstanding results when it comes to A-levels - the passport to university. Teachers need to be fully qualified and experienced in their subject specialisms, particularly when it comes to social science- or humanities-based subjects. Too often it's the case that teachers in school sixth forms, and even colleges, are delivering their second subject at A-level, which clearly disadvantages the learner. This won't do at all. Students at 16 expect their tutors to be subject experts and to possess substantial experience when it comes to delivering mainstream subjects such as English and foreign languages, and in minor subjects such as government and politics and philosophy, which appear to be gaining popularity in 2013.

Likewise it's essential that teachers possess solid vocational expertise, acquired through the world of work, outside the classroom, when delivering subjects such as sociology, politics, citizenship or media studies. No college in their right mind would employ a lecturer in bakery without having some work experience in

making bread or baking cakes! Why should it be any different for those delivering social sciences or arts-based subjects in the post-16 sector? Many of our best teachers and college managers have had a lifetime of relevant work experience outside the classroom, with a tint of eccentricity to go with it. Who remembers a boring teacher?

The idea of Michael Gove, the secretary of state for education, that we return to the 'rote learning' of the 1950s to boost standards is misplaced. Let's not forget that these didactic methods, in the main, left thousands of our youngsters bored rigid, especially in the old secondary modern schools, designed for those who failed their 11+, me included! Too often these lessons resembled a scene from the 1960s movie 'Village of the Damned', with dull, uninspiring teachers talking at rows of passive pupils, who daren't ask a question - and many of whom could barely read or write after 15 years of formal education. Contrary to popular belief, there was no 'golden age' of improvement in standards throughout the 1950s.

Of course, there is a place for traditional teaching methods, when it comes to the teaching of law, or maths. Most law courses in higher education rely on these methods, for the simple reason that prospective solicitors or barristers need to recite, remember and regurgitate complex case studies when dealing with clients. But when it comes to arts-based subjects such as history, sociology, English or geography, a more student-centred approach is needed, such as group work, individual activities, or interactive Power Point presentations, based on individual research tasks set by lecturers. There's mounting evidence that most social science students, who are predominantly women, prefer these 'feminised' learning techniques, as opposed to being lectured at for two hours! Put simply, the human mind can't absorb this amount of

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information or knowledge beyond 20 minutes, especially in the post-modern world of mobile phones and texting. But a word of caution here: we can't go back to the hard-left political approach of 'discovery learning', a feature of many London inner-city comprehensives schools in the 1970s, where pupils did their own thing, with minimal teacher guidance, and learnt next to nothing.

Lessons need to be reinforced by a range of interactive resources and activities. Effective planning of lessons, a passion for the subject by the tutor, and use of praise for less able learners needs to be implemented in mixed-ability classes. Tutors need to adopt effective oral questioning techniques, ensuring that all class members make some attempt to answer one question. Skilled and experienced teachers are able to probe deeper, to tease out prior learning, knowledge and understanding as well as the skills of critical analysis - a key feature of all second year A-level courses. Tutors need to take on board what educationalists refer to as 'differentiation strategies' to effectively meet the needs of all learners and fulfil their academic potential - no easy job when faced with twenty-odd learners - which is why the further education sector can learn much from independent schools, who limit A-level classes to no more than fourteen students. Little wonder that the private sector across the country delivers the most outstanding A-level results, with their pupils attaining the top grades of A-B. The vast majority go on to attend Russell Group universities, including Oxford, Newcastle and Durham. Why should college students, from deprived backgrounds, be excluded from the elite institutions?

Enrichment activities, through the use of high quality guest speakers and educational visits, should be at the heart of any arts, humanities and social sciences programmes in the post-16 sector. Get the experts in from the world of business, academia, politics, law, the media and the voluntary sector to make lessons fun, interesting and to provoke critical thought.

Many forward-looking institutions in the city have fully embraced 21st century technology such as e-learning and virtual learning, to make students more independent, and to prepare them effectively for higher education. But let's not make the mistake of overstating these innovative developments. Most A-level programmes at A2 are tough and demanding, and require student commitment. It's too easy for students to rely on the Internet, a useful educational tool as a resource. Rather, they need to get their teeth into core textbooks, articles and start reading the papers or watching documentaries of an educational value.

So what is the way forward overall to raise achievement at A-level and get FE students the top grades that their peers in private schools seem to gain with relative ease? One, college and sixth form tutors

working in deprived neighbourhoods need to disseminate and share 'good practice' by sharing resources and learning from each other through peer observations of teaching sessions. Two, all tutors should engage in CPD and subject support meetings. Three, tutors need to become assistant examiners in their subject to grasp what the examiners are looking for. Four, effective team leadership and work produces happy teachers and content students. A dysfunctional team can have an adverse impact on student attainment. Five, weaker colleges need to invite high quality speakers from 'high performing colleges and sixth forms', and examiners from the top exam boards. Six, institutions need to reinforce 'target setting' and benchmark against national averages in other post-16 providers. Seven, revision sessions in the holidays need to be an integral component of any A-level programme, with an emphasis on 'personalised learning'. And crucially, tutors need to set and assess homework assignments based on past exam questions, on a regular basis, and provide detailed, constructive feedback to boost student confidence and self-esteem, necessary to gain the top grades at AS and A-level. It's clear that most providers of further education across Newcastle are doing precisely this. But many of the 'failing' colleges outside the North East aren't.

Colleges need to adapt to the changing educational market-place in a post-industrial society, where too often post-16 providers are competing against each other for potential learners. Collaboration is the obvious way forward, but rarely works. So post-16 providers need to adopt the PR and marketing techniques used by the private sector for the past three decades. Student achievement, especially from those from under-represented groups in the community, needs to be celebrated using the traditional print and broadcasting media and social media websites.

Some of our top universities in the region are quite willing to open up opportunities for disadvantaged youngsters as part of the Aim Higher and Widening Participation agendas. We need to take advantage of these offers, so that we can boost the number of working-class students entering university - a point made by the Milburn Report. Alarming, most of our top Russell Group universities, such as Newcastle and Durham, are still monopolised by the affluent middle class from central London removed, and the home counties. Although more youngsters than ever before are going into higher education at the age of 18, working-class young men with no family history of university are not. If we're serious about creating a more meritocratic and fairer society, more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds need to be encouraged to take up the 'life-chance' enhancing opportunities provided by a university education.

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# Critique of City and Guilds course in Communication Skills (1977)

*We print here a paper written by Colin Waugh in December 1977 as a response to a document on Communication Skills presented by Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) advisory teacher Inder Gera at a conference in Huddersfield. (For background, please see p16.)*

**M**y purpose in this paper is to make clear why I am against the proposed course in Communication Skills. It is necessary to state at the outset that I am against it altogether, and not merely insofar as its implementation would destroy General Studies with craft students. One of the reasons why I am against it is that I am for the teaching of communication, which I believe would not just be hampered but actively harmed by it. My attack will be directed both against the document describing the course and against the assumptions on which, according to Inder Gera, it is based.

Inder has said that the course originates from the perception by a group of practising teachers in ILEA colleges that their craft students had difficulty in reading, writing, talking and listening, and their desire to “do something for” these students. Used once or twice, this phrase has no special significance. But when you hear it over and over again, you begin to think about its implications. Amongst these, it seems to me, is the assumption that students do not do things for themselves, and further, that it is alright for an educational project to start from an acceptance of this, rather than an attack on it. There is also, underlying this, an acceptance of the criteria by which the students were perceived to fall short. However, it is no doubt wrong to read too much into one little phrase.

We pass on, then, to a pair of distinctions with which Inder says he operated when devising the course. First, he distinguishes between education (understood to include, for example, messages received through the mass media) and schooling (something which takes place in an institution such as a college). He then makes a further distinction between the institution and the classroom (understood here to include the communication “workshop”). What is his purpose in using the first of these? The answer seems to be, to define the area of life with which teachers are properly concerned (“schooling”) in such a way as to move the moral issues entailed in the concept of education from its centre to its periphery. In effect he is saying “take whatever view you like of the final aims of education; don’t think about it at all if you don’t want to; our job is to get on with schooling.” The object is to manoeuvre us into a position where the only debate can be about technique.

At the same time, adopting this distinction gives him a slightly iconoclastic, radical air, though to many people the radicalism of the deschoolers and McLuhanites from whom it derives looks a bit threadbare nowadays. How false his radicalism is becomes clear when we turn to his second distinction, between institution and classroom. This boils down to saying that the college “offers” the

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students such things as counselling, careers advice, theatre visits, film clubs, sports, discos and so on, so that there is no obligation for the teaching process itself to take account of their needs in these directions. They become extracurricular. I would guess that he adopted this distinction out of opposition to the old style Liberal Studies, in which fragments of "culture" were forced on students for one hour a day in the classroom. His idea looks better at first, because it seems to give them a choice. In reality, however, it cuts out of their formal curriculum the one lesson whose form and content they could influence. And at the level of "hidden curriculum, it teaches them that work and leisure are by nature discrete spheres which should not interact.

What should happen in the classroom, then? Basically, that we should issue the students with a set of multi-purpose tools, of "transferable skills". Obviously the way a word has been used at one stage in its history cannot be a basis for prescribing how it shall be used later. Nevertheless, a change in use often symptomatises a change in thinking, and may also accelerate and spread such a change. A development seems to have happened in the use of "skill". Whereas it once meant only a quality residing in a person such that s/he could carry out some activity with a high degree of fluency, precision and so on, it can now also mean the activity itself, separate from the person. Thus we now speak of going to a centre to get a skill. At one time, skill (always in the singular, never preceded by an article) was a quality latent in a person or a group, which they might deploy in many directions (for example, football teams in defence, dressmakers in cutting). Now we tend more and more to talk of the skill of welding, the skill of writing and so on, not qualities so much as things, which may be acquired and exchanged. The quality has first been split off from the person and then itself split into fragments. It is also true that a person, in the course of trying to find a living, might be trained and retrained in a dozen different skills, and yet still be scarcely skilful, in the older sense, at all.

There are straightforward economic reasons why this has happened, and there is no point in regretting it. But where we go wrong is in applying the notion of skills (in either sense) to communication. This is because skill is, by definition, behavioural, that is, observable. Communication, on the other hand, because its primary medium is language, which is also the primary medium of thought, is in the end inseparably linked with something which is, also by definition, unobservable, namely thought. If you persist in applying the notion of skill to communication, you do three things. First you split it off from thought.

Second you make it vulnerable to all those mechanising, automating, alienating forces which are cutting the skill out of manual crafts. Third, you open up the possibility of making thought too into a skill. (Notice how, in the tantalizing references we keep getting to level II of the course, the phrase "thinking skills" is already being used without any sense of impropriety.)

We are now in a position, I think, to understand why Inder goes for a skills as opposed to a knowledge based course. Just as he cannot (or will not) recognize that skill can [reside] in persons, so he does not see that to know may be to act. The only knowledge he recognizes is alienated knowledge, parcels of predigested information which students passively absorb, the equivalent in the cognitive domain of atomized skills in the psychomotor domain. However, people who have understood Freire better, or even people who have just been involved in real GS discussions (as opposed to "guess what I'm thinking" sessions) know that knowledge doesn't have to be like that. The whole knowledge/skills dichotomy is not only dangerous (because self-confirming, but also unnecessary.

If you are the kind of person who locates students' literacy problems entirely in them and not at all in those who set the standards, and if you are the kind of person who wants to farm films and so on out to student union clubs so that you never have to justify using one to an employer, then you will also jump at the idea of having a workshop rather than a classroom. It is much easier to tell an employer that "his" apprentices spend their college day in a workshop getting skills than to tell him they have spent it in a classroom reading. But this does mean you have to jettison a few liberal formulae. For example, Inder has said that he sets a certain value on reflection in the classroom. Of course, reflection doesn't have to be meditation; there is every reason for linking it as closely as possible to action. But isn't there a very serious danger that in these workshops the students will be occupied at every moment with tasks which are too intricate in form for their minds to wander (as some repetitive manual jobs permit) yet too shallow in content to connect with their real concerns?

But the content - so we are told - is up to the teacher. This too sounds very liberal to GS teachers used to struggling against vocational teachers' efforts to nail them to pre-established subject areas. The danger is, that if you do not assert your right, from the start, to investigate contentious areas, for example sex, race and class, you are likely to be in a weak position later when you are caught doing so. If you don't say what your subject matter is, an employer, through the agency of a vocational head of

department, will sooner or later say it for you. But the problem goes deeper than that. By saying that content is optional (ie that it is irrelevant to specify it) Inder draws a howl of protest from GS teachers. By this means he is already halfway to manipulating them into a position where they accept the idea, which is absurd if you stop to think, that there can ever be a form without a content and vice versa. This in turn diverts attention from the real issue, which is "who decides?" both about content and about form.

Inder has repeatedly said that in the early stages of a course there must take place a process of what he calls "negotiation" between teachers and students. Now although this does call to mind the suspect concept of the teacher-as-manager it seems, like many of his ideas when you first hear them, rather interesting. It does seem to me that I engage in some such process, and perhaps that I should do so more systematically, not only at the beginning but right through. However, the one thing that is going to stop this, even in its present limited form, is the compulsion to work towards an exam through a series of assignments pre-established by an external body whose members have met neither me nor my students. Furthermore, negotiation means group interaction, which this course, with its emphasis on individual learning, will effectively stifle. To talk about negotiation while simultaneously conniving at the destruction of the very open-endedness which makes it possible is to talk nonsense of the most unconvincing (and hence insulting) kind. It is like saying "you can have any rise you like as long as it's under ten per cent."

I have often used a South African government film in which it is suggested that unless you have lived there you cannot have a view. Similarly, it is all the time suggested that people who have no experience of communications workshops cannot criticise them with any authority. It is not worth contesting this. But I would contest the suggestion that my experience of "real life" is of poorer quality than that of the course's proponents. The document emphasises that learning will be through "real life" situations. This means, not only that students go out and interview people etc, but also that the assignments they do in the workshop are more realistic than what normally happens in classrooms. This is not true of the assignments we have seen. What is more significant, though, is the extent to which the course's proponents are willing to use the phrase "real life" as if it referred to some set standard against which everything else can be measured, rather than something which it is the first task of education to investigate.

We come now to the question of the "assessment" (ie the examining and marking) of the course. This reveals perhaps more clearly than

anything else the interplay of authoritarian opportunism with liberal platitude. The latter takes the form of the rejection of a remedial model, the former, among other things, of the unwillingness to even think about those who will fail. Inder says that we are naive to talk about people failing. Rather, we should admire the course because it will certificate a majority of students; that is, it will reward them for something that, in most cases, apparently, they can do already. But if they can do it already, why have the course? And if everyone can pass, why have the certificate?

Having considered some of the things Inder has said, let us now turn to the course document itself. The following, among other things, are wrong with it:

1) The title signifies that it is (a) possible and (b) right to treat communication as a separate discipline. (a) may well be untrue (at least at present); but if it is true, (b) is certainly not.

(2) It is stated on page one that the sixty to ninety hours for the course "may be taken from within Technical Studies and/or General Studies." This is right insofar as it is a step towards admitting that these, in our society, are necessarily opposed. But it is wrong in implying that there will not be pressure to take the time from GS.

(3) If we count such variants as "inappropriate", "appropriately" and "appropriateness" the word "appropriate" is used thirty-five times in the document. There are also many equivalents, such as "acceptably", "correct", "effective", "relevant" and "necessary." The vast majority of such uses are in contexts where it is essential to know more about what is meant. No such qualification is ever provided. The grossest example of this is item 1 on page ten.

(4) The list of types of material to be used (which are termed "contexts for assessment" and hence cannot be genuinely optional) is heavily slanted towards "vocational" material, including only the most cursory references to news media and advertising, and excluding, by implication, such areas as feature films, music and other creative arts.

(5) The objective "distinguishes fact from opinion" appears on pp 2 and 3, implying an absurdly crude approach to questions about knowledge which are central to any serious education.

(6) At many points in the document the suggestion is made, with varying degrees of subtlety, that communication is always hierarchical. For example (p5) we find "accounts to a superior for actions taken

or intended". (Notice the further implication that you may be called to account for what you intend, as well as what you do, as when charged with conspiracy, picked up on suspicion and so on). And it is implied that positive direction naturally comes from above; for example, on p4 the context in which the objective "follows oral descriptions, instructions and directions accurately" is to be assessed is "directions from superiors or peers." This seems to allow for a spot of democracy until you stop to think why there is no reference to instructions coming from inferiors.

(7) On p7 it says "situations should relate to the student as an individual, as a student, as a worker and as a citizen." Here we are, back again with exactly that schizophrenic model characteristic of civics courses and rejected by GS teachers since the late 1960s.

(8) Similarly, on p4, amongst the contexts for assessment, we find "social and domestic situations" and "information in a social context." What notion of the social can the person have who wrote that?

(9) Amongst the notes on p9 we read:

Communication work should be integrated into the educational and vocational context of the students so that it emphasises the practical and social aspects of communications skills rather than the reflective and literary.

It is worth looking at this in slightly more detail because it sums up everything else that is wrong with this tawdry document. It contains two ideas that are broadly true:

(a) the practical is always social

(b) the social is always practical

and six that are false, for the reasons I suggest:

(c) reflection is always literary

(can't an illiterate reflect, then?)

(d) literature is always reflective

(is *The Charge of the Light Brigade* really reflective?)

(e) literature is never practical

(so Macchiavelli's *Prince* isn't literature then?)

(f) literature is never social

(so a play by Sophocles isn't literature?)

(g) reflection is never practical

(so if I make a tenon joint that doesn't fit, and I try to work out why, I'm not reflecting?)

(h) reflection is never social

(so a discussion after a simulation isn't reflection?)

We are left with two possibilities. Either the person who wrote this cannot see the implications of what he says, or he is pretending that he cannot. Either way, with this quotation as with the document as a whole, there is something badly wrong.

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### Background:

The setting was a pair of national residential conferences in late 1977 and early 1978 organised at the then Huddersfield College of Education Technical (Holly Bank site) by Douglas Pride.

The conferences were concerned with the piloting across the UK of year 1 of the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGL) course, then numbered 772, later 361, in Communication Skills.

This course represented a link-up between CGLI and the ILEA FHE Curriculum Development Project, set up by the ILEA staff inspector Eric Bourne. (Bourne's autobiography, *A European Life*, was published in 2012.)

The conferences in Huddersfield, attended by about 50 teachers of General Studies and/or Communication, were intended to allow lecturers to find out about and discuss the 772 Certificate, but in fact offered a platform for the ILEA advisory teacher Inder Gera to promote it. At the first conference, Gera presented a paper doing this, to which the paper printed here, and presented at the second conference, was a response.

Colin Waugh was a basic grade lecturer in General Studies, based in the Engineering Department of the then Tottenham College of Technology, now part of the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London (CHENEL). He was involved with the London-wide organisation, General Studies Workshop (GSW), through which GS teachers across both inner and outer London were currently campaigning against what they saw as an attempt by careerists posing as saviours of the downtrodden to replace General and Liberal Studies with a restrictive qualification focused on the acquisition of narrow 'basic skills'.

# An alternative provider

**Ian Duckett**

**W**ith the massive growth in school exclusions, down - at least in part - to the growth of academisation under the Coalition government's dangerous Gove-led so-called revolution. This even applies to pupil referral units. One of the consequences of this is an increase in alternative education provision. Shaftesbury Young People (SYP), one of these alternative providers, believes that, regardless of previous educational experiences, all young people can leave school with good academic outcomes if they are offered personalised support and expectations are high.

## Alternative

SYP's Wandsworth Extended Learning Centre (ELC) provides an alternative curriculum for 14-16 year olds. The ELC currently services the London boroughs of Wandsworth, Lambeth and Southwark.

We offer a timetable which delivers accredited outcomes including GCSEs in English Language, English Literature and Maths for which all young people are entered. Shaftesbury also teaches ICT, Music Technology, Sports Leadership, Art and Design, Hospitality and Catering, and Performing Arts - a selection of subjects designed to reignite the youngsters' interest in learning. We also teach our students a range of skills covered by an SYP ASDAN-

accredited Engagement, Employability and Enterprise programme.

## Intensive

In the mornings there is an intensive programme of GCSEs, which provides a second chance to learners who have not been able to benefit from full engagement within a mainstream school system, have been let down by the world of education, or are disadvantaged in some other way.

All young people have a personalised learning plan, weekly targets, one-to-one support if required, and a highly pro-active approach to overcoming any barrier to their learning and achievement.

A crucial aspect of the ELC education programme is outreach work in the shape of mentoring and support afforded by daily home and family liaison.

Transition planning and guaranteed progression routes represent another dimension of SYP's service and supplement the schedule of GCSEs, Functional Skills, personal and social development and vocational studies described in our curriculum model. After they leave Wandsworth ELC, our learners will hopefully go on to a further education college to study, or return to school. Wherever they go, the work they will have done with us is sure to improve their prospects.

# Utopia Workshop

**Robin Sivapalan**

**T**he Utopia Workshop, supported by the Brent Trades Union Council and Unite Community, is looking to establish three courses in the new year for workplace and community activists.

Know Our Rights  
English for Action  
Free education

In the first place, we want to bring together volunteer educator-organisers to make plans.

The Utopia Workshop supports the local working-class movement, promoting education, discussion and creativity. A library has been set up in the Trades Hall in Willesden (centrally located in Brent), wide-ranging in scope, with a view to developing knowledge and understanding about the world we live in. Books are going out to workplaces, street libraries and activist meetings.

It is necessary to build again on the tradition of 'Independent working-class education', in our unions, community groups, political parties and campaign groups, in a context where state education is being increasingly taken over by corporate and religious interests, where free and critical thinking is squeezed out by a narrow focus on exams and qualifications - and working-class students are deterred by cost. A new generation of activists requires organised, free education.

The Utopia Workshop is about knowing the world we live in and its history, imagining the world we want, and taking the action we need to get there. The three inter-connected courses we want to run are the basis of this.

## 1. Know Our Rights

The local trade union and working-class movement stands for democracy and collective action. Democracy means everyone having equal power, voice and status. Whether in the workplace, as a tenant or benefits claimant, if you're disabled or undocumented, a Black person, Muslim, woman or LGBTQ, we live in a society where there is discrimination and systematic oppression.

Our Rights are never handed down - they are fought for and easily lost. We can see this struggle

for social, economic and political justice raging around the world. Here, the government is cutting back drastically on legal aid, attacking trade union freedoms and civil rights, and demolishing public services, the NHS and the welfare state.

Grassroots movements, taking collective action, are our best defence against inequality and oppression and the best way to guarantee our rights and freedoms and public services. In Brent, there is a long history of people asserting their rights; in the workplace for pay, conditions and dignity at work; on the streets campaigning or standing against the police, UKBA and racists; and in court, council and parliament. The Brent Law Centre, Citizens Advice, Brent Mencap, Renters Campaign, the Kilburn Unemployed Workers Group, the Counihan-Sanchez Housing Campaign, Brent Housing Action, Stop the Racist Van, the Brent Stop and Search Monitoring Group all promote our rights, take on casework, campaign and organise.

This series of workshops aims to learn and evaluate the rights we have, to support each other in organising for them to be known more widely and respected, to campaign for our rights and advice services, and support collective action through unions and community campaigning.

Workshops and meetings would cover Rights at Work, Immigration, the Police, Protest, Housing, Benefits, 'Equalities'. Many groups and organisations run trainings and public events already covering these Rights and campaign areas. The aim is to help promote these events, and work jointly with other local organisations and individuals, to develop a local framework for education and events and collective action around our rights.

## 2. English for Action

Brent is home to people from all around the world, speaking many languages. Aside from the new draconian state requirements for English proficiency which coincided with cuts and fees in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), English classes can positively empower people in the workplace, with the landlord, council and other



situations where language is used against them. English classes could also bring together people of different background, who share a common experience of exploitation and vulnerability, and forge a practical relationship with the existing trade union and 'community' movement.

English for Action is an existing organisation, drawing upon educational tools forged in work with oppressed peoples pioneered by Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. EFA is not currently working in Brent, but have welcomed potential English teachers for our Brent course to observe their classes and take their training.

<http://www.efalondon.org/>

### 3. Free Education

Before state education existed, and alongside it, there has been a tradition of independent working-class education, especially in the field of politics, history, philosophy, economics and literature. Increasingly, the battle for access to a non-vocational curriculum is in retreat. Courses that working-class people have opted for to know our world - like Media Studies, Sociology and Psychology - have been demeaned, probably because of the interest ordinary people took in them, and because they represented tools for change.

Working-class access to the 'further' and 'higher' education they really want has been limited once again by fees and debt and course closures, and 'life-long learning' involves constant re-skilling to survive the labour market not a broadening of intellectual horizons. Non-EU migrant workers are further debarred by the vast fees imposed on them and the time devoted to survival.

Free education, in money terms but also free from the mechanics of exams and qualifications, is important for people to gain a space where education can be about community building and social empowerment. We are encouraged to compete for individual progress, and our knowledge is transformed into a currency, where only a few are ever allowed the highest grades and access to the best resourced and lucrative degrees.

Teaching and learning in the formal sector has been significantly pushed toward drilling for external assessment, and more radical, libertarian and inclusive ways of organising how we do education are as important as developing alternative content. The trade union and political party organisation of education has declined with these movements. Brent Trades Council and Unite Community, bringing

together different unions and diverse community and political activists, can play a role in providing inclusive and well-resourced education and a direct link to action.

There is a vast reservoir of experience, knowledge, interest and books in our community that we can draw upon, from existing and former activists and beyond.

The aim is to bring together potential educators and organisers over the coming months, to discuss what education provision is already accessible and what we could organise. Over a few meetings, we can share our views and experience of working-class education, assess what we think the priorities are and our capacities, and design models of education we can carry out, whether reading groups, film screenings, courses, workshops, lectures.

## 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.**

**For further information, contact the Secretary:**

**Ben Cosin  
3 Halliday Drive  
DEAL CT14 7AX**

**CAFAS website: [www.cafas.org.uk](http://www.cafas.org.uk)**

# Towards an IWCE manifesto

*The Independent Working-Class Education Network is drawing up a manifesto. Some items that might need to be included are listed here. Please contact us on [iwceducation@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:iwceducation@yahoo.co.uk) with comments, additions etc.*

## Reasons for an IWCE manifesto now

Eg: to provide a more stable basis for expanding the network, and thereby for more consistent activity; to make explicit the values shared by those with an interest in rebuilding IWCE.

## Our activities now

What we have done - and failed to do - since 2009. What should we be doing in the short and medium term future?

## Need for definition of IWCE

What do we mean (and not mean) now by 'independent', by 'working-class', and by 'education'?

## History of IWCE movement itself

The Ruskin strike, the Plebs League, the CLC, the NCLC. Why was its legacy 'lost'?

## History of other closely-related movements

Eg: Rudolf Rocker's classes in the East End; the Movement for a Scottish Labour College.

## History of earlier movements

Eg: the struggle in the London Mechanics Institute (1820s); the 'really useful knowledge' concept within Chartism.

## Movements elsewhere

Eg: the education side of the bourses de travail in France; Brookwood College in the US.

## IWCE's relation to from-above workers' education initiatives

Eg university extension/WEA. How should we relate to the WEA now?

## Movements since IWCE

Eg in the 1960s-1980s: History Workshop, Ralph Miliband's Socialist Education Centres, Northern College.

## Related non-socialist movements

Eg: the Antigonish movement in Canada; the Paulo Freire literacy movement in Brazil.

## Teaching and learning methods

Do we need to think collectively about this? If so, do Vygotsky, Luria, Leontiev, Voloshinov, for eg, offer a starting point?

## Relation of IWCE to TU education

What do we think about Unionlearn, and what can we do about it? Can we establish IWCE as a necessary condition of union organising now?

## Relation to mainstream further and higher education

Its history and our analysis of it. How would a revived IWCE relate to activity (eg by lecturers who are socialists) within the mainstream?

## Relation to big politics

Eg how do we think revived IWCE would connect to / affect other left political activity?

## Conception of socialism

Does reviving IWCE entail

rethinking socialism more broadly? Eg is valid workers' education a necessary condition of ideological struggle, and hence of effective class struggle more generally?

## Democracy

How can we be adequately democratic amongst ourselves? What issues do we have to agree on in order to rebuild IWCE? How should we handle disagreements?

## Globalisation

Should we be trying, at least in embryo, to build a 'global Plebs League'? Eg should we be thinking about workers' education in areas to which industrial capital has been moved?

## Equality

Does the attempt to rebuild IWCE need to develop its own distinct stance towards equality campaigns, issues etc?

## Sectarianism

How should we relate to existing left groups, including those which may act in a sectarian fashion, and especially to their internal education procedures?

## De-skilling, Luddism, technological change etc

Is discussion and education about these issues intrinsic to revived IWCE? If not, why not?

# Robin Small on Marx

Colin Waugh

Robin Small, *Marx and Education* (Ashgate, 2005), 204pp

**T**his is a valuable study, which nevertheless gives rise to questions about what is involved in understanding Marx's view of the world.

Robin writes from the standpoint of a university teacher whose main fields of interest are philosophy (he has also published a book on phenomenology and two studies of Nietzsche) and education. *Marx and Education* looks to be addressed primarily to undergraduate students, perhaps mainly in the field of school education. In a straightforward and unpatronising way, Robin poses questions both about passages in Marx's writings which refer explicitly to education, and about other aspects of his thought relevant to this, for example on alienation. In an unobtrusive way Robin uses his deep knowledge both of the historical circumstances in which Marx lived and wrote, and of the intellectual world in which he participated, also retranslating from the original German some of Marx's key formulations. He includes valuable contextual material that I for one was unaware of, for example from Schiller, from Hegel's writings on education, and from a book about education and work by the French socialist Claude-Anthime Corbon published in 1859.

Robin's standpoint is much to be preferred both to that of academics who tell you what Marx thought without understanding it themselves, and of activists who present Marx's ideas as intrinsically unchallengeable. Like Stephen Castles and Wiebke Wustenberg in their 1979 book *The Education of the Future*, he gives weight to Marx's comments in

*Capital* on the half-time system and to his proposals about polytechnical training. However, Robin's book is better than theirs in two clear respects. First, his analysis of Marx's underlying philosophy, for example the third of his 'theses' on Feuerbach, is more sophisticated than theirs. Secondly, the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe means that whereas these earlier writers dealt with Marx's legacy mainly by talking about institutional arrangements in the Eastern bloc, Robin focuses more on thinkers such as Gramsci, Freire and Bowles and Gintis.

It might have been better if, as well as referencing quotations to the collected works of Marx and Engels, Robin had more consistently referenced them also to the titles of specific texts, for example *The Communist Manifesto* or *The Poverty of Philosophy*, because this would make it harder for students to lose sight of the concrete circumstances in which particular arguments were put forward. In all other respects, however, *Marx and Education*, is suited not only to its intended readership within mainstream HE but also to use by activists in reading circles, educationalists and the like. Hopefully a paperback version will come out soon.

Nevertheless, I believe that education was even more important to Marx than this study implies.

In his introduction (pvii) Robin differentiates between what Marx said and what has been made of this since. However, he also maintains that: [Marx's] ideas would still constitute an important chapter in the history of educational thought' '[e]ven if they had never been put into practice' - ie implying that they have been - and that '[t]he twentieth century was . .

. the historical period in which socialism was put into practice . . .' (px). So despite warnings that he issues to the contrary, Robin does assume that the Soviet Union, China under Mao Tse Tung etc in some way realised socialism as Marx conceived it, and that Marx would have supported at least some of the arrangements they made for education. Regardless of whether these assumptions are right or wrong, it seems a little surprising not to exclude them from a study where there is otherwise a consistent effort to avoid reading history backwards.

Also in his introduction (pviii) Robin discusses whether Marx put forward ideas on education 'in a way that forms a pattern of thinking, and even amounts to some unitary theory' and identifies the risk that he himself runs 'in picking out the references to education'. I feel that he does in the end fall victim to this risk, essentially because, perhaps because of his intended readership, he accepts too readily the dominant definition of what constitutes education (that is, equates it, in effect, with schooling), and as a result underestimates its centrality in Marx's thought.

## Root

Marx's conception of the world is at root simply that those who do the work shall decide, collectively, what work is to be done. He expressed this succinctly in his 1864 inaugural address to the International Working Men's Association, where he contrasted with the political economy of the capitalist class that of the working class, which to him boiled down to 'social production controlled by social foresight'.

For foresight - the strategic planning of production - to be social - that is, to cease to be restricted to a few thousand big shareholders - the vast majority, who are currently excluded from any positive say in such planning, must put themselves in a position to decide. In short, they must radically deepen and extend that which under capitalism passes for democracy. What led Marx to think that this extension of decision-making must take place?

Marx believed that capitalism must eventually destroy the possibilities that it has itself opened up of a decent life for everyone. He believed, further, that only the organised working class could prevent this, by taking political power and releasing the problem-solving capacity latent within its own ranks. Why did he think that the working class possessed this capacity?

Marx developed a labour theory of value different from that put forward by bourgeois economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, namely that what workers sell to capitalists is not their labour,

but their labour power, their capacity to work for a certain time. This insight is arguably the single most important idea which he had, the key step which enabled him to move beyond bourgeois political economy at its strongest. But from another point of view this is also something which workers know from experience, which tells them that the employer buys your capacity to work and then decides when and how to use it, and when to keep you standing idle.

Marx linked this insight to another, which he expressed much earlier on, in the second of his 'theses' on Feuerbach, namely that: '[t]he question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth - i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question'. Here, then, he put forward in embryonic form what we might call a 'labour theory of cognition' - the proposition, that humans know the world primarily by working in and on it. And this in turn implies that the major steps in human development must in the end have arisen from the insights of direct producers - peasants, artisans and industrial workers.

By bringing together these two ideas: on the one hand, his particular labour theory of value, and, on the other, this 'labour theory of cognition', Marx created a powerful conceptual tool: the ability to differentiate between, on the one hand, those prerequisites of the production process which cannot expand their own value, such as, machinery, materials, buildings, waterpower, steam, the muscle-power of draught animals, land etc, and, on the other, the one which can, namely human labour power.

Human labour power possesses this capacity because human beings have evolved a very large ability to remember and, still more significantly, to reflect on remembered experience - in short to make both material and intellectual tools and through doing so also not only to think but also to think about thinking. And they have organised themselves do these things both collectively - for example, to pass on the results from one to another - and diachronically - that is, to pass them also from one generation to another - in short to train and educate themselves, and thus to become able to produce, to plan the outcomes of their interaction with their environment to a qualitatively greater extent than other species.

In this sense at least, then, Marx did not just think about education from time to time. Rather, he based his most central concepts, the ideas which mark off his thinking from that of other apparently

comparable intellectuals, on it.

Here we come to a difference in kind between a thinker like Marx and one like, say Nietzsche. There was something in Marx which made him listen to workers' ideas in a way and to an extent which the vast majority of thinkers otherwise from his background did and do not. Not only did Marx listen to workers himself, he also chose to collaborate throughout his life with Frederick Engels, who entered into dialogue with Chartist millworkers in Salford and Manchester and chose to live with one such activist, Mary Burns as his wife in all but name.

### Elaborated

Marx and Engels, then, were able to develop the conception of the world that they did because they listened to what workers said and, in a term used often by Gramsci, 'elaborated' - that is, systematised and synthesised, thought through logically, the implications of the insights which workers had. So whereas the ideas of other big-name philosophers, whatever their merits, ultimately reflect the standpoint of the class of which they themselves were members, those of Marx reflect the ideas of the working class too.

Here, obviously, the question arises: if Marx really did hold such a 'labour theory of cognition', how is this to be reconciled with the points that he repeatedly made about how the organisation of work under capitalism was stripping the knowledge elements out of the labour process, such that training, in the diminishing circumstances where it was necessary at all, made no difference to the value produced by labour, the vast bulk of which had become interchangeable, such that the same worker could be moved from one branch of production to another?

The answer to this is that Marx saw knowledge and the processes by which knowledge is produced - or, as he expressed it in the Communist Manifesto 'the means of intellectual production' - as just as much subject to, and a factor in, class struggle as physical activity. And further, just as class struggle in relation to physical work and the production of material goods had a history, so too, in his view did class struggle around 'intellectual production'. Evidence for the claim that Marx and Engels held this view, at least in 1845-46, is to be found in *The German Ideology*, where they wrote that the division of labour which is 'truly such', namely that between manual and mental labour, between those who have the power to decide and those who can only execute, arose in the first class societies, taking in the first instance the form of a division between

priests and the rest of the population. So just as, in their view of the world, the 'history of all hitherto existing society [other than primitive communism] is the history of class struggles' around material production, so it is also one of class struggles around 'intellectual production'. The producers generate insights, but the ruling class, either directly or through agents who in normal times are loyal to it maintains a firm grip over how those insights are elaborated

It follows from this that to Marx and Engels there has been in every class society one form or another of a struggle 'now hidden, now open' between those who monopolise 'the means of intellectual production' and those who are excluded by this monopoly from access to these means. This in turn implies that class struggle of any kind always has an education dimension, a dimension in which there is a contested relation between intellectuals, whether they are themselves members of the ruling class or only its agents, and 'the instrumental classes', those who are reduced as far as possible to being like tools or non-human animals, in short to 'constant capital'.

In this discussion, then, I have tried to show that the question of education is intrinsic to the most fundamental aspects of Marx's thought, and that of Engels. It would follow from this, if true, that, yes, it is necessary to pick out Marx's references to education as normally understood, as Robin does, but also to extend our analysis to this deeper and more pervasive set of concerns. And this in turn requires, I believe, that we move beyond a conventional definition of education, and instead understand by this term that which seeks to reverse the 'division of labour' thought by Marx and Engels to be intrinsic to class society in all its forms.

Therefore I think that the value of Robin's study can be fully realised only if we supplement it from the standpoint of an 'independent working-class' definition of education.

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