

The future of general education in vocational FHE courses: draft position paper

We print here for readers' comments a document written jointly in March 2014 by David Crabtree and Colin Waugh

Part 1: VET policy

David Crabtree

This paper explores VET policy by asking the following questions:

- Is its purpose clear?
- Does it deliver?
- Who is it designed to benefit?
- What do we now need to consider?

Is the purpose of VET clear?

VET is an integral part of national economic policy. Aligning it with the needs of employers has created a consensus that the purpose of VET is to provide employers with a skilled workforce to increase the ability of the UK to maintain a position of strength and power in the world. The currency of VET is skills. Skills within this context are a mixture of behaviours and underlying core or basic skills normally drawn from an idea of a skills hierarchy.

The history of thinking about VET has been one of linking post-school work-related education to national economic interests and the demands of employers. The context for this thinking has been the relative economic progress of the UK compared to major competitors. Even as far back as 1852, Lyon Playfair, in a lecture on 'Industrial Instruction on the Continent', was warning that improvements in technical education were urgently required if Britain's manufacturers were to maintain their lead over foreign competitors (Perry, 1976).

The current skills strategy for England was launched in 2007. It represents the Government's

response to a 2006 review of skills in England by Lord Leitch. The strategy aims to make England a world-class leader in skills by 2020, benchmarked against the top quartile of OECD countries. The underlying political consensus around the Skills Strategy is that 'learning' is a valued commodity and harnessing the intellectual resource of the nation provides the differentiating currency of the 21st century to secure economic prosperity. The logic runs that higher order skills are now required to ensure that western economies can compete with emerging markets.

Learning within VET is narrowly defined and subservient; learning is only necessary in relation to the function of labour. The interests of employers define learning in the context of work-related skills and knowledge along with an underlying concept of utility cost ie only learning which serves the needs of employers should be paid for out of the public purse. It has been deigned that the public purse pay for VET because employers tend not to want to pay for it and it is deemed to be in the interests of the nation to do so.

High-skill economies tend to be the rich countries. High-skill economies have tended to relocate labour intensive manufacturing functions to poor countries because low-skills economies serve to keep inflation low in the high-skills economies. Low skills economies are characterised by poor working conditions, low labour costs and a plentiful supply of people to perform routine and low level tasks. As such, ideas associated with VET policy contribute to an acceptance of dismal working conditions of workers in low-skill economies.

Current areas of discussion about the purpose of VET in the UK tend to be about methods to strengthen the existing system in relation to skills and how to market VET internationally as a commodity in its own right (see AoC, *UK Vocational*

Education and Training [VET] Towards a Comprehensive Strategy for International Development).

Does it deliver?

Generally, the consensus is that VET does not deliver. A consistent criticism of VET policy in the UK over the past 150 years is that it is fragmented, lacks the employer involvement it requires to operate effectively and does not actually deliver the skills required.

Many recent reports, including a recent OECD Report on UK VET (OECD 2009), have identified the problems of employer engagement: 'Few countries have achieved strong employer engagement without an equally strong apprenticeship system, which remains elusive in England and Wales . . . In spite of the government's decalred intention to have much VET employer led, the delivery of the Leitch targets will require a very strong lead from government'.

With regard to the skills required, the recent government-initiated Wolf Report identified that the staple offer for between a quarter and a third of the post-16 cohort is a diet of low-level qualifications, most of which have little or no labour [market?] value. The report says the current funding system encourages colleges to put students through a lot of qualifications – but not to continue to improve their core skills in English and maths if these are lacking. It calls for changes to the system of funding and regulation, longer-term work placements for older pupils and greater involvement of business and industry.

Who is it designed to benefit?

The idea is that VET benefits all. Employers get the workers they need, workers get high-skill employment, companies deliver on high value-added goods, the system produces high value returns, everybody gets paid well, the country maintains its power and employment and profits are high.

Questions that are not often asked about VET are things such as:

- What does it deliver to people? Are individuals better off because of VET?
- What does VET do to thinking about socially important knowledge?
- Are economic interests actually served by employers dominating discussions about VET?
- Is VET a big con designed to undermine education?

These questions (and others) are important because VET should not be considered as a specialist and adjunct part of education. Since 1976, all education has become VET. The then prime minister, Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College heralded a new dawn for education in the UK: '. . . the goals of our education system . . . are clear enough – they are to equip children to the best of their ability for a lively, constructive place in society and also to fit them to do a job of work.' (1976)

Consequently, when determining benefit, I would suggest that there is one very important measure which tends to be left out of evaluation of VET: does what is currently being offered provide lifelong earning for the majority of the population? The evidence is that it has not. The Office for National Statistics shows UK youth unemployment standing at a persistently high level of 20.5 per cent, whilst in the Eurozone it is 24.4 per cent (Eurostat, 2012), and in the USA 18 per cent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

What do we now need to consider?

We need to look at VET in relation to what it offers all the interested parties / stakeholders particularly individuals. We need to consider how the concept of VET has distorted our view of learning, education and knowledge.

We need to recognise that high-skills are not separate from higher order reasoning. We need to consider the reasons why such subjects as Maths and English are not successful.

We also need to recognise that VET is education, and as such need to take into account the whole person. To quote Paulo Freire: 'Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.'

References:

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Part 2: A better direction

Colin Waugh

I take it that the object is to try and develop, as quickly as possible, one or more forms of education, especially for 16-24 year olds, that, in the terms used by Paulo Freire which David quotes, would be a 'means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world'.

The main ways in which we might be able to do this are either by trying to rebuild the tradition of independent working-class education (IWCE) that existed in the first half of the 20th century, or by trying to develop valid forms of provision within FE colleges and recruiting universities, or, more likely, by doing both these things and making sure they are linked. Here I will focus on what we might be able to do within FHE.

I agree with the general direction of David's argument about VET policy, and I feel that we should see this against the background of the 'de-industrialisation' of the UK economy, the essentials of which were carried through between the mid 70s

and the mid 80s. 'De-industrialisation' here is a shorthand term covering developments which have included the movement of industrial production to lower waged economies outside the UK, technological and managerial changes to the organisation of the production that remains here, the expansion of financial services, especially in London and the Southeast, and of employment fields that support this, for example electrical installation, passenger transport and IT.

The biggest way in which 'de-industrialisation' has affected FE is through accelerating the dissolution of the layer of industrial craftspersons. Between WW2 and the mid 1980s, the central thrust of both FE and the parts of HE most closely related to it was the technical education of parts of this layer. Much of what has happened to and within FHE since then stems from the abolition of this thrust. The destruction of the Liberal Studies, General Studies and (on technician level courses from the mid 1970s) General and Communication Studies (G&CS) that formed part of this technical education is itself an example of this.

In the period since 'de-industrialisation' took hold, FE colleges have seen a succession of non-industrial, nominally full-time vocational course models. Each of these models has been accompanied by a form of general education. Some of these forms have been based on outright rejection of the tradition and insights of LS/GS/G&CS, some on ignoring these things. Others have incorporated strands from that tradition but in a manner which renders them ineffective.

This process actually began in the 70s with the drive by a group of people around the ILEA inspector Eric Bourne, eventually supported by CGLI, to replace the non-examined GS that was part of courses for industrial-release apprentices and trainees with a free-standing certificate in Communication Skills. It continued from 1983-84 when, as part of the merger of the Technician Education Council (TEC) with the Business Education Council (BEC) to form BTEC (now part of Edexcel), there was an attempt to abolish the form of general education that was integral to TEC courses, ie G&CS. Eventually, a compromise was reached which involved Common Skills, Core Themes and a programme of integrative assignments. This compromise proved unworkable. Then in the early 1990s, with GNVQs, the BTEC model was scrapped in favour of one derived from the ideas of Gilbert Jessup about learning outcomes, from which the model of Core Skills was developed. This was damaged by the Major government's decision, against the advice of organisations like the CBI, to restrict these skills to Communication, Application of Number and IT.

A further step in the wrong direction was then taken in the second half of the 1990s following the Dearing review and in the lead-up to the Curriculum 2000 initiative. Dearing recommended the introduction of free-standing but compulsory 'Key Skills', again focused exclusively on Communication, Number and IT. This model was rejected by elite schools and by mainstream A-level students generally, but a reduced version of it was retained for those doing vocational A-levels. But within a few years this in turn came under attack on the grounds that the multi-choice tests within it were too easy and that students were getting too much help with the coursework assignments. So it in turn was scrapped and replaced by Functional Skills, focused exclusively on English, Maths and IT but now assessed by exams (plus a small oral component).

All five of these models were and are fundamentally flawed.

CGLI Communication Skills assumed that nothing except basic communication matters, and that it was alright for tuition in this to be 'free-standing', ie not part of the students' main course. The BTEC model ensured the Core Themes would not be done, provided no adequate means of checking that the Common Skills had been done, and depended on integrative assignments that were impossibly unwieldy. Core Skills excluded the so-called 'soft' or 'additional' skills (ie problem solving, working with others, and improving own learning and performance) and imposed impossibly bureaucratic evidence requirements. Key Skills failed to reintroduce the additional 'skills' and went back to the 'freestanding' model introduced by CGLI. Functional Skills excludes the possibility of motivating students through coursework assignments, which in the case of Key Skills allowed them to investigate topics of their own choice which could also be related to main course content.

As former practitioners of LS/GS/G&CS we know very well that these areas too had significant weaknesses. However, we believe that these weaknesses were different in kind from those of the models described above, in that, given the chance, we could have put them right.

We also believe that the structure of the situation in LS/GS/G&CS meant that the experience acquired there, if it can be recaptured and analysed properly, will provide insights from which a valid model of general education on vocational FHE courses now and in the future can be generated.

This structure can be briefly described as follows. The state strongly encouraged colleges to provide LS/GS/G&CS, and awarding bodies required students to do it. At the same time, at least with LS

and GS, there was effectively no requirement as to what should be done within it, and no assessment of outcomes. In a period where there was a tight labour market, this put the students, most of whom were released by employers onto part-time college attendance, in a position of strength which forced lecturers to concede forms of reciprocal, mutual and dialogic teaching and learning that normally do not find a space in which to develop.

We believe that only by including at their centre such forms of teaching and learning can vocational courses in FHE enable students to develop the capacities which are necessary both at an individual and a collective level in modern society.

We further believe that if the experience of LS/GS/G&CS had been drawn on properly under the circumstances imposed by 'de-industrialisation' the mistakes which we have identified in the design of general education from that day to this could have been largely avoided, with the result that a much more valid practice, with a much stronger conceptual basis, would be in place now.

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Gang culture

Newcastle city councillor and lecturer Stephen Lambert looks at some of the issues

In the 1990s, new forms of criminal youth gangs began to appear in some of Britain's cities such as London, Manchester and Liverpool. They were violent, armed, organised, territorial and too often involved in drugs. But, as experts have noted, even in the cities where it has taken hold, this has been confined to particular neighbourhoods where deprivation is combined with social exclusion. And there remains much debate amongst experts as to what is the cause. Some believe it stems from class and ethnic inequalities; others take the view that gangs are almost like surrogate nuclear family structures, where disaffected young men seek and gain an identity. Whatever the explanation, what's going on at the moment is a huge cause of concern, and gang culture in some of our 'core' cities is having a bad impact on youngsters and their 'life-chances', as well as having an adverse impact on law-abiding working-class communities in some of our key cities. That's why we must take preventative measures to stop this taking root in our city.

Six years ago, disturbances in the Nunsmoor Park area of the city, and more recently outbreaks of disorder outside the 'Gate' in the city centre, raised concerns that gangs of this sort might be starting to appear in Newcastle. This led to the setting up of a council-backed study group of youth workers, the police and councillors, of which I was a principal member. We examined what is meant by gang culture, and investigated whether it had taken root in our city and if not, why not, and what could be done to tackle the possible emergence of such a phenomenon in the future.

Who joins gangs and why? Research by John Pitts (Luton University) and by experts at Leicester University notes the following features: gangs are dominated by young men, mostly from deprived areas; often there are family links, perpetuated by a hierarchical structure; and young men join them for a sense of belonging and identity. Most are territorial, and, according to Pitts, there is in parts of south London also an ethnic dimension. The experts also found that gang members are heavily involved in

drug use and dealing. Most have been excluded from school, and few, if any, have any basic qualifications, such as GCSE passes, or vocational skills.

Yet Newcastle has not been afflicted by this type of violent, armed, drug-related gang crime which is seen in some disadvantaged communities elsewhere in some of our 'core' cities. Nor was the city affected by urban riots and disorder in 2011. More recent primary research, using informal interviews and participant observation in some of the west end's 'roughest bars', conducted by myself, concludes that the city hasn't got a teenage gang culture, but rather a variety of youth sub-cultures, such as Goths, who are more interested in style and music.

There is a big difference between youngsters hanging around street corners or shops, sometimes committing low-level acts of crime, and 'real' criminal gangs as seen in other major cities. Newcastle is quite small and compact, so it's hard to form territorial gangs when you're talking about a city with a relatively small population.

Another view is cultural. Our strong local identity, the lack of neighbourhoods that feel 'un-owned' by communities; long-established, strong extended families, which for years have exercised informal social control in the west end, and the lack of deprived estates located next to exclusive retail outlets may have helped stem the emergence of a gang culture and 'copy-cat' riots across the city in 2011. Yes, of course there are sporadic outbreaks of violence in a small number of streets, and in the city centre at the weekend, but the violence tends to be with fists and beer glasses – unacceptable though that is – it's not with knives and shooters.

Although much has been done by Safe Newcastle, the statutory community safety partnership in the city, the retention of neighbourhood police teams, and the good work done by ARCH [Agency to Combat Hate Crime and Manage Community Tensions. Ed.] to manage community tensions, more needs to be done. The Coalition government can't turn its back on Newcastle. Money has to be found from central government to fund voluntary youth projects in both the east and west ends of the city to prevent vulnerable youngsters drifting into anti-social behaviour. We need to tackle truancy rates in schools – sadly amongst the highest in the region

– perhaps by running more job-related courses for those young white and BME working-class boys bored by the academic National Curriculum. But above all, we need as a city and as a region to achieve full employment and provide meaningful opportunities for disaffected youngsters living in the most deprived areas of the city, if we're to avoid the emergence of a gang culture, a criminal 'under-class' or worse social disorder on our streets.

UK youth unemployment: find a NEET solution

Drawing on research coordinated at Huddersfield University by Robin Simmons, Stephen Lambert argues for radical solutions

Media commentators have recently highlighted that youth unemployment levels in this country are now higher than in 2009 – with the North East being hit the hardest. The implications of this are serious, and not only for hard-pressed businesses, public services and the economy more broadly. Unemployment is often associated with social isolation, ill-health, and other forms of long term exclusion for

the individuals concerned, and for their families. However, the 'scarring effects' of unemployment are particularly serious for young people. Youth offending, anti-social behaviour, and the incidence of early parenthood are significantly higher amongst those who spend significant periods of time classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training).

Although over recent years there have been several

sensational headlines about NEET young people, research carried out at Huddersfield University not only challenges some of the stereotypes which have built up around youth joblessness but also offers a range of recommendations for policy-makers concerned with this area.

Recently completed, the three-year project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, has a number of important findings. One of

these, which doesn't agree with the received wisdom, is that nationally three quarters of 16-18 year-olds who are NEET come from a household with at least one parent in work. The majority of jobless young people don't come from some real or imagined workless underclass, and most are NEET for relatively short periods of time (on average twelve weeks). Moreover, whilst generally NEET youngsters have lower than average qualifications, many actually have a good academic profile. It's easy to forget that young unemployed graduates or those taking a year out before starting university are officially classified as NEET.

Harsh

Despite much rhetoric about skills shortages, the harsh reality is that most young people are in fact over-qualified for the jobs available to them. Although pockets of high-skill work do exist in the British jobs market, nowadays most new employment – especially that which is available to young people – is in retail, leisure, social care and other parts of the low-skill end of the service sector. Although some commentators are fond of blaming the poor and unemployed for their own plight, the research conducted at Huddersfield has found that most NEET young people are essentially ordinary working-class kids with fairly mainstream attitudes and opinions.

Youth unemployment data for Newcastle upon Tyne illustrates this quite vividly. Over 12 per cent of the city's youngsters aged 16-24 are jobless. 18 per cent are classified as NEET. Whilst affluent wards of the city such as Gosforth have NEET rates for 16 and 17 year-olds as low as 1 per cent, traditional working-class

areas such as Benwell, Scotswood and Walker have far higher rates of youth unemployment – 7 per cent and 11 per cent respectively. In Cowgate, one of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the city, the jobless rate amongst 18-24 year-olds is a staggering 30 per cent!

Either way, most NEET young people aren't idle or feckless; most want to work and few are outside the jobs market for very long – although they often 'churn' chronically between low-grade courses and poorly paid, insecure work. It's not unusual for young people trying to enter the labour market to be subjected to exploitative conditions and endemic job insecurity. It's understandable that their motivation and determination to work can wane over time. On the few occasions on which the young people taking part in the research were able to find decent, secure work, they usually stuck with it. Generally, NEET young people don't lack aspiration, they lack meaningful opportunities.

The research findings have led to a number of conclusions, some of which relate to the nature of the education and training available to NEET young people, which is often not effectively matched to their ambitions or capabilities. However, as important is the need to reform the labour market itself. Firstly, it's clear that there is a desperate need to stimulate the demand for labour across the economy. Secondly, the labour market needs to be effectively managed and regulated. In other words, an industrial policy is what is needed.

Realism

Yes, there has to be a dose of realism with all this. It's not feasible to re-open long-closed

coal mines and shipyards. But much else can be done, such as creating work in the green economy, on environmental projects, in housing regeneration and on public infrastructure projects. In the last six months, Newcastle Council, which is Labour run, has created a big capital programme to invest in infrastructure, including roads, pavements, housing and ultrafast broadband. It is hoped that this will, in time, create much-needed skilled jobs, instil business confidence and help give jobless people across the North East a sense of hope in the future. Elsewhere, for example in Liverpool, Leeds and Sheffield, other Labour-run councils have created apprenticeship agencies, which are organising training and work opportunities for several thousand people. And nationally, the Labour Party have committed themselves to a Job Guarantee, aimed at ensuring a real job for anyone who has been workless for two years (or a year if he/she is under 25).

Changes

Although such initiatives are to be welcomed, more needs to be done if we're to give our young people a brighter future. It will require significant changes in social and economic policy – not only at regional level but in the broader political economy and the priorities of the nation.

Raymond Williams and the creativity of division

Stephen Woodhams

From 1946 to 1961 Raymond Williams taught in adult education. His area was south east England, but his own learning had been away in the 'border country' of Wales. These sharply contrasting environments were typical of the divisions that threaded through Williams's life and which he refused to diminish or displace. That between the Welsh working-class background of his early years and the teashop culture found in Cambridge he memorably responded to in the celebrated essay 'Culture is ordinary'. The pattern of his life was to refuse easy answers, seeking rather the complex and problematic, which yet remained committed to learning that could creatively contribute to a full democracy.

'Culture is ordinary' was something of a turning point. What followed were the remarkable years of the New Left when, to borrow his terms, Raymond Williams connected again with people in all sorts of ways. Yet the years as adult education tutor may have been something of a preparation. In his *The Emergence of Cultural Studies 1945-1965*, Tom Steele proposes that after 1945 there was a turn in adult education classes toward forms of representation as the focus of study. The disproportionate increase in literature classes may be cited as evidence. Tom Steele argues that this trend created a distance between tutor and student not found with the hard subjects of political economy and industrial history in the inter-war years. The reasoning is that, where study of industrial history had direct access to events and changes, to understand these same processes through, in particular, literature required first that the forms of writing be understood before any use be made to better gain appreciation of a period. Evidence for Williams's assertion of added complexity may be with a tutors' conference he convened at Oxford in

1950. The participants consisted of literature tutors and historians, and afterwards Williams wrote scathingly of the latter for their inability to recognise not only the distinctiveness of literature but also the wider social and cultural life that people lived, and through which they experienced their world. Historical scholarship in England at the time was well behind that of France and elsewhere. Under the sway of Lewis Namier, political events remained the prized nugget once history had been sifted through the historian's sieve. The focus for the conference had been a decade of the industrial revolution, and Raymond Williams's report, as Dai Smith notes, is something of a manifesto for the social and cultural history that was to come only years later (1).

Determination

Williams went on to address a range of theoretical issues, including the problem of determination, posed by Marxism in the image of a base and superstructure. In 1950 Williams was inclined to hold a radical flag for literature and to deny that it could in any simple sociological manner be read-off from exterior forces that not only determined content but pre-determined the form of writing that came to be literature. To accept this second premise would be to agree that forms of writing, even perhaps the novel itself, were results of external modes of production that were already given and restricted in type. Over time, Williams worked through a singular original understanding, in which writing was integral to change; such as emphatically occurred and came to be called the industrial revolution. It followed therefore that literature, drama, film, television etc no longer sat outside a limited base wherein the motor of history whirred away, but were forms of production

in relations that constituted society. If, then, in WEA classes after 1945, there was a move toward representation which in turn introduced division between tutor and student, it brought in the case of Williams a creative conflict that set going a densely complex mode of reasoning, that shapes *Culture and Society*.

Whether, however, concern with representation was after 1945 a new departure in working-class culture is more debatable. It may be instructive to examine a history of cultural learning for insight into what has been learnt, who has done the learning, and how have they learnt. The question bears on circumstance as between WEA and independent working-class learning, and it is insightful to again look at the example of Raymond Williams. If between 1946 and 1961 he worked officially in the former, initiatives in independent learning were perhaps more characteristic of his life. Between 1956 and 1962, New Left Clubs grew in many cities, often building on existing adult learning classes. A sense of a network was made possible through the pages of, first, *Universities and Left Review*, and, subsequently, the early *New Left Review*. Parallel were meetings organised through the *New Reasoner* group who, it is fair to say, had, in the north of England closer contact with a 'traditional' labour movement. Williams was the vital link between generations, being, as he remarked, closer in experience to those around the *New Reasoner*, yet spontaneously empathising with the world of the younger group in London.

Typical of Raymond Williams, a repeat formation emerged around what became *The May Day Manifesto*. The first edition in 1967 was expanded into a popular Penguin the following year and re-issued by Lawrence and Wishart as an ebook in 2013. The *Manifesto* carries far-reaching arguments that of course would have to be amended but otherwise remain prescient to understanding contemporary Britain and beyond. The *Manifesto* thrived in a network of groups sharing activities and proposals through a *Bulletin* published by the independent publisher Merlin Press, and successfully lasting some 23 issues between summer 1967 and June 1970. A National Convention of the Left formed, holding a highly successful conference in 1968 at the University of London. The long-planned full Convention took place in April 1969, centred on St Pancras Town Hall, attended by several hundred people and a kaleidoscope of organisations, and officially chaired by Raymond Williams. The *Manifesto* group, whose efforts produced the Penguin edition, was an early example of a planning and policy group that later Williams was to think through alongside Rudolf Bahro's *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*. An account at a local

level of New Left Clubs and Manifesto groups could prove of benefit to a history of cultural learning.

A different means for independent workers' education is offered by *Keywords*, which Williams described as providing an understanding of how language was embedded in society. Changes in experience might then be expressed through shifting meanings in words. Demonstrating that the language we use has a history, where the use or meaning of words has been contested, is something Williams saw as a fully political act and sign of allegiance. The historical semantics he proposed is likely to be of immense value to independent learning, and might profitably be used as a basis for meeting and discussion. *Keywords* can be sourced in different forms, a note on which can be found below (2). A last example comes from late in Williams's life. *Towards 2000* carries a telling insight into economic trends and the direction of contemporary capitalism, notably through Williams's now well-known formula, 'plan X'. The plan encompasses a scenario of a whole future that might be examined and tested against perceptions of the present century.

Division

Raymond Williams, then, does not sit on one side of a supposed division between an institutionally supported WEA tradition and another tradition that valued independence to pursue, in the phrase revived by Richard Johnson, 'really useful knowledge'. Rather, he worked in ways that used the means available. That a Welsh background would have made him aware of the Plebs League and Labour College is something Derek Tatton has addressed in his 'The purposes of Adult Education'. Yet the job with the Extra-mural Department and the WEA would have been an enviable position to a young man returned from war and with a new family. Most importantly, he made it the means by which the writing got done. *Border Country*, his first novel, was the outcome, along with a series of critical and theoretical works. The independent tradition ran clearly through his engagements with others: the New Left and *May Day Manifesto* groups, the Socialist Society and Socialist Environment and Resources Association. *Keywords* was a very different but no less important outcome. Raymond Williams is infamous for the difficulty of his writing; he is also famous for seeking to move beyond division.

In the 21st century, struggles over learning have transcended the old binary opposition of institutional versus independent. The internet has become the new site of conflict, as not-for-profit groups battle

with state and corporation to, in Raymond Williams's words, keep the channels of communication open. Recent republishing of Williams's books, and the availability of his essays on line, are part of an emergent culture that is part virtual, part spontaneous gathering, part institutional. The Occupy Movement, Bank of Ideas and Free University might seem to exemplify the first two characteristics, yet networking through institutions may in fact be more possible than ever. The internet does not stop at walls, real or virtual, and the possibilities of sharing knowledge beyond the academy that in the process transforms its use, which in turn alters its content, means we may have channels of communication that can, through struggle, be kept open. Raymond Williams's capacity to look forward was quite uncanny. We may then with profit use Williams to think through the potential landscape ahead, to, like him, develop the best means for democratic communication that contributes to a culture in common – wherever they may be found.

A record of the years 1946-1961 can be found in *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*. The collection of pieces ranges across Williams's teaching methods, subject matter, relations with colleagues and, beyond these, wider arguments as to the purposes of adult learning. One essay late in the collection may be of special relevance. Given originally as a lecture in tribute to his colleague Tony McLean, 'Adult Education and social change' explores some of the phases of adult learning, making the argument that the process should be understood, not as only an effect of history, but as integral to that past and at times pressing a direction for society.

Notes

1. The post-war decades were without doubt intellectually brilliant. Early attempts to bridge the Cold War divisions were Freddie Batson's *Essays in Criticism* and *Past and Present*. That the two journals came from literature and history is clue to where the intellectual hub lay. Raymond Williams sat in the centre. The 1950 *Report* and the printed outcome of a Communist Party Historians Groups school in 1954 at Netherwood, to which Williams was one of only two outside speakers, are two documents that might serve as insight into the crux of the period.

2. *Keywords* is the title of a seminal work, variously celebrated since its second edition in 1983. BBC Radio 3 broadcast *Raymond Williams: Keywords*, with contributions from a number of friends and critics, on 16/03/2008. For several years a joint

project between the University of Pittsburgh and Jesus College Cambridge has continued the book through an online project extending the number of 'keywords' with newly written essays. Much publicised is the present visual keywords devised by Iniva, exhibited at Rivington Place in 2013, and presently on at Tate Liverpool. BBC Radio 3 are to explore the exhibition as part of the *Free Thinking* series.

Selected further reading

Raymond Williams:

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Marx as educator

Patrick Ainley

Robin Small *Karl Marx, The Revolutionary as Educator*, Springer 2014, 85pp, £44.99 (ebook \$24.99) 978-94-007-765-2/ 9789400 776562

This book meets a need illustrated by a recent poster advertising a meeting for students at the London University Institute of Education that asked ‘Who was Karl Marx?’ Such is the repetitive diet of Foucauldianism, augmented by the latest academic fashion for Deleuze and Guattari, that even post-graduate students of education are unaware that Marx was, as this book begins by asserting, ‘an important educational thinker’. Although Marx wrote before the modern state school system was established, Small states ‘He is the greatest theorist of the society that gave rise to schools as we know them – and this is the society we still live in’ (p1). As he adds, Marx wrote for people who needed to find out what was wrong with the society they lived in and how to change it for the better, and so he was also an educator. More importantly, ‘Marx is an educator for us. He challenges us to develop our capacity to think critically about our own society . . .’ (p2). This is the seminal Marx presented in this book.

Robin Small, a philosopher of education and Auckland University who has previously written *Marx and Education* (Ashgate 2005, reviewed in PSE 73), is well qualified to introduce new readers to Marx’s revolutionary education in the concise form intended by Springer’s series on ‘Key Thinkers in Education’ edited by Paul Gibbs, in which each chapter is separately downloadable although the overall price – in virtual form or hard covers – is exorbitant. Hopefully, however, the book will make its way into libraries because it is an introduction to Marx’s life as well as to his thought. So Small begins with Marx’s own education at the Trier Gymnasium,

quoting Marx’s prize-winning essay ‘Thoughts of a Youth on Choosing a Vocation’ which insists that ‘worth can be assured only by a profession in which we are not servile tools, but in which we act independently in our own sphere’ (p5). Then in Bonn and Berlin Universities, Small introduces the ideas of Bauer, Feuerbach and Stirner which influenced Dr Marx before ‘the theoretical mind, once liberated in itself, turns into practical energy’ (quoted on p9) in the form of ‘Marx as Journalist’.

Small details particularly Marx’s debate with Stirner who ‘wrote on education from a teacher’s standpoint’ (p21) and with Feuerbach, taking ‘education’ in the third of Marx’s ‘theses’ on Feuerbach ‘in a wide sense, to include all the influences that determine human development’ (p19), like enculturation in the German term *Bildung*. Here ‘Marx is emphasising a critical thinking which is also self-critical’ (p24). Then in his first works with Engels, Marx breaks with Bauer to found ‘the theory later known as “historical materialism” [which] centres on a distinction between the “base” and “superstructure”’ (p25) with education a part of the superstructure: ‘This is the basis on which Marx is able to advance proposals for school reform. He can acknowledge the limits to what can be achieved within a capitalist society, yet still look for opportunities for an education that runs ahead of the present state of things’ (p27). Thus in the *Communist Manifesto* Marx proposes ‘Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children’s factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, &c, &c’.

What Marx meant by this in relation to the debate over factory schools and over state education as well as the curriculum, Small traces in Marx’s contributions to the educational programme of the

First International. Here he 'emphasized the need for working within the existing social order, while at the same time arguing against . . . education by the state' and for 'a system of state regulation without "interference"', 'citing as an example the decentralized public school system of Massachusetts' (p57). Marx and Engels were also impressed by the educational reforms of the Paris Commune which 'confirmed that a socialist revolution could not simply take over existing state power but would have to set up an entirely new apparatus of government' (p58). So, they advocated a polytechnic curriculum which 'imparts the general principles of all processes of production', like Corbon's *enseignement professionnel* which 'rethought the idea of technical education' to take advantage of the positive side of flexibility so that workers can move from one branch of industry as desired, rather than spending their lives in "life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation" (p66).

Meanwhile, Marx's daughters enrolled in a relatively conventional academic schooling at the South Hampstead College for Ladies, where their father was rather proud of their achievements but complained repeatedly about the fees! 'None of this, Small comments, 'would have suited Eleanor Marx particularly', as she was 'the most like her father in personality – energetic and independent, with a strong rebellious spirit' (p53).

Having seen how Marx responded to the educational issues of his time, Small asks what we can learn from him now that education has become the principal legitimator of social inequality and a prime means of social control over prolonged youth. 'Simply repeating what he says . . . will not be enough . . . we have to bring our own thinking to the task' (p70). Small focuses on two central topics: the school in today's society and the teaching force. (It is a pity that he does not extend this discussion to further and higher education as the age of education has extended to schoolify these institutions.) 'To rescue education from the influence of the ruling class', as the *Communist Manifesto* urges, Marx resists restricting the curriculum to subjects supposedly protected from ideological influences; rather he sees the need to counteract them together with tradition and habit. These are all instances of ideology but 'not simply deceptions imposed on some passive audience. They are grounded in experience and this is the source of their strength and persistence' (p73). 'Marx located education within "practical social relations" rather than with art, religion and philosophy in the higher regions of the social "superstructure"'. Education is thus in a dynamic interaction with the economic base. As he puts it, 'education produces labour capacity', just as

health care maintains or restores the ability to work, so that, as Small comments, 'While the school may be a location where ideology is passed on, that is not its main function'. This avoids 'the simplistic view that public education in capitalist society is an elaborate conspiracy to spread false beliefs' (p74).

In recent times of the so-called 'knowledge economy' and 'information society', specialised expertise is crucial to the creation of new wealth, as well as being a commodity in itself. As Small points out, 'In one draft for *Capital*, Marx speaks of the "general intellect" or "social mind" - that is, the sum of society's scientific understanding and expertise – as being a means of production in its own right . . . As Marx puts it, the general progress and accumulation of society's knowledge "is appropriated gratis by capital"' (p74). 'At this point, invention becomes a business, and the application of science to immediate production itself becomes a factor determining and soliciting science' (p75). Institutionalised education is bound up with this development but Marx adds that education distributes knowledge unequally to different classes as it perverts what ought to be a public good into private knowledge. The modern state has turned public education into a quasi-market which is 'free' only within narrow boundaries so that promises of equal opportunities and access for all cannot be realised.

This process of marketisation entails what Small calls a 'redefinition of the "ideological castes"' (p79). This is being imposed in a different historical context from that in which a rising bourgeoisie sought to establish its power, giving rise to Adam Smith's distinction between unproductive labour associated with older forms of production for use and productive labour realised in the instance of the schoolmaster 'belabouring the heads of his scholars' because the proprietor has invested his capital in a teaching factory instead of a sausage one. Small comments: 'The labour of teachers appears as an overhead expense. That is, it is necessary to keep the whole system going, but not identifiable as adding value directly to commodities . . . The issue is not just about keeping costs (which here means wages) down. It is about what kind of work teachers are doing – and what kind of work they understand themselves as doing' (p80). Small approaches this by asking in conclusion whether teaching is a professional occupation.

The *Manifesto* rejoices that 'The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers'. And Small comments, 'For teachers the employer may be the state rather than a private

school owner, but the same conditions of work apply' (p82), before cautioning that 'this is not the last word' because Marx and Engels add, 'Bourgeois society reproduces in its own form everything against which it had fought in feudal or absolutist form'. So we need to ask: are the ancient vocations – 'the free professions' as they are called in German – of doctor, lawyer and priest being reproduced in a new form so that the professional model is extended in this new form to new occupational roles? As well as 'general intellect', there is what Marx calls 'general industriousness' (looking and being busy, Like Dickens's Mr Panks) which the culture of professionalism values, along with a sense of personal responsibility. 'In Marxian language', Small comments, 'this looks like a typical ideological mindset that not only presents a false picture of social reality but also acts to the disadvantage of those who adopt it' (p83).

The deprofessionalisation of teaching, along with other professional occupations, as they intermingle in inter-professional working with standardised and simplified para-professions, is analogous to the deskilling inflicted on industrial craft workers in the 1970s and '80s. It involves also a loss of

autonomous judgement and control over what was an example of what Marx called 'free activity', like the often cited case of artistic expression but more directly social, with collegiality as its form of solidarity, 'even if professions tend at the same time to be quite hierarchical in terms of specialized expertise' (p85). It may be therefore that these forms of solidarity can be defended and extended rather than abandoned – as suggested by Magali Sarfatti Larson in the conclusion to her 1977 Marxist analysis of *The Rise of Professionalism*. Like general schooling leading to graduation as citizen and worker 'fit for a variety of labours', revocationalised higher education in which students have a sense of induction to practice in a field of real application – including the academic profession, might be the means for professional workers, in solidarity with other workers, to find ways of claiming and realising the full human potential of all work. 'But perhaps', concludes Small, 'this is where Marx's assistance runs out and we have to make our own decisions' (p85).

Miko Peled

Cliff Jones

Miko Peled, *The General's Son. Journey of an Israeli in Palestine*

To paraphrase D. H. Lawrence, though Miko Peled writes of checkpoints and warfare, of wheelchairs and death, of humiliation and pride, of violence and peaceful protest, of enmity and friendship and of justice and injustice, his theme is humanity. His journey is an external and an internal journey of discovery of others and also of self: for him and, I suggest, for readers. Reading his book made me angry, frustrated, tearful and very slightly and cautiously optimistic. It also made sense of some things I had witnessed.

But why that title? Before Miko's father, Matti Peled, became known as an academic Arabist and

campaigner for peace he had been a strikingly strong Israeli general. Exercising military power and control were not, however, addictions from which he suffered, though wanting to win arguments might have been.

Looking back to 1967 we see a country, encouraged and prompted by Miko's father, choosing war, winning and gaining territory. Afterwards Miko's father saw the need for peace, friendship and return of territory. Too many of his colleagues did not. To be an Israeli general or military hero is to be a potential politician. To be an Israeli politician it is possible that you will have been a general or military hero. Empathy is not a prominent requirement in the person specification of generals and military heroes. Miko's father was

exceptional. Once out of the army he never again put on his uniform physically or psychologically, unlike some others.

Among the many powerful scenes described so effectively in this book is one where Miko is in the West Bank, experiencing for the first time the brutality meted out by Israeli soldiers: the army that, as a child and young man, he admired as the best and most moral army in the world now behaving inhumanly. He receives many such shocks as he proceeds on his journey. He also, courtesy of his elder brother, unlearns some of Israel's constructed history: the sustaining myths of David defying Goliath. I remember growing up equating Israel's wars to the Battle of Britain: so heroic.

Helping to distribute five hundred donated wheelchairs in Israel and an equal number in Palestinian Bethlehem he does not expect to be arrested on his return to Israel. But he is. Trying his hardest with friends to get into Gaza from Egypt with medical supplies he frustratingly fails. The Egyptians have closed the border at the request of the Israeli government. Later he finds out why: Operation Cast Lead is about to be launched (whoever thought up the name of that operation?). One hundred tons of bombs are dropped on a very small and overcrowded place: in effect a large prison which continues to suffer beyond our imagining and yet out of our sight. How many BBC reporters go there? How much time has peacemaker Blair spent there? As Miko says, even a one-ton bomb can destroy a block of apartments. I remember getting an email at the time from a young Israeli friend who was learning Arabic saying 'please don't think I agree with any of this but I am one of very few.' She was right: there were no repercussions for the politicians. It was a popular operation.

I had to smile at his description of the delay getting into Israel from Jordan. I was also delayed at the same border post. But no one pointed a gun at me. They did at him: the son of a famous General. If they had known that my colleague and I had arrived via Damascus things might have been different for us. I think (I have lost count) that I have been to Israel thirty six times over thirteen years. My only reason for going now would be to see dear friends, including people with whom I strongly disagree but love.

The International Professional Development Association (ipda) once awarded a prize to one of my students who is now a principal of a secondary school in East Jerusalem. I presented it to her in Jerusalem. Out of the window we could see a settlement. People were late arriving for the ceremony. I was impatient. I had travelled almost two and a half thousand miles to get there so why

were they late? Checkpoints? Surely that meant only a few minutes lateness? Read Miko's book and you come to understand that checkpoints sometimes involve hours of waiting but are only part of the problem. If, because of what are clearly racially based decisions, you are not permitted to travel on certain roads to get to work or to meet friends or to take a child to hospital, a journey that ought to take minutes can take hours; and this in your own country.

But surely all these Palestinians are terrorists wanting to kill decent Jews? Chomsky's Journalist from Mars, free from the official narratives of the powerful, would identify a different group of terrorists. Even with all of his family background and his experience in the USA of mixing, arguing, disputing and finding common ground with Palestinians, Miko Peled is physically and emotionally unsure as he first crosses into occupied territory. Perhaps his biggest shock is the normality of human engagement and hospitality that he encounters: doctors being doctors, nurses being nurses, teachers being teachers and farmers being farmers. He does not, and is not made to, feel like an enemy. And yet he must witness the inhumanity of their treatment by his own compatriots and by the army of which he was once so proud.

This is not really a review: it is a response from a reader. And I have left out so much, including his karate classes for Palestinian children, his barely controlled temper when ignorant soldiers casually shoot and mistreat children, his hurt when friends are killed, his devastation when his sister's thirteen year old daughter is killed by a suicide bomber (I had to stop reading at that point), his love of family and friends and, despite it all, or perhaps because of it all, his assertion of his Jewishness as something to be proud of.

Miko wants an inclusive enlarged secular state. Any so-called two-state solution will be occupation by another name. Perhaps we could arrange for certain politicians to be locked up together to read this book. Miko Peled is by no means the only Israeli travelling such a journey. But few started with a father such as his and few have gone so far. Buy and read. Be angry. Be sad. But, perhaps, after you have wiped your eyes, you might be ever so slightly hopeful.

A final thought: his mother in her garden growing plants: not a garden or a house stolen from a Palestinian family (she had the chance of that but utterly rejected it as immoral) but close to what was the village of Dier Yassin where the Palestinian inhabitants were massacred in 1948. I think of the growth of her plants as I think of the growth of the values that her children are propagating.

Beyond the coalition

Colin Waugh

Patrick Ainley and Martin Allen (eds), *Education Beyond the Coalition. Reclaiming the Agenda*, 2013, 182pp, ISBN 978-0-9575538-2-80, £6.99 per hard copy, also available as a free download from <http://www.radicaledbks.com>

This is a good, readable collection of writings from a leftwing perspective by people who are now in most cases HE lecturers concerned mainly with teacher education, but who have in the past been practitioners in primary or secondary schools or FE. At least four have been prominent figures in the Socialist Teachers Alliance grouping within the NUT.

There are two good papers on primary education, one (by Valerie Coultas) critiquing Michael Gove's ideas about English, the other (by Clare Kelly) arguing for a liberal conception of primary schooling against Gove's mad restrictionism. Former Hackney teacher and Socialist Teacher editor John Yandell contributes a broader polemical repudiation of Gove as, mainly, a rightwing political careerist happy to destroy publicly provided schooling in pursuit of his personal agendas.

There are then four - in this reviewer's opinion - rather deeper studies, two of them by the people responsible for editing and producing the publication as a whole, Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley, who deal, respectively with 14-19 curricula (again starting from why Gove is wrong) and HE. Both of these chapters should be of direct interest to PSE readers,

and the former, particularly, is strengthened by a perspective which takes account of economic - and specifically of labour market - issues. Martin reiterates his advocacy of 'a general diploma for everybody', and it would be good if practitioners both in schools and FE, particularly those working in such general education areas as Functional Skills, took this opportunity to consider arguments for and against this proposal.

Richard Hatcher has over the last few years specialised in issues surrounding the privatisation of schools and the destruction of democracy that this entails, and here he contributes a valuably concrete analysis, arguing for the rebuilding of genuine local control. Robin Simmons makes the case here, as previously in, for example, *PSE*, in favour of tertiary colleges as the best model for FE.

The least satisfactory chapter is perhaps the one at the end by Ken Jones, who puts forward suggestions about what he thinks a leftwing strategy across all sectors might be like - and in particular what it should avoid. This is centred on an attempt to synthesise ideas attributed to Gramsci with the perspective of Raymond Williams, and makes reference also to the statement of principles issued by Birmingham Free University.

The lead-up to the general election makes this a good moment to produce this collection, and hopefully people will get hold of it and use it as a stimulus for discussion and activity.

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.

Course report: ethics with clinical teacher students (1969)

We reprint here from our predecessor publication Liberal Education 16, July 1969, an article by R. I. Redfern, then at Ipswich Civic College

The course was devised for a group of Clinical Teacher Students from hospitals in this country and abroad. Clinical Teachers are experienced nurses, who follow a six-month course to prepare themselves to teach in the wards, released from the responsibility of ward management.

It is felt that so many problems, old and new, press upon all those who work in hospitals in these days that some examination of the principles by which men sought guidance in the past, and a sharing of questions and conclusions that arise in their own experience, would form a valuable, and indeed necessary, part of their work. The total course for these full-time students occupies six months. The section on Ethics was planned to cover fourteen weekly sessions of an hour and a half each. In fact it extended to sixteen.

Though it was planned for Clinical Teachers it could, with slight modification, apply as well to groups of students in any social work – health visitors, teachers, prison officers, or youth workers. Examples, whether given to the class or arising out of members' experience, would be different, but the examination of the major efforts of mankind to discover principles to guide behaviour would apply equally. For the work to develop as it did, a certain experience was necessary before a student could offer an adequate contribution – even a certain seniority – so that responsibilities upwards and downwards in the chain of authority could be examined. But the treatment of the subject could, without great difficulty, be adapted to suit students of different age and development.

The "adequate contribution" of the students must be emphasised. This was not a series of lectures on various ethical theories. There was to be no examination in the subject; it would matter little if students remembered none of the names of the philosophies mentioned. The point was to look beyond the personal preconception and the parochial view to understand the views and decisions of others, whether

adequate or not, and to discuss man's searches for universal guidance, whether or no these were felt to be valid.

As opportunity offered, help was given in clear and orderly arrangement and exposition of thought, in the kind of speech that would carry conviction – or fail to do so, and in the making of notes. We took note also of the methods of reasoning, the inductive and the deductive, the Socratic question, and the syllogism.

The Tutor's brief was succinct and awe-inspiring. The syllabus of the Royal College of Nursing Certificate Course runs as follows:

Introduction to Ethics

Comparison of the natural, mental and moral sciences. Man as an emotional, rational and evaluating animal. Group patterns and their significance. Leadership, authority and discipline. Punishment. Ethical aspects of emotions, knowledge, duty, motive, justice, good-will. Ethical principles in the exercise of authority.

General Ethical Principles

- 1. The teaching of Spinoza, Hume, Butler, Kant.*
- 2. Group integration and leadership.*
- 3. Authority and Discipline.*
- 4. Definition and administration of justice.*

All in fourteen ninety-minute periods! It seems to involve the whole of psychology, sociology and philosophy as well as the Ethics which appears in the title.

The first essential was to know something of the students who were to enter for this marathon. Fortunately a list of the selected group was early available, giving ages, professional training and experience, present post and "other details", which included information on general examinations passed, families, and sometimes home conditions were known and possibly relevant. There were twelve of them, three

of them men. Ages ranged from 24 to 48. Present places of work included many parts of England, not primarily the south-east, Ireland, Wales and Jamaica, while previous experience had covered New York, New South Wales, Nairobi and the Oman Desert! This looked interesting and promised well for widely-varied contributions to discussion.

Next, how to secure this personal participation? People will expect a lecture, notebooks open and pencils at the ready. They mustn't have it, and they mustn't be alarmed by a lot of abstruse-looking names at the outset. So they were given a problem, related, indeed, to their own profession, but which involved (as all do) basic principles of right and wrong. "Given a certain amount of money at the disposal of the 'Authorities' (never mind who they were) at Coventry, were they right to build their cathedral or would they have done better to provide themselves with the finest maternity hospital in Europe?" We may have been unjust to Coventry, but we felt we were on safe ground in assuming that their hospital's maternity department (or any other) probably left something to be desired. This gave rise to some quite strongly expressed opinions, fairly enough on both sides, and one could feel the class warming up, even beginning to get heated. So then they were asked to prepare for next week two or three problems from their own thought or experience, at least one "professional" and one "general". These (from "Euthanasia" to "The treatment of the disgruntled orderly"), were duly forthcoming. Three or four were selected, and those who had propounded them were asked to prepare to lead off next week in their discussion, which was then thrown open and became truly general. This seemed to establish that it was the students' own course and they were responsible for its success. Many of the personal barriers were lowered, and discussion became frank and intimate. At the same time we recognised the right of every member at will to put up a notice "Private – Keep off the grass". We turned out to include Catholics, Protestants, Humanists and Agnostics, and were able to adopt our standpoints fairly.

At this stage it seemed wise to let them know something of the more historical side of the work in front of them, and they were given a duplicated handout, mentioning in barest outline the philosophers whose work might, given time, be touched upon:

SOME ETHICAL THEORIES

IN HOMERIC GREECE

"Good" and "Virtue" mean "befitting one's function" - as King – Warrior – Shepherd.

IN HISTORIC GREECE

"Good" is the good of the (city) State.
To Aristotle "Good" equals happiness.

HEBREW

"Good" is the will of Jehovah.

CHRISTIAN

Derived from Hebrew, with revised ideas of Jehovah.
God – Christ – Church.

PROTESTANTISM

Luther (1483-1546) – Individual conscience. Man essentially corrupt, can recognise "Good" only through God's grace.

Faith replaces reason.

MACHIAVELLI (1469-1572) – The individual again, with power as his object. Judge actions by their consequences.

HOBBS (1588-1679)

"Good" equals safety. Hence support the state (cf. Greeks). But State is now Leviathan.

SPINOZA (d. 1677)

Ethics pub. posthumously. Determinism, hence self knowledge alone liberates. Knowing his capacities, man is free to make the best of them. Unites freedom and reason.

LOCKE (1632-1704)

Justifying the Revolution of 1688. Introduces idea of "Contract" in State.

BUTLER (1692-1752)

Rearguard action for the "Ought" of Divine Providence.

HUME (1711-1776)

Reason secondary to feeling in determining behaviour. Criterion of action its general utility.

ROUSSEAU (1712-1778)

The "Social Contract". Anti-monarchist – Guide to French Revolution.

KANT (1724-1804)

"Categorical Imperative" - A law is a law of Nature when it is capable of being generalised. Hence the moral "Ought".

GODWIN (1756-1836) ad BENTHAM (1748-1832)

"Utilitarians" - The greatest happiness of the greatest number.

MARX (1818-1883)

State-organised society unreformable, therefore abolish it. Substitute co-operation for competition, compulsion. After the establishment of communism, the State would gradually wither away.

Some general reading on sociological background was suggested, but only two books were pressed upon the students: Alistair MacIntyre's *Short History of Ethics* and Edmunds and Scorer's *Ethical Responsibility in Medicine*.

Thereafter the general plan was to deal in alternate meetings with the material of the "handout" approached from the historical angle, and material that came up in class. All material was examined in the light of philosophical theories introduced by whatever point in the syllabus we had then reached. Our purpose was always to see how far the philosophers' answers would take us towards a solution satisfactory to ourselves. If they did not go far enough, what further thinking remained to be done? This might be postponed till the work of a later philosopher was under discussion, or we might do our best with it ourselves. In the weeks when we formulated our own topics for discussion, sometimes we started from any aspect of principle on behaviour that had come up, and sometimes a topic was given, thought about for a week, and discussed at the next meeting. Examples were "Authority and Discipline", "Authoritarianism and the Democratic Principle", "Loyalty", "Leadership", "The Group as a Unit".

Towards the end of the course, this all led up to the role-playing of a Ward Meeting, when the parts were taken of all those likely to attend, from the Ward Sister in the Chair to the junior in her first year of training. The agenda was arranged in advance by the members, and roles assigned, and during the discussion many of the points that had been dealt with in the Course – the "Good" – of the patient, the hospital, the staff, the general public – were brought out. Something could be seen, too, of the contribution that could be made by all those present, even the most junior. A critical evaluation of the meeting naturally followed.

Finally, it was recognised that there were no clear-cut answers, that the ultimate guide must be the conscience of the individual working within whatever general pattern of guidance he has chosen – religious, Christian or other, humanist, communist or whatever. But, to come to our decisions, we needed all that we could muster of knowledge relevant to the immediate issue and to other men's thought on its like . . . of sympathy, of common sense and of love.

Essential to whatever success the course may have enjoyed was the co-operation of the Tutor in general charge of Nursing Studies. She joined us at nearly all our meetings and constantly kept the Course Tutor (a layman) down to earth on what was or was not possible and applicable to the world of the hospital. She lifted the sights of the members of the class above individual prejudices and local inhibitions to what ought to be done and could be, given insight and determination.

General Studies Project

- The project was set up in July 2013 by *PSE* readers and contributors.
- It is based on the belief that the Liberal Studies, General Studies and General & Communication Studies components that existed within vocational FHE courses in the UK from the 1950s through to the 1980s, involving thousands of lecturers and hundreds of thousands of industrial-release and full-time students, are potentially a source of unique insights into how post-compulsory curricula everywhere should be developed now and in future.
- On this assumption, the project aims to recapture the experience of these curricular areas, starting with the experience of lecturers in General Studies (GS).
- This is being done through recorded interviews with former GS lecturers, which are then transcribed. As well as this, a literature search is underway, aimed at developing a deeper knowledge of the context in which this unique experiment took place.
- If you were such a lecturer, and/or are in touch with others who were, and would like to be interviewed, to assist in any other way, or just to know more about the workings of the project, please contact us at: **post16educator@runbox.com**

Instructive weaknesses of Liberal and General Studies

Colin Waugh

The origins of FHE go back to the industrial revolution, and in particular to the mechanics' institutes that were set up, starting from the 1820s, initially by artisans themselves or by people from other classes genuinely committed to their enlightenment and emancipation. Another strand of provision that lies behind these sectors is the drive by industrial employers, starting around 1890, sharply to increase their control over productive processes by creating layers of trained supervisors and managers, with the aim of eroding the control previously exercised by old-style craftspersons. And a third strand is the day-continuation institutions that began to develop as a result of state encouragement in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Despite earlier attempts to increase management control, there was after WW2 expanded recruitment of craftspersons into some sectors of UK industry, especially mechanical engineering. One effect of this was a corresponding expansion of provision for the technical education of trainee craftspersons in what would now be called FE - but were then usually called technical - colleges. This expansion included as a regular feature of courses an element of 'liberal education'.

The idea of liberal education was by then at least a hundred years old. However, the form it took in 1950s FE arguably derives from the Workers' Education Association, set up in 1905, in essence by Christian socialists in the Oxford University Extension Delegacy, though with the Cooperative Society clerical worker Albert Mansbridge as their apolitical front-person. Over the succeeding half century, the WEA passed through phases which included the formation of the Workers' Educational Trades Union Committee (WETUC) in 1919 and, during WW2, a central role in the Army Education

Service and Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA). It was almost certainly on the basis of these latter models that the powers-that-be extended liberal education into FHE, a development well advanced by 1955.

Possible reasons for this step are as follows. First, in the circumstances of Cold War anti-Communism, the capitalist class probably judged it desirable, as had their forebears when they set up the WEA during the lead-up to the Great Unrest, to shape a layer of working-class activists and opinion-formers who would use their 'power' 'wisely' – that is, in the interests of the employers. Secondly, however, it was also expedient for them to camouflage by progressive measures of this type their renewed drive to weaken the position of craftspersons in industry .

As it was actually introduced into FHE courses, liberal education took the form of liberal studies (LS) – that is, a timetabled slot in which lecturers appointed from a variety of non-technical backgrounds were employed to arrange some form of broadening, civilising or enlightening teaching and learning. Then by the 1960s, as the expansion of the craft layer in industry continued, and especially as it began to draw in via forms of part-time release young people who in previous periods would have had unskilled jobs, this slot came more commonly to be called General Studies (as for example in the 1962 DES document *General Studies in Technical Colleges*). Meanwhile, the extension of traditional university education to a broader section of 18-21 year-olds than hitherto had by the second half of the 1960s led to young humanities or social sciences graduates from working-class backgrounds being recruited as GS lecturers in FE.

In GS classes these graduates (people, that is, who differed both in age and background not only

from most of those who had previously been liberal studies lecturers, but also from the ex-craftspersons who formed the majority of technical lecturers) came face to face with groups of industrial-release apprentices and trainees, many of whom were themselves drawn from sections of the working class hitherto excluded from technical education. This encounter took place under circumstances in which, as the post-WW2 boom began to disintegrate, there was a massive and long-running struggle by workers, led mainly by their shop-stewards, to defend what had been gained during the post-war boom. It took place also against the background of the wave of cultural self-assertion by working-class young people, in vernacular music and many other aspects of life, that began in the mid 1950s, and which drew adherents from amongst both FE students and GS lecturers.

Lastly, in the 1970s, following the 1969 Haslegrave Report, the government moved to change the FHE system to align it with - and itself to facilitate - the restructuring of production in favour of management. In the previous period first-line supervisory staff in industry, for example, checkers, machine setters or drawing office personnel, were commonly recruited from amongst experienced craftspersons - that is from amongst people who, where they followed a qualifications route at all, usually did so via one controlled by City and Guilds or by equivalent regional awarding bodies. From the mid 1970s, however, these employees were increasingly recruited from amongst school leavers who, though apprentices, were released onto Technician Education Council (TEC) courses, with the possibility of progression onto Higher TEC courses either within FE or in polytechnics. As an intrinsic part of this change, a new variant of liberal education, called General and Communication Studies (G&CS), was introduced as a compulsory element in courses. For the first time, this course element was assessed and graded in at least nominal parity with technical course elements. However, the units in which its content had to be specified were normally college-devised (within an overall framework laid down by TEC), and this allowed practising G&CS teachers in some colleges to negotiate with the awarding body, with technical course team members and managers, and with spokespersons for employers over what was to be taught and learnt. Where this worked well, it gave these lecturers a degree of control over their work and a status that they had never had before, and which their successors have never had since. At the same time, however, it made their work part of the process by which the craft layer of the industrial workforce was differentiated into a minority of technicians and a majority of semi-skilled operators.

These three models of general education - LS, GS and G&CS - are best seen not as discrete and successive forms of provision but rather as phases, often overlapping, through which liberal education passed, such that lecturers could, and often did, participate in all three. Further, although the introduction of G&CS was clearly a qualitative shift, it applied only to a minority of students, and did not in itself constitute some decisive step towards the destruction of liberal education. This was destroyed, rather, by the Thatcher government's 'de-industrialisation' of the economy, resulting in the exclusion of young people from jobs in unionised industrial sectors, and thus also from apprenticeships and college release.

In the article on pp1-4 David Crabtree and I argue that 'the structure of the situation in LS/GS/G&CS . . . put the students . . . in a position of strength which forced lecturers to concede forms of reciprocal, mutual and dialogic teaching and learning that do not normally find a space to develop . . . ' and that 'only by including at their centre such forms of teaching and learning can vocational courses in FHE [ie now CW] enable students to develop the capacities which are necessary both at an individual and a collective level in modern society'.

There are two reasons why this is not a proposal to reintroduce LS/GS. First, the circumstances surrounding FHE have changed in ways that rule that out. Secondly, these course elements suffered from weaknesses which cannot be ignored. Properly understood, however, these weaknesses are as rich a potential source of insights about what to introduce now as the - largely unacknowledged - strengths of the areas concerned, which in any case they do not outweigh.

Because I believe G&CS placed lecturers in a much stronger position than did LS and GS, I will leave it out of further consideration in this article. The criticisms and weaknesses cited are the main ones which I encountered in the period 1969-1990, when I was a GS lecturer, first at Brixton College for FE and then at Tottenham College of Technology, and when I was also involved in the Association for Liberal Education, General Studies Workshop; and the NATFHE General Studies Section.

On the basis of this experience the main criticisms which to my knowledge were directed against LS/GS, are as follows. It failed to support students in their technical studies. It was too free and easy. It required students to engage in ridiculous activities. It lacked progression. It lacked a clear direction and/or purpose. It failed to address students' language deficiencies. It was too much like school. It was insufficiently rigorous. It was boring. Its content was focused too much on sex. The students spent too much time watching films. It

was under-theorised. It asked lecturers to do something impossible. It was patronising. It tried to probe into students' minds. Before we consider these criticisms it is necessary to emphasise three points.

First, LS/GS was not monolithic. Both the students and the lecturers involved can be divided into groups which were in several respects at variance with one another, and the relations between and amongst these groups changed over time. Secondly, there is plenty of evidence that LS/GS succeeded more often than it failed. Thirdly, 'de-industrialisation' has produced a situation in which few if any of those currently teaching such curriculum elements as Functional Skills English in FE are aware that their work derives historically from these earlier forms of general education.

I will not try to rebut the criticisms listed above, but rather to point to some of the factors which lay behind them.

The charge that LS/GS was not rigorous came characteristically from people who taught maths or physics as elements within vocational programmes – that is, either from people who serviced such courses but whose main job was to teach these subjects as academic specialisms elsewhere in the college, or, less often, from vocational lecturers with a higher than average level of knowledge in these academic fields. It can be understood as saying that, whereas they had to struggle against students' difficulties with and/or resistance to these course elements, the fact that GS was not an academic subject meant that LS/GS lecturers – that is, normally, the only other course team members with degrees – could adopt a student-centred approach and hence avoid this.

Criticisms alleging that LS/GS engaged in ridiculous activities, spent too much time talking about sex, showed too many films, was generally too free and easy, and failed to support students in their technical studies came characteristically from vocational lecturers, line-managers and heads of department. They reflect several different concerns and situations. First, many of those who made them were intermediaries between the students' employers and what happened in the college. Secondly, vocational heads of department were often in a position where they had to justify LS/GS to heads of section who wanted to get rid of it, or, more commonly, to shorten the time allocated for it. Thirdly, the fact that LS/GS had effectively no externally laid-down structure, especially when coupled with the tight labour market then prevailing, meant that the students were often in a position of power in relation to the LS/GS lecturer that did not apply elsewhere in their course. So if the students decided that they wanted to discuss something, the

LS/GS lecturer had every reason to encourage them to do so, or if a student suggested an activity, the lecturer would be likely to encourage this, setting aside what he or she may have planned. The need to win and retain students' interest meant that decisions as to what to do had often to be taken very quickly, including, sometimes, in the lesson itself. Further, the need to find a common experience that all the students were able to discuss could lead to a decision to show a film. Fourthly, LS/GS lecturers were usually in a position where they had to teach twenty or more classes for an hour a week, hence they were always under pressure to come up with fresh approaches, and as a result often tried out new strategies and materials directly with students, because this was a way for them to extend their repertoire of possible activities. Lastly, this was before course team meetings – let alone course team discussions of lesson content – had become at all frequent, so there was no forum in which activities done in LS/GS were systematically discussed with other lecturers.

The criticism that LS/GS failed to address students' difficulties with formal – especially written – English came, in my experience, characteristically from lecturers who were – or who aspired to be – mainly teachers of GCSE English, but who were required to make up their timetables with LS/GS. Craft students in particular resisted attempts to get them to do written work in LS/GS, and this resistance was understandable, given that they had to spend several hours of their college day copying notes from a blackboard in technical lessons. It can also be argued that the real issue raised through such criticisms is the control exercised by a minority of traditional intellectuals over the processes of verbal communication, especially in such fields as legal documents, but also in the print media, advertising, script and speech writing and the like – in other words, that it was and is much more political than the lecturers raising it in this fashion were willing to acknowledge.

The allegation that particular activities proposed by the LS/GS teacher were too much like school came characteristically from students, reflecting the fact that they viewed themselves primarily as workers, as people who had put school behind them. On the other hand, when they said that a particular activity was boring this arguably tended to reflect a perception on their part that the lecturer was presuming on their goodwill in a situation where they knew they were not obliged to give it – in short, it was often a sort of backhanded recognition of the fact that for most of the time we did manage to capture their interest. It is necessary also to bear in mind that, although they were required to attend the LS/GS lessons, their qualification did not depend on

them passing an assessment in it - so from their point of view it was rational to think that if the content of LS/GS failed to hold their attention on its own merits it was literally pointless. A different kind of criticism sometimes made by students, especially when the topic under consideration put pressure on them to reassess their beliefs, was that we were seeking to interfere unacceptably with thinking processes that they perceived as private.

Finally, there was another group of criticisms of LS/GS/G&CS that have sometimes been made by lecturers themselves, either at the time or in retrospect. One such criticism is that this area of work asked lecturers to do something beyond what could reasonably be expected, given the circumstances in which it required them to operate – in a sense, then, that it was ‘set up to fail’. Some of those who said this were doing so from an elitist standpoint – ie they were saying that the students were too stupid to be enlightened by them. But others were justifiably pointing to lack of time, resources, administrative back-up and the like, and in many cases they were right.

Another criticism sometimes made by LS/GS lecturers, especially in retrospect, is that the implied requirement to enlighten students was inescapably patronising. Nobody who was involved will deny, I think, that there is a core of truth in this – which can arguably be understood as a criticism less of LS/GS in particular, more of the overall WEA project from which, I have argued, it seems likely to have derived. But in that case there is at least the possibility that some lecturers found a way past this, for example by trying to ground what they did in a dialogue with students.

Again, some experienced lecturers came to think that LS/GS lacked a clear direction and purpose, that it lacked progression (ie that there were no criteria for moving through the material taught and learnt), and/or that it was under-theorised (ie that practitioners either failed - or were never in a position - to elaborate a coherent rationale for it). But this then raises a question which is like the one which students so often posed, not always rhetorically, namely ‘Why have we got to do this?’, except that now we rephrase it to ask ourselves: ‘What was this for?’



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