

THE REAL RADICAL EDUCATION?

**Liberal and General Studies
with vocational students
in UK colleges 1950-1990 as
revealed through interviews
with practitioners
who taught it**

**Bulletin 1:
origins; purpose; context**

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Editorial

'Liberal Studies' and 'General Studies' (L/GS) were the terms most widely used to refer to a curricular element that existed across UK further - and some higher - education institutions between the early 1950s and about 1990. Many thousands of teachers and several hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of students took part, willingly or otherwise, in this radical experiment, which mainstream educational commentators and historians have largely ignored.

L/GS typically consisted of a one or one-and-a-half hour slot in the college day of young people who had been 'released' from work on one day a week, or the equivalent by block release, to follow technical courses, the rest of their college time being spent on work-related material. It was nearly always taught by arts or social science graduates rather than specialist vocational staff. Although exam boards required principals to certify that students had taken part in L/GS classes, for most of the period most L/GS was not formally assessed, let alone examined.

This placed L/GS lecturers in a situation which the vast majority of teachers and lecturers never experience. It pushed many of them into radically experimental practice, and some also towards ideas about education that are important here and now.

A group containing four former L/GS practitioners set up the Liberal and General Studies Project, though not under that name, at a meeting at Huddersfield University in September 2013. They defined three broad aims: to research the origins of L/GS; to recapture the experience of teaching L/GS, through interviews with practitioners; and to explore the implications for FHE now and in future.

Since that meeting, there has been progress on the first two of the aims. Historical

research has given rise to significant insights, and interviews structured round questions agreed in 2013 have been recorded with 50 former practitioners (14 women and 36 men). All the interviews have been transcribed, providing a body of oral history material which can eventually be archived for access by researchers.

Of those interviewed, the first to start teaching L/GS did so in 1960. 14 started in the 1960s, 29 in the 1970s and 7 in the 1980s. The average time spent teaching L/GS was about eleven years. Between them the interviewees taught L/GS at 59 institutions across England. Nineteen of them underwent L/GS-specific pre-service or early career teacher education. 40 said they devised their own teaching strategies and materials, either alone or with other practitioners. 37 said their relations with students were generally good. Most said their personal relations with vocational staff were good.

The present publication aims to give readers a flavour of work done by the Project so far. All three articles are by former practitioners involved in setting it up. The first article deals with an aspect of the history of L/GS. The second analyses some of the responses of interviewees to question 9 ('Did you have a clear conception of what L/GS was for?'). The third discusses the changing ideological and cultural climate in which L/GS teaching took place, using as illustration some of the responses from interviewees.

Future publications will give further historical background, extend the analysis of interviewees' responses, including those of the 19 not represented here, and propose ways in which FHE now can learn from the L/GS experience.

The 1955 NIAE report

Colin Waugh investigates *Liberal Education in a Technical Age*

The 1944 Education Act for the first time required local education authorities to make provision for 'further education'. Following this, there were within the various forms in which post-compulsory vocational - and in particular technical - education was then provided, local attempts to give students access to information, concepts and techniques beyond those required for a particular employment field or qualification - in short, general education. Such provision seems often to have been called either Social Studies or English.

In 1956 the Ministry of Education issued a White Paper, *Technical Education*, which proposed that ten existing colleges be redesignated as Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs). These institutions, which were then set up, would concentrate on full-time higher level technological courses leading to the award of a new qualification, the Diploma in Technology. A short passage in this White Paper referred to the need for liberal education within these institutions. In line with this, the Ministry issued in 1957 a circular, numbered 323, titled *Liberal Studies in Technical Colleges*. This suggested ways in which CATs, along with technical education providers more generally, could liberalise their provision. In the same year, the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI) awarding body published a syllabus for its Mechanical Engineering Craft Practice course in which providing colleges were enjoined to show that students had done some General Studies. Shortly after this, an awarding body for the Diploma in Technology was set up in the form of the National Council for Technological Awards (NCTA), and this then recommended that about 10 per cent of diploma students' time be earmarked for Liberal Studies.

The purpose of this article, however, is to look at the process by which, between 1953 and 1955, a document was produced which arguably had a decisive effect on how existing general education provision was extended and reshaped into a form which became more or less universal across FE colleges from the second half of the 1950s - that is, a timetable slot called Liberal or General Studies. This document is *Liberal Education in a Technical Age*, a report issued in 1955 by the National Institute for Adult Education (NIAE).

What, then, was the NIAE, and why did it concern itself with this area of educational provision?

In March 1919, at a meeting chaired by its founder Albert Mansbridge, the Workers' Education Association (WEA) set up a World Association for Adult Education, and in January 1921, also at a meeting chaired by Mansbridge, the British Institute of Adult Education (BIAE) was set up as the UK branch of this. Towards the end of World War 2 the WEA's then national officers initiated the setting up of a National Foundation for Adult Education (NFAE) as a body focused on research. But by 1948 it was clear that this organisation and the BIAE overlapped, to a point where, with the support of the Ministry of Education, it was agreed to merge them to form the NIAE, launched in April 1949. This development reflects tensions within the WEA which there is not space to discuss here. However, one aspect of these tensions was the development from at least the 1920s onwards of a lobby pressing for the WEA to involve itself in the liberalisation of technical education.

In the early 1950s, in line with this impulse, the NIAE carried out a survey of local education authority activity in the field of further education, and in 1952 a report on the findings of this survey was issued, under the title *Social Aspects of Further Education*. In the Introduction to this report, six 'premises' were set out, the second of which was: 'Technical instruction should contribute both in settings and in methods to cultural and social experience', and in its final chapter, titled 'The setting for vocational studies', its author, E. M. Hutchinson, who was secretary to the NIAE, and who was here writing on behalf of its Committee, says that 'We believe that any education is inadequate which ignores these premises . . .' This final chapter is largely concerned with replies from 'a number of principals' to three survey questions put to them by the NIAE. Hutchinson explains that from these replies 'it seems clear that they describe an existing situation in which the "liberalising" of technical studies certainly cannot be achieved by adding "subjects" to the present syllabuses. "Current affairs" periods, felt by most students (and perhaps by some teachers) to be an irksome frill, are little better.'

The final chapter is then followed by a 'Summary and Conclusion' in which Hutchinson notes that although: 'There is fortunately no evidence that the increase in activities variously described as social, recreational or "hobby" has impeded the growth of courses of disciplined study whether for vocational or other purposes', it is still the case that:

'thinking . . . demands effort and to increase the relatively small number of people willing to organise their thinking, to extend it by reading and close discussion and to sharpen it by expressing their reflections in writing, otherwise than to meet examination requirements, remains a difficult and important task. It is a special challenge to bring this work, as now promoted by the universities and the W.E.A. into relation with the more limited objectives of most evening institute adult students'.

At this stage, then, the NIAE was exploring the possibility that forms of general education derived from the kind of work done in WEA tutorial classes could be introduced into the then dominant form of technical education, namely evening classes attended voluntarily by skilled workers.

In 1953 the NIAE carried this project a stage further by setting up a Committee of Inquiry into issues addressed in the final chapter of *Social Aspects of Further Education*. This Committee included invitees from the Association of Technical Institutions (ATI) and the Association of Principals of Technical Institutions (APTI).) Boris Ford was appointed as its paid secretary, and in that capacity he wrote *Liberal Education in a Technical Age*. Who, then, was Boris Ford?

Ford was born in India in 1917. His father was an officer in the Indian Army. Ford became a chorister at King's College Cambridge, and then attended a private school, Gresham's, where he was taught by a collaborator of F. R. Leavis, Denys Thompson. In 1936 he progressed to Downing College, Cambridge where he was taught by Leavis himself. By the summer of 1937 he was also a member of the Communist Party at Cambridge and took part in a summer school for miners held in Wales by the CP. He joined the army in 1940, and within that the Army Education Corps (AEC), During the war, he had some involvement with the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA) and came to know its civilian director, W. E. (William Emrys) Williams. (ABCA was a gigantic, radical and arguably successful experiment in the discussion-centred education of - mostly young - adults. Both ABCA and Williams himself are relevant to the history of L/GS but this too will have to be pursued in a later article.)

In 1946 the government withdrew the funding for ABCA and it ceased to exist, but a civilian successor, the Bureau of Current Affairs (BCA) was set up under Williams's directorship, using funding from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. At this point, Sir Ronald Adam, the radical general who had been centrally involved in setting up and running ABCA, wrote:

'I do not share the rash opinion of some zealots who seem to believe that discussion-groups are the last word in adult education. But I am sure they are the first word. . . . If adult education in this country, despite its long history, still continues to attract such a small fraction of the population, may the reason in part be found in our failure to develop it more fully on its elementary level before proceeding to its higher forms? If there is anything in this suggestion then local education authorities may find in the new Bureau some timely assistance in building adult education from the ground up.'

In 1947 Williams recruited Ford as editor in chief of BCA materials, and in 1951, when Williams left to direct the Arts Council, Ford succeeded him as BCA director. But the BCA closed in that year, partly because the Army stopped buying its materials, but partly also because the BCA had failed to achieve the civilian support initially anticipated. In 1952, commenting on this and recognising how the climate of opinion had changed, Ford wrote :

'One of the most important consequences of this inheritance [ie from ABCA] CW] was that the new Bureau thought of itself as falling within the sphere of adult education. Its hope was that the services it had to offer would be welcomed on a large scale by the discussion groups, residential centres, centres of further education, clubs and community centres, indeed by the whole of the formal and informal adult education movement that most people so confidently expected to see develop throughout the country.'

After a year working for the United Nations in New York and Geneva, Ford was appointed to the NIAE inquiry.

When the inquiry started work in 1953, one of the first tasks assigned to Ford was to write to the 226 college principals who belonged to the APTI, posing the following questions:

'(a) Do technical colleges recognise any responsibility for developing 'liberal' interests

and outlook in their students? (b) If so, how do they set about doing this? (c) How far is the technical staff able, or willing, to deal with the human aspects of technical studies? (d) Should liberal studies receive examination status?’

91 APTI principals, plus 14 out of 33 principals of art colleges, responded to this letter.

Summarising their responses in the 1955 report, Ford notes that, although all but seven of the technical college principals who replied said they were willing to accept some responsibility for developing ‘liberal’ interests and outlook in students as per the first question, ‘rather over half of them’ did so ‘without great enthusiasm’. However, he also says that ‘[s]ome twenty-five Principals . . . replied Yes to this first question with warmth and elaboration’. He goes on:

‘For many of these Principals, this task is the major problem facing technical education today, more important even than the quest of material prosperity through the production of efficient technologists. Put in its most simple terms, they accept the proposition that education is concerned with the whole man, however much it may be necessary at this stage of his development to lay the main emphasis on training him for his job.’

Before setting out the report’s specific recommendations, Ford poses (p47) the question: ‘How liberal an education are technical institutions able to provide?’ and then indicates on behalf of those involved in preparing it ‘what we suppose a Technical Institution would need to do in order to promote an education of this kind and what we have in mind as the product of such an education’:

‘It would need to provide a coherent scheme of education in which technical and non-technical considerations were always evident and inter-related. The staff would consist of technical and non-technical specialists, concerned with different facets of a common problem. The technical teachers would frequently hint at worlds lying beyond the specialism, raising questions of To what ends as well as By what means. They would remind their students that their specialisms have a past and a future, the one requiring understanding and the other imagination. They would remind them that their specialisms, just because they are specialisms, provide only partial statements about truth and reality; and that the mark of

an educated person is his capacity to appreciate that other points of view may be as valid as his own or even its superior, and that it is always possible that he may be wrong. Brought up on such assumptions as these (and surely no one would ask anything less for the scientists, technologists, technicians and operatives who to so great an extent are building the society in which we live), technical students would be on the way to developing such qualities as flexibility of mind and human sympathy.’

At this stage, then, there was within the NIAE group a presumption that a systematic effort to liberalise technical curricula would involve the active participation of technical lecturers alongside teachers from other backgrounds.

The report’s main recommendations were:

‘. . . there ought not to be any period in the educational process during which the values commonly associated with a general education are dropped for a time because of the intense pressure of vocational preparation’.

‘. . . a certain measure of liberal non-vocational study should be included in vocational education’.

‘. . . in all full-time (including sandwich) and day-release courses . . . an effective proportion of students’ time should be allotted to non-vocational work. In general . . . for day-release students at least one and a half hours during the day should be devoted to non-vocational studies, and . . . for full-time and sandwich course students such work should represent about one-fifth of their timetable’.

‘. . . we do not accept the thesis . . . that non-vocational studies will succeed only when they can be shown to have some immediate utility or when they are intimately related to this or that technology. While in such studies the students’ interests, technical or otherwise, should be taken into account, non-vocational studies must . . . stand in the curriculum on their own feet; to attempt to prop them up in some fashion on technical territory is simply to deny them the qualities that make them liberal and humane’.

‘. . . the problem of endowing general studies with a status and prestige comparable to those of technical studies is most likely to be

achieved within a technical college by the establishment of a Department of General Studies, a department set up to provide its own courses and having a staff, student-body and accommodation of its own. Such a department would be responsible for the general studies undertaken by the students of other departments; it would provide courses of an adult educational character where this proves possible and desirable in relation to the general organisation of further education in the neighbourhood; and it would also provide its own courses for students wishing to work for examinations like the G.C.E.'

'... in technical and professional examinations at all levels some regard should be had to the qualities derived from liberal studies, particularly the student's maturity of judgement. This might be tested in various ways - by the carrying out of a project, the submission of testimonies of study, the answering of an essay paper in the examination, or the writing of something in the nature of a thesis. Perhaps, in time, the college's own assessment of these less easily examinable qualities could also be given weight.'

'We attach great importance to the role of the training colleges for technical teachers and we hope that they will do all they can to convey to their students the nature and meaning of the liberal element in vocational studies. Much can also be achieved through arrangement by the Ministry of Education, the regional advisory councils, and local education authorities of short courses and conferences for technical teachers not only to discuss the need for broadening vocational education, but also to experiment with ways of securing this breadth.'

When the report came out, in 1955, there were 592 FE institutions in the UK, but only 231 principals belonged to the APTI, and as we saw, only 91 such principals had replied to the NIAE consultation on L/GS, and of these only about 25 expressed a commitment to developing this curricular area.

Among the report's recommendations are some that reflect Liberal and General Studies provision in technical colleges as it was already developing in 1955, some that had a decisive influence on how it developed in the ten years or so thereafter, and some that, if they had been implemented, as in fact they were not, might have made the situation within it significantly better than it was.

The work situations of the lecturers interviewed by the Liberal and General Studies project were shaped by several factors. One of these factors was the way in which technical education was funded. Another was the tradition of upper class intervention in the post-compulsory education of working-class people that goes back at least to 1830. (As regards 1950s FE, this tradition operated mainly through a branch of the Inspectorate, known as 'Other FE'.) A third factor was the influence of ABCA, which in turn, and amongst other things, reflected debates and tensions that grew within the WEA from the mid 1930s onwards. Here, however, there has been space only to look at the role of the NIAE report. The articles that follow in the present publication include quotations from interviews in which L/GS practitioners speak about their work. When looking at these articles, and at further material from these interviews that we shall be making available later, readers may wish to ask themselves whether - and if so, how far and in what respects - the picture of L/GS that emerges from these quotations conforms to the model proposed in *Liberal Education in a Technical Age*.

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General Studies: the purpose

Liz Perry

This article is based on fifty interviews conducted during the period January 2014 to Spring 2017 with former teachers (lecturers) in General Studies in Colleges of Further Education. The lecturers taught in periods of time ranging from the 1960s to the 1980s. They responded to a series of questions that covered their period of time teaching; the types of courses they taught on and the range of students they taught; their recollections of the way the curriculum was organised and how resources were generated. They were also asked whether they had a clear conception of the purpose of General Studies and what, in reflection, they considered most worthwhile about the General Studies curriculum. In this article we focus on the purpose of teaching General Studies.

It is interesting that of the fifty people interviewed virtually all felt that General Studies as a subject area was most worthwhile and an important part of students' education and training in technical colleges and colleges of further education. However, only nineteen of the fifty were actually trained to be a teacher of General Studies in further education colleges. Of these the majority were trained before taking up their posts while one or two undertook training in the teaching of General Studies during their service, through in-service training, for example. Among the other 31 some had trained to teach in secondary schools or had arrived in colleges ready to teach in their degree subject with or without teacher training certification. The vast majority of the fifty interviewees had degrees in the humanities and social sciences domains.

Given this varied background it is interesting to hear how teachers arrived at their conception of what

General Studies was for and what it consisted of.

Respondents who had trained to teach General Studies at Garnett College in London or 'Hollybank' as the Huddersfield College of Education Technical was known, considered the purpose of General Studies as part of their teacher training:

'I actually believed it was an important space in the curriculum for young working-class men and women to be able to challenge, you know, what their sort of - I mean, I think we used the phrase at the time - 'commonsense notions' of the world. And, you know, to take a critical look at the world.' (Peter Glasgow, started teaching GS 1976)

'... my view was a sort of an idealistic one, that the people who were in FE colleges were largely working-class people who were in danger - very patronising, this sounds - in danger of having a very narrow sort of vocational education, as not an education at all but being trained and then being sent out into these jobs. And I suppose I had a sort of faint missionary attitude towards it, which is that it was our duty to broaden their education, to introduce them to, sort of, concepts that they didn't come across in training - basically to give them a good general education, an opportunity to question things that they wouldn't have got - or we suspected that they wouldn't have got - in their vocational education. So it was a very patronising view, the sort of view that ... I just expected to, sort of, meet a sea of

hostility and overcome it by my personality, you know, my background. And that, by the end of the year [or] a couple of years, they would be eating out of my hand, and I could sign them all up for the Socialist Workers Party (1). It didn't turn out like that, but that was basically my, sort of, view, which I suppose is a sort of classic liberal view. Whether or not that coalesced with what the official position was, I don't know.' (Chris Lessware, started 1977)

'I believed in the liberal education ideal that people were not just workers but also people with families, communities etc. I wanted to teach General Studies in FE - partly because it was FE and wanted students who wanted to be there and partly out of a political feeling that I wanted to be discussing politics and literature with working-class students. Looking back that might have been a naive concept - to consider educating the working class to become politically active - it seems rather condescending now.' (Adrian Perry, started 1969)

'I went into all of this because I wanted to get involved in some kind of political or social literacy, and that's why I'd chosen to train at Garnett to move into this area.' (Roy Stafford, started 1975)

'But the good thing about Garnett was that they didn't subscribe to a particular theory of General, Liberal or Complementary Studies. We were given, if you like, definitions and examples of each of these sorts of areas, so that we had an understanding of a very broad idea of what could be done in those lessons, and then it was up to you to go in whatever direction suited you.' (Peter Salisbury, started 1976)

'(I) went deliberately to teacher training FE at Hollybank at Huddersfield, specifically GS. My degree subject was politics and philosophy. I remember we had the sociology of education, we had psychology and might have had something else that might have been called something like philosophy, something like that. And then we had a whole, a massive amount of things to do with practical teaching. We learnt such as how to write lesson plans, how to do schemes of work. We learnt about Bloom's taxonomy and none of that I found terribly interesting. It was just - I saw it as the kind of stuff you had to

get through, like tools of the trade - but the biggest part of it was going on teaching practice.' (Mary Heslop, started 1982)

Respondents who had not trained specifically to teach General Studies arrived at their rationale for the area through interaction with colleagues and through the process of thinking through their own motivations for teaching in the area. These interviewees also cite the importance of events such as those organised by the Association for Liberal Education, where they could meet with colleagues and discuss ideas about the purpose of General and Liberal Studies and the curriculum and teaching strategies. These events helped to formulate their individual understanding of a rationale for General Studies in vocational training and education.

'... it's quite a wide-ranging thing. I mean, in a general sense, I think I remember reading in the early 50s - about the early 50s or the late 40s - that people wanted education to somehow prevent a further rise of fascism and that, you know, they were worried about the rise of fascism, and they saw this liberal education as being a way of humanising people.' (Paul Elms, started 1968)

'I had my own conception. I believed in liberal education, but I didn't believe that something should be imposed on technical students as if it was superior to what they were doing. I felt that science and technology had an equal role to the arts and so I tried to merge the two together, to get the science and technology merged together with the arts to make a whole, because I believed in the whole person - that's what liberal education was, that people shouldn't just be reduced to machines doing their vocational jobs but they should recognise that there were other things in life beside their jobs. (Graham Taylor; started 1972)

'... in my head I thought I did [ie have a clear conception of what GS was for]. I thought that the idea was, rather than just have a one hundred per cent focus on vocational study, my job was to make them think about other things outside of their vocational training; to look at the world and at politics and literature and to broaden their minds. That was my attitude and that's the way I handled it.' (Bob Gaffey; started 1981)

'Well, my position was, as an English specialist, is that this time allowance was

fundamentally to deal with the students' literacy, written and spoken. And the General Studies was a useful context in which to do that work. So I always was very much aware that you had to find a way of getting these young men (mainly) to use language, and to improve their language skills. (Bill Dabbs, started 1962)

'... it was about that bit of education that was about socialisation, that was about 'We live in a society, we live in a group. What do you think about this that's happening? What do you think about that?' And those sorts of conversations should be part of education. And we've lost that. And the other part of education is the development of the individual; you know, 'What's important? What are your morals?' Sorry, 'morals' sounds a bit... But what I mean is, 'What's important to you? What should you value? What do you value? How do you know what to value? Who influenced you in those values?' All of those things, they were the hidden agenda, if you like, of General Studies, but it's very important for getting the most out of your life.' (Jane Gould, started 1979) (2)

Conferences, networking and other staff development opportunities helped individuals to formulate their conception of the purpose of GS.

'Initially [I had] no clear conception of the rationale for teaching General Studies in the vocational curriculum beyond the CGLI policy statement and personal conviction. The ALE probably influenced my thinking. My conception of a liberal education involved social awareness and understanding, critical thinking and personal skills as a basis for 'citizenship' and 'personal empowerment'... I think - it sounds very 70s really, but I think the value of stimulating critical thinking, trying to help them develop a wider perspective on the society that they live in. I mean that concept - citizenship is about, you know, - what's the society about that we live in and what are your values about it, and how does one - what does one do if one disagrees - it sounds a bit clumsy - more succinctly, it was trying to get people to think.' (Felicity Munday, started 1972)

'At the beginning I had a very - sort of - general idea of what was supposed to be going on. I couldn't call it clear. I thought it was... I mean City and Guilds wanted the

students to know things other than their vocational courses, so because they were technically and practically oriented, my emphasis was more on the humanities side.' (Geraldine Thorpe; started 1977)

'I think I had a very clear conception. I mean, it was very idealistic and naive. I seem to remember there was a body called the Association for Liberal Education, and they would run conferences throughout the year, and, you know, they would seem to me to be, you know, if you put this in political terms, a bit closer to the liberal centre than I might have been in my thinking.' (Guido Casale; started 1972)

'... and that was what was so useful about things like the General and Communication Studies Section and the Association of Liberal Studies, these larger professional organisations that I was able to link in to, that there was a discussion about something broader than that.' (David Crabtree, started 1972)

'Yes, that was absolutely clear. It was to engage and make learning fun. There were a number of things around citizenship which on reflection were fairly didactic and quite heavy-handed. And they were an element of it but that was part of what I suppose we all believed - it was education for a liberal outlook. [Para break] But the basic thing, which was encouraging people to think and learn for themselves, was absolutely key.' (Madeline Hall; started 1979)

Several respondents give a sense of how the understanding of the purpose of General Studies changed over time.

'It was changing, and we know that it was about to be called General Studies, and communication was being infused into it. And so towards the end there was all the discussion about not what the classics graduate in the DES thought about humanising technologists, it was what industrialists wanted. So, in my mind, there was this shift between what was appropriate for young workers and what their employers needed. That to me seemed to be a shift. And so, during that four years as a young, 28 year-old lefty, I thought that General Studies was about introducing critical thinking, politicisation, making people aware of where

their work fitted into the world in a much broader sense. In other words, I suppose I was unknowingly seduced by the C. P. Snow / Leavis debate. Which is relevant to Liberal Studies, because there was a sense in which - temporarily - Leavis won. And therefore we're talking about a culture at the end of the 60s, in my case, which was . . . The context was a Harold Wilson government, Roy Jenkins Home Secretary, liberalisation of abortion, divorce, race relations legislation. That was the context in which a young man was teaching these young workers. You know, that's a romanticised view of the 60s.' (Malcolm Clare, started 1966)

'Between 1969 and 1990 my position developed and changed over that time but I don't think I did have a sufficiently clear view of what it was although I began to think that I did but I was brought up very sharp about that by a conversation which occurred at Tottenham in the late 70s where a chap who was employed as a part-time General Studies teacher in the building department and this chap had been at the Central Labour College in the 1920s and he had been the leader of the furniture makers union and he was very old by the time I encountered him and there was a group of us in the late 70s talking about things and I was shooting my mouth off about . . . General Studies . . . and he just said 'Yes, but what is it for?' and I couldn't answer him. In a way this is another version of what the students used to do when they said 'why have we got to do this?' . . . In other words it was under-theorised or under-conceptualised and I think that was a constant problem with it.' (Colin Waugh, started 1969)

'Yes - and no. And I think it changed over time. And, as I said, I think that *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* characterised what I saw myself as doing - in other words, trying to subvert a vocational education that locked / fitted these people into a pre-given social hierarchy. And to develop the, sort of, social side of them, political side of them, seeing them not just as workers but also as citizens, in some way, and that that was part of our responsibility. I think it was very ill-formed, at the beginning.' (Jonathan Simmons, started 1977)

Most frequently, respondents describe their students as workers and that the purpose of the

General Studies curriculum was to introduce students from this background to experiences and knowledge outside their normal range of experience.

Although most assert that their sense of purpose was clear, several now reflect that at this point in time some of the assumptions would seem patronising and condescending. One respondent notes that there was an assumption that General Studies lecturers all thought the same way and that this was not challenged:

'Well, what if it was found that the people who were delivering general education were bigots or . . . you know, there weren't any controls to say that you might not be, in fact, if you like, influencing students in other directions. So I suppose to that extent - I mean, it's only just occurred to me, to be honest - I mean, I thought our influence was generally quite benign, and quite healthy and quite useful to students. But I suppose sending someone into the class to talk to them about broad issues without any . . . any control, I suppose one could end up with people with a range of views you might not necessarily want to have broadcast to young people!' (Jerry Thomas, started 1983)

Although interviewees explained their individual understanding of the purpose and importance of General Studies there are only rare examples of a collective or shared understanding within departments or even teams. There are almost no recollections of college or departmental policy with stated aims that would drive the development of the curriculum in this area.

'I think I was very fortunate, in that I was in a big department, with a lot of very forceful and resourceful people. And so if you did get stuck, you'd go and ask someone. If you didn't get guidance from the vocational lecturer, you would always get guidance from somebody in your own department who'd had some experience in that area. So I think our main objectives were pretty clear, in that we wanted to stimulate the students to think, to be able to respond to challenges that they may face at the moment or later on in their working lives. We wanted to give them some kind of resource, not just that they could read and write but that they could analyse, they could spot a false argument - which we thought was really important - and that they would train up their communication skills so that they could express themselves, and also pass on messages efficiently and not in a

slapdash manner. And so we did have a whole clear set of objectives, but we didn't always have the chance to deliver them in the way that we wanted.' (Ken Hyam, started 1975)

'He [the Head of Department LP] produced some sheets which he gave me, some of which I have here, which were our guidance. I can't remember a lot about it. I remember, you know, we did have that framework that he gave us. We were left largely to our own devices. I was rarely visited. I used the sheets as guidance but I made up a lot of what I was doing as I went along, sometimes from week to week. And the inputs we made were tolerated by the college largely because the government had said, and the examining bodies, these students must have some liberal studies.' (Dick Booth, started 1963)

'I can't remember any discussions in the colleges about developing a clear rationale although I do remember making a case for it in one of the colleges.' (Adrian Perry)

'I knew it was an edict, I think it was government policy and then it was local government policy. I did sit on the academic board for a short period but it's forty years ago now. At that point it would be Arthur Colledge who was principal. He came from a liberal arts background so I guess he had more time for it than most. But I'm not sure I was strategic enough in those days to know.' (David Ransom, started 1970)

'But I developed my own [ie conception of what GS was for], you know, I mean, I wasn't . . . Yeah, I mean, I don't remember reading anything, seeing anything, you know, being . . . certainly never any staff development. Nothing like that.' (Jane Gould)

'I don't think we really did. I mean, I believed that it was important to develop their civic consciousness. But I think it was quite unspoken. And we were a very politically conscious department - a leftwing consciousness, and I think this was very much part of what we all thought it was important to present a kind of leftwing . . . (Barbara Hill, started 1974)

'I think it was a great shame that there wasn't something done at local authority level about General Studies because it was only later on - about five or six years of teaching myself and

it wasn't to do with teaching but with my trade union activities - that I got out and about and got to see other colleges and realised how different things were in lots of ways and I just don't understand . . . because I did eventually get a secondment to work in the local authority and I found out that, lo and behold, there were advisors to further education but I hadn't known that and I never saw one and it would have been so easy just to . . . I mean it's not as if we were an uncooperative lot. If you put twenty General Studies teachers in a room together they would have a hell of a lot to say to each other.' (Matthew Simpson, started 1974)

In summary the dominant terms that respondents use to explain how they saw the purpose of General Studies are:

- Critical thinking: the importance of showing students how to think for themselves and how to understand the world in which they lived. The ability to spot the false argument or so-called 'common sense' viewpoint.
- Social and political education: a critical understanding of how the social and political dimensions of the world affect people's lives and individual rights and responsibilities. 'Liberal' is the most frequently used word.
- Growing up: becoming adult and understanding rights and responsibilities as adults and citizens.
- Cultural: to introduce students to areas of culture - arts and humanities that they may be unlikely to come across: theatre, film, literature, music. There is only one example of a General Studies department that included science specialists in the team.
- Literacy: addressing literacy skills in reading and writing, particularly in vocational contexts.

Notes

1. In a conversation with the interviewer after his interview was recorded, Chris Lessware explained that his reference here was an example only, and did not imply anything that he actually did or wished to do.

2. 'Jane Gould' is a pseudonym.

The context of Liberal and General Studies 1950s - 1990s

Roy Stafford

Liberal Studies/General Studies (L/GS) developed and briefly prospered during a period of profound political, economic, social and cultural change in the UK during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. It was a different form of educational provision in that it could not be contained within set subject boundaries and it was perhaps more 'open' or more 'porous' to external influences, more receptive to new ideas, but also more vulnerable to changes in forms of employment, pressures from government and other factors.

The L/GS Project interviewed fifty practitioners who had taught L/GS in the years between the 1960s and the 1990s. It also instituted a search of primary and secondary sources to try to build up an idea of what happened over the forty years of LS/GS practice. Fifty interviews is a small sample and it was also possibly too heavily weighted towards practice in London. The interview questionnaire was kept deliberately simple with a limited number of questions. Despite these two constraints, the interviews themselves provide some evidence about the classroom context for some of the practice described in the literature. Interview excerpts are referenced in this article by a pair of initials in brackets.

In this short article I want to explore two of the most important contextual issues grouped around the concepts of 'popular culture' and 'identity' (there are other contextual issues not considered

here for reasons of space). It's worth noting that initially the L/GS curriculum space was often taken up by English and Social Studies, the first a traditional subject in secondary education, the second much more recent, but still mainly a 'body of knowledge'. As L/GS developed the emphasis on a critical pedagogy and an awareness of the importance of classroom culture increased and led to the development of different kinds of provision.

A starting point

The archive of *The Vocational Aspect of Education* (now *The Journal of Vocational Education and Training*) contains several articles on the introduction of 'liberal studies' in further education. In Vol. 6: 13 (1954), W. Cooper, Principal of Rugby College of Technology and Arts offers a paper on 'Liberal Studies in Technical Education'. Following a quote from Francis Bacon, Cooper offers another from the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, Memorandum on Higher Education, July 1954: "There must be a reasonable fusion of the humanities as well as mathematics, science and technology in the courses." He then sets out the policy at his (I'm assuming W. Cooper was male) college which has been in place for eight years -

i.e. since 1946. All students are expected to take liberal studies throughout their time in college (usually five years part-time).

The provision requires students who have not achieved an O Level in English to take an 'English and Social Study' class and pass a 'term test' before selecting from the liberal studies programme. This programme offers courses from the following broad categories:

Art

English and Communication (i.e. post O level)

Moral and Mental Sciences (psychology, philosophy, logic, human relationships, religious studies)

The Appreciation of Music

Natural Sciences (History of science, materials, physics, anatomy, science of music)

Social Sciences (Citizenship, law, history, international politics, world problems)

'General Topics'

Physical Education

First Aid

This reads something like a general course in an American liberal arts college. Cooper admits that it has been difficult to find staff to teach such a wide range of options, especially since higher education is becoming more specialised (this is one of the reasons liberal studies is so necessary). Nevertheless, Cooper maintains that the burden can be carried by the Department of Commerce and General Education with specialist input from the Art and Pure Science Departments.

If this ambitious scheme (which Cooper admits is already under time pressure with a reduction from 90 minutes to 60 minutes for each liberal studies class) offers a good starting point for what might be taught and how it might be approached, what happened over the next thirty years?

As an example of the kinds of work L/GS teachers might be engaged in during the 1980s, the Teaching Method programme at what was then Garnett College in Roehampton (now part of the University of Greenwich) in 1983-4 is helpful. Garnett, one of four institutions training teachers for FE, offered a One Year Full-time Certificate in Education (Further Education). Potential General Studies teachers were recruited by the Faculty of Humanities and Business Studies. The faculty offered 'Special Method' courses notionally in three distinct areas: Language and Arts, General Education and Business Studies. These were the only course components that were 'subject specific' - all other components (Learning Theory,

Psychology, Philosophy etc.) were taken by all student teachers. Each student was expected to take two Special Method courses. Those in the General Education section were offered 'General & Communication Studies' (i.e. BTEC servicing) or 'Social Education' (including 'Social and Life Skills' as required on Manpower Services Commission Schemes). However, they could instead choose other Method courses such as 'Media Studies' or 'English and Communications' offered under Language and Arts.

Towards the end of their course, student teachers (now with significant 'supervised teaching experience') were offered short 'Electives' - programmes of 3x3 hour sessions in a range of more specialised topics. These might be 'media resources' or 'uses of technology' and in 1984 there was a big focus on using video cameras and sound recording in the classroom. There was also an offer of 'Anti-racist teaching strategies', 'Women's Studies', 'Caribbean and African Writers in English', 'The Computer and the Humanities Teacher', 'Racist & Sexist Bias in Language', 'ESL [English as a Second Language] in Mainstream FE' (and many more). What is notable about the full list in comparison with the Rugby programme from 1954 can be summarised in three bullet points:

- 1. The limited coverage of science-based options (only psychology)
- 2. The emphasis on media education, both in terms of analysis and also media practice using video and audio
- 3 The impact of identity politics (anti-racist and anti-sexist strategies and the re-working of eurocentric canons of literature) and teaching for new forms of education access and support (e.g. ESL, special needs).

The 'liberal education' ideal of the 1950s had to change to meet the requirements of students in the 1980s. In practice it also had to change because of what government wanted. Since the majority of Industry Training Boards had been abolished in 1981, it was increasingly clear that the needs of employers were being subsumed by government policies. Back in 1954, in a similar article to Cooper's (in the same issue of *Vocational Aspect*), Fletcher and Kingsford (1954) considered 'Social Studies in the technical education of day-release students' at another large (new) college, Hatfield Technical College. In this description of both curriculum and practice

there are signs that what lay behind many of the later changes was at least being discussed in the early 1950s, though both Hatfield and Rugby were large modern colleges with engineering students at all levels and they were not necessarily typical. Again, in the same issue of *Vocational Aspect* as the other two articles, a report can be found on a talk and discussion at Garnett College entitled 'Some Problems of Teaching Social Studies' (Wallace, 1954). This picks up on some of the same issues in a more general way and refers to three or four more outlines of course components. It is concerned about specialisation and the lack of 'coherence' in contemporary education, warning about young people who have seen school as a patchwork quilt of subjects that they can't bring together. It refers to the dull routines of factory jobs - in more modern terms, the discussion is about alienation and the "broken ties" in society as far as youth is concerned. While this is interesting in providing early examples of the kind of rhetoric David Cameron used in referring to 'broken Britain' in 2007, what is more interesting for us is a reference to Dover Wilson, writing about the new continuation schools in 1921. Wilson is somebody whose importance for the L/GS Project we are only now beginning to appreciate. Taken together, the three *Vocational Aspect* articles suggest that as early as 1954 there was detailed discussion and preparation for liberal studies and social studies - but it is fair to say that few of the cohort of teachers recruited to teach L/GS over the next thirty years had much idea about these early discussions.

**Popular culture:
youth, money and moral panic**

During the mid 1950s the UK experienced a prolonged period of economic growth which would lead the newly-appointed Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to declare in 1957, "Most of our people have never had it so good". One of the key aspects of the new affluence of the period was 'full employment' (i.e. at around 2.5 per cent unemployment to account for volatility in the labour market) and a disposable income for the newly defined 'teenagers' who were mainly in work rather than in full-time education. (National Service would also take some 18-21 year-olds out of circulation for two years.) This new group of consumers would spend their money on clothes, motor-bikes and forms of entertainment - all to a certain extent denied to their parents' generation at the same age. New suppliers of goods and

services expanded to meet this new 'consumer demand' - which eventually triggered a 'moral panic' about the 'unsuitable' behaviour that accompanied the new forms of consumption.

The young people involved in these depraved activities were often the same young people recruited on day release courses at the newly expanded range of FE institutions. Returning to *The Vocational Aspect of Education*, a year later in 1955, the earliest indicator of this concern comes in a paper by James Halliwell who taught at Workington College of FE. 'Some experiments in liberal and social studies with mine trainees' explores experiments in encouraging mining apprentices to write poetry. This is necessary because:

The young miner at the training centre can and is taught to be an efficient miner. But he is likely to remain stupidly underdeveloped as a citizen, he will have no standards of value, as far as beauty is concerned, and will develop and sustain his appetite for crime comics, worthless films, commercial dance music, sordid back alley pleasures, because he is unaware of anything better.

In quoting this extract, it is not the intention to denigrate teaching about poetry but simply to demonstrate the attitude of an L/GS teacher towards popular culture. It will be only five or ten more years perhaps before L/GS teachers are constructing lessons considering some of those 'worthless films' or 'commercial dance music'. The high culture/low culture debate has rarely been represented so starkly. Did Strauss write waltzes without payment? Perhaps James Halliwell didn't meet students who could articulate what the pleasures of their chosen dance music might be, but the social changes meant that eventually that is just what they would be able to do.

To be fair to Halliwell, he opens his paper with a reference and a quote from D. H. Lawrence in relation to an essay on 'Nottingham and the Mining Country' (1930) which Halliwell believes delivers a message for the teacher of social studies in its presentation of the miners' search for 'beauty' in life. (The essay actually refers to the 'Mining Countryside' and Lawrence has been claimed as one of the first writers to consider what would now be 'environmental issues' - and might later be discussed in L/GS classrooms.) Lawrence is one of those writers who straddle the concepts of 'literature' and 'popular writing'. In 1960 a film adaptation of Lawrence's *Sons and*

Lovers might sit alongside a contemporary film narrative such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* based on the novel by another East Midlands working-class writer, Alan Sillitoe. These two narratives demonstrate the developments in opportunities for working-class young men in Nottingham over a thirty year period. The novels and plays of the so-called 'Angry Young Men' (and Women) of the mid 1950s to early 1960s and the film adaptations of the British New Wave were some of the earliest 'modern' texts to appear in the L/GS classroom.

By 1962 in their handbook for teachers, *Liberal Studies*, Cedric Blackman and colleagues suggest 'practical criticism' might form a useful part of a liberal studies programme and as a starting point they take the *Observer's* film critic C. A. Lejeune's three simple questions that structure her approach to a film.

What does it say?
Does it say it well?
Is it worth saying? (Blackman et al 1962: 99)

At the end of their chapter, having explored how such an approach might be applied in the classroom, Blackman et al have developed four new questions that might be asked about a work of art:

Has it widened, deepened or clarified my experience?
Has it refined my appreciation of that which is beautiful?
Has it increased my capacity for joy, love or sorrow?
Has it increased my awareness of myself?

These may seem momentous questions to pose for the craft student who has just been to see *Shane* [the popular Western from 1953], or just read *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, but the fact remains that they are applicable and would probably receive two affirmative answers from most students. (Blackman et al 1962: 105)

Blackman and his colleagues don't provide any evidence of whether this approach was actually tried and what the results were, but at least they demonstrate thinking that has picked up on the popular culture debate and is attempting to work with its energy rather than against it. A much more detailed account, which included discussion of classroom practice, appeared a few years later. *Talking About Cinema* by Jim Kitses and Ann

Kaplan was first published in 1966 and then reprinted in 1974 with some additional material by Jim Hillier and Jim Cook. All four of these writers were important figures during the formation of academic film studies during the 1970s but here the focus is on the development of new forms of film study that took place in the General Studies classes at what was then known as the Kingsway Day College in the 1960s with the support and encouragement of the Principal Fred Flower and the Head of General Education, Jean Stovin. The college catered for students aged 15-18 who attended on day release from various jobs in the Civil Service.

Most students had two hours of General Education as part of their day at college and the film classes were open to any students who had passed GCE O Level English. In addition, film study also featured in some of the English and Social Studies classes offered to students without an O Level qualification. Kitses and Kaplan describe many of the familiar attitudes towards General Studies amongst the diverse groups of young people they encountered - some were reluctant to engage with anything that suggested 'school work', some were very enthusiastic, some who might otherwise have been in sixth form or university were rather blasé. Many opted for film because it sounded the most interesting choice given the range of options.

The work was seen to be innovative in that it took a 'thematic approach' - studying groups of films (shown on 16mm film) associated with 'young People', 'Personal Relationships', 'War' etc. Previously one of two approaches might have been adopted - either to explore the idea of 'Film Grammar' and techniques, or Film History, identifying the development of film as art. Crucially, the General Studies classes screened what were seen as popular entertainment films alongside foreign language films, documentary films and some TV material (TV programmes, especially documentaries were then made on 16mm and distributed via education film libraries.) The aim was to encourage students to see links between films and to think about how characters and issues were represented.

One of the 50 interviewees makes reference to this period at Kingsway:

... When I was at Oxford I met a friend of a friend, a young American who was teaching day release students at Kingsway Day College in London [possibly Jim Kitses]. I was very excited by his account that he was able to sit down with a group of young people and talk about

new plays, films and politics and I went to watch him teach. I was very excited by this and I applied to do a PGCE which I did do at the Institute in London . . . The teaching practices at Kingsway were very important. I was confronted with young people who had very mixed feelings about being taught these topics. But there was an inspiring principal, Fred Flower and his deputy Jean Stovin, who gave good back up and so that was good. (DB)

As well as the innovation in using popular films in their teaching, the Kingsway practitioners also introduced potentially controversial topics by way of films. Kitses and Kaplan quote from an article in *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1962, in which Norman Fruchter explains how the first of his six courses he had taught at Kingsway had come about:

I started the first film course by accident. During a wave of unofficial strikes soon after the High Court judgement in the ETU [Electrical Trades Union] case, I was talking about trade unions with a class of police cadets doing English and Social Studies. I asked if anyone had seen *The Angry Silence* [a 1960 film about a factory worker who refuses to join a strike and is seen as a 'scab' by other workers]. "Who was in it?" I named some of the actors. The cadet shook his head. "Nah. Couldn't have been a good film. Didn't have no stars".

Fruchter goes on to explain that after a discussion about how the cadets usually watched films, he realised that they knew very little about how films were made and simply accepted each film as an event they liked or didn't like. Fruchter then reflected on his own teenage experience of watching films and realised that he would have to think about how to introduce a more detailed study. Kitses' and Kaplan's commentary on Fruchter's account raises several key issues for both film and media education and L/GS.

The first point is that showing films in classrooms with the aim of then discussing the content of the film or its 'message' is potentially meaningless or even possibly dangerous if the students are unaware of a range of issues about who has made the film, who paid for it, what kinds of film techniques are used, who is the intended audience etc. Each of these later became key concepts in film and media education. Unfortunately many films were used for this purpose in L/GS classrooms by teachers who

might not be as aware of the possible problems as Norman Fruchter. Consider this testimony:

The film studies guy [i.e. an L/GS teacher who later specialised in film studies] - and this is, I have to say, in my opinion, a terrible indictment of Liberal Studies and the structure of Liberal Studies - he showed them movies. He hired movies and he entertained them. So if he had a one-hour class, he would hire a film for two weeks, and he would show them the film for two weeks, and he would show them the film in two parts, a feature film. The only film that I showed, I remember, in my four years, was Peter Watkins's *The War Game* [this controversial 48 mins film about the threat of nuclear war, made for the BBC in 1965 but not broadcast until 1985, was available to hire on 16mm and became a staple of L/GS classes for many years]. And I showed that across the college, and it changed the whole mood of the college, for that week, because I showed it in every lesson, I did, but I thought it was very important. And then the principal had me in his office saying, "Listen, West Middlesex Hospital just phoned me and said the nurses are so upset, they've come back from your day-release and you've shown them this film, they're too upset for words". (MC)

This interviewee was referring to the late 1960s and the testimony neatly encapsulates the evolving but still conflicted sense of the importance of popular culture. Why didn't the two lecturers co-operate, even if they disagreed about how to use films? *The War Game* certainly provoked responses from audiences - responses that needed to be related to the filmmaker's approach and use of techniques. The testimony doesn't refer to what kinds of follow-up were undertaken. The use of films and other audio-visual resources is seen as divisive in several interviews. The following statement is not untypical:

I know once we had got audio-visual aids, and we'd got cameras with film projectors and things, it was very often the case that a class would be sat down in front of virtually anything that was available, without any preparation and with no follow-up. So it was just entertainment time, in a sense. (BD)

Some L/GS teachers argued that the main purpose was simply to 'expose' students to works of art and references to this view crop up in several other interviews. In the extract below an L/GS teacher reflects on what a 'cultural experience' meant for one group.

I used to take groups of students to the theatre and we used to go and watch plays. We saw *Our Day Out* [Willy Russell's play about a school trip for a 'remedial class' staged in Liverpool in 1983] and my gang were all seventeen - big tough lads - and they were all in the front row and all the eleven year old kids were acting as if they were in the zoo or something and calling my gang names and my gang were all bright red because if those eleven year olds had done it outside they would have been kicked to death but they couldn't do it in that context and it was really funny. (BG)

This example refers to something apparent in other sectors of education during the 1970s and 1980s - the idea that 'education' and 'schooling' are different concepts. The first is about reflecting on and learning from a wide range of experience, the second is about learning how to follow rules. Taking students out of the classroom and engaging with the world in different social contexts can produce different forms of learning as this description of an 'option scheme' suggests:

. . . this involved things like motor vehicle maintenance, arts and crafts, music, five-a-side football, or a very successful one was where the whole morning or afternoon was spent volunteering in the seven or eight large mental hospitals that were situated around St Albans. And this often led, after students had gone in there, to, when they'd finished college, continuing this volunteering. And this was seen as a radical approach to the delivery of G&CS. Some of the activities were offered by G&CS lecturers, but in other cases we brought in specialist part-timers or used people from other departments. (MT)

What began in the early 1950s as an L/GS concept of 'broadening' educational experience saw a change in the texts that might be studied and the discourses that might be explored. This moved away (slowly) from an 'inoculation approach' towards popular culture and towards

engagement with the kinds of texts/experiences that might be familiar to students but which hadn't previously been validated in formal education. As an example of how things changed, here's a 1970s reference to poetry in the classroom which contrasts with Halliwell's ideas in 1955:

I used to do poetry with my classes, with the building workers and with the automobile workers. I did poetry, which I read aloud, and also tried to get them to write poetry - because I wanted to break down their prejudice against it. And we watched a television programme, I remember, in the late 1970s by Roger McGough. With my classes, I used to do the Liverpool poets, the Merseyside poets, some Kipling, a bit of Shelley and Browning, and the Beat poets - Ginsberg . . . anyway, Roger McGough, who was one of the Mersey poets, did a series of about six TV programmes, which I showed my automobile class. And they really got into it, and they wrote appreciations of some of McGough's work, and they also tried to copy it by doing some poems themselves. I got the best of what they'd done and put it in an envelope and sent it to Roger McGough, and he wrote back this ecstatic letter, saying how wonderful it was to receive this work, and how it made his television series worthwhile to know that there were auto mechanics in Willesden who were so enthusiastic about poetry. Anyway, I was also very moved by it too, and so I sort of regarded that as the peak of my Liberal Studies career. (GT)

The focus on the culture of the classroom and then the move outside the classroom would also challenge the relationships between lecturers and students and perhaps offer new learning experiences.

Students, lecturers and identity

The students who enrolled in further education institutions in the 1950s were primarily day-release apprentices in traditional industries. Alongside them were block release students and a smaller number of full-time students on vocational and academic courses (this third group was possibly less likely to be included in the L/GS provision). In many colleges the

student body was predominantly white, male and working-class. In some parts of the UK there were significant numbers of students working for the same large employer. These students had a sense of identity largely defined by employment and the connotations of social class that went with their particular sector.

I think you have to remember the culture of those days . . . it was the sunset of 'jobs for life' so the kids who came to college, the males particularly, were going to be electrical engineers, or they were going to work in the steel works, that was what they were being trained for. The people who trained them were ex-engineers themselves who'd been in the steel works or who'd been mechanical engineers, motor mechanics or whatever. And so the culture of the college then was very much vocational and there was this thing [GS] grafted on . . . (DR) [this is a reference to a college in a northern city in the 1970s]

Compare this situation with the same college in the 1980s. By then in most major towns and cities there were more women and more non-white students in colleges. The 'de-industrialisation' of many industrial centres and the rise in youth unemployment meant that students (or 'trainees' on YOPs and then YTS schemes) were now more likely to be concerned with what rights they had in respect of benefits, immigration status and sometimes the courts if they were subject to the so-called 'sus laws' of the period. Since the 1970s, trips to the local magistrates' court or crown court had often been included in GS programmes. In London, some students were taken to the Old Bailey as this lecturer (who had contacts with one of the Sheriffs of the Court) recalls:

I took my interior designers on a visit. And we were allowed to sit not in the gallery but in court at the Old Bailey. And at the end - I'll never forget - the usher said, "The judge would like to see you". So I thought: I don't know what's gone wrong! All of them, we went through the door at the back where he goes. And he was the senior judge that week and it was a murder trial - young lads. He sat down at his desk, took his wig off and said: 'Now, what would you like to know?' And he was so open. And what astonished me: my students asked very good questions. And I was careful to thank him, it was so good of

him. They even asked him the situation - and what would happen if . . . ?, you know. So those visits were worthwhile. (HW)

Classroom exercises and discussions might be informed by publications like the *NCCL Handbook* - (National Council for Civil Liberties). The procedures of courts and tribunals were also studied by way of simulation exercises in which students examined witnesses and tried to construct arguments to convince a jury or panel.

One of the main changes from the late 1960s onwards was the entry into L/GS teaching of a significant number of recent university graduates from the humanities, arts and social sciences. These were young teachers who had themselves been radicalised in different ways during the period of 'student unrest' from 1967 and into the 1970s. Only a relatively small group of the interviewees in the sample were trained specifically in L/GS, but those who were had more opportunity to prepare for the kind of work they wanted to do and they had the potential to innovate in their teaching. They had in some cases been working-class students themselves and they were also generally younger and more in touch with the culture of their students than some of their more established teaching colleagues.

I think [the students] saw us as people who were less formal . . . we were much closer to them in age, of course - who they could have a more relaxed, informal relationship with . . . they could talk about more personal issues. (GC)

I just expected to, sort of, meet a sea of hostility and overcome it by my personality, you know, my background. 'Hey, I'm working-class like you' - that sort of thing. And that, you know, by the end of the year [or] a couple of years, they would be eating out of my hand, and I could sign them all up for the Socialist Workers Party. It didn't turn out like that, but that was basically my, sort of, view . . . (CL) (1)

I think that *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* [Neil Postman, with Charles Weingartner, Delacorte Press 1969] characterised what I saw myself as doing - in other words, trying to subvert a vocational education that locked/fitted these people into a pre-given social hierarchy. And to develop the, sort of, social side of them, political side of them

seeing them not just as workers, but also as citizens, in some way, and that that was part of our responsibility. (JS)

These lecturers also had more recent academic knowledge of new areas of study in higher education that could be adapted for L/GS.

I remember some of the games, some of the learning games, there was something called Starpower [an American game devised by R. Garry Shirts in 1969] that was very popular at the time, to talk about competitiveness and social class. We would use methods that were used in management, for example discussional role plays, where people were set an assignment to create a committee, and the committee had to work out the answer to a problem. And there was another committee sat outside, evaluating what they did. And the outside committee would give feedback to the inside committee. So we used to do things that helped people a lot to develop interpersonal and discursive skills, to become more articulate and more analytical in what they do. And then we'd show them, and make them think about the impact of their personality on each other. And so I think those kind of techniques were something we got very much from what the managers did - you know, they were like watered down or they were borrowed from management training techniques. We did a lot of stuff like that. And we did role plays . . . (GC)

These kinds of activities helped to challenge traditional student-teacher relationships and some of the interviewees discuss the kinds of interactions they had with individual students. In the example below, the interviewee mentions a particular student who had been 'difficult' in class:

But we ended up agreeing and negotiating a way forward. Some years later he came to me in the college library and said he was about to be made redundant, could I help? And I said, "Well, we never liked each other. Why should I help you?" And he said "You're supposed to work to role". And in that sense I think I spent the first twelve years or so of teaching General Studies actually trying to find a proper professional role rather than 'being myself'. So with most of the students, who

were, broadly, white working-class, I got on fairly well. I spent a lot of time influencing a lot of the companies' training departments to broaden their intake, so that women and black students could be apprentices as well. So we made connections with not just the students but with their companies as well, which helped strengthen us. (DC)

The second part of the quote above is an example of how, for some L/GS lecturers, their role extended outside the classroom and became involved in wider struggles about equality and opportunity. In some colleges the change in the nature of the student body created opportunities as well as posing challenges for staff:

. . . we were very concerned about the students' out of class activities, so for instance I helped students put on fashion shows and other kinds of activities, and really get involved in the local culture which, of course, was the black culture of the area in West Norwood. Some of the vocational staff, many of whom had come out of the services, were quite conservative in a general sense, and so sometimes I was acting as a bridge between the students and their vocational lecturers. (RS)

As Further Education responded to the political, economic and cultural changes of the 1980s, L/GS was faced with a number of challenges, many of which were shared by vocational staff. It's interesting to note that one writer in *Vocational Aspect* recognised that the challenges for L/GS might require the kinds of organisational developments that were already apparent in some colleges. Graham Peeke (1980) explores the sociological concept of 'role strain' - the potential for tension between a lecturer's own sense of her role and how that role might be defined and changed with organisation structures and curriculum developments. In the section referring to ideologies, Peeke recognises that there may be a conflict between the personal ideology of the professional lecturer and that of the administrators in the college. It may also exist between those professionals outside the college who define themselves by their vocational background (scientists, social workers, engineers etc.) and professional lecturers. Peeke suggests that colleges find ways to

resolve some of these conflicts:

Spatial and temporal separations of roles are also practised and special roles that may be particularly vulnerable to sources of role strain (perhaps that of the liberal studies lecturer for example), can be protected by being set up as autonomous departments or sections less subject to control from other sources. (Peeke 1980)

The concept of role strain might help in thinking about what differentiated L/GS lecturers, both amongst themselves and in relation to vocational or single subject academic staff. There are at least three different ways of approaching the role of the L/GS lecturer - or defining the identity adopted by L/GS lecturers. The first is to focus on 'professionalism' in order to attempt to meet the requirements of the job description. The strain here is that in many cases the role was not clearly defined and since it was not a subject as such, there was no sense of relying on the 'discipline' associated with a body of knowledge and a scholarly tradition. This could lead to lecturers falling back on their own subject specialism (e.g. English or sociology) in order to be sure that what they were teaching had legitimacy. (This position might also be related to what was sometimes termed the 'side-step shuffle' - the gradual movement towards a timetable filled with GCSE/A-level classes in traditional subjects.)

The second possibility is to negotiate the lecturer role so that the L/GS lecturer attempts to remain within the boundaries of what is expected of all the lecturers in the college, but seeks to find acceptable ways to move outside the boundaries, to 'do things differently'. This might then lead towards a different type of negotiation with students and several interviewees discuss the concept of a 'negotiated curriculum' with students. This negotiated role may indeed lead to 'role strain', but it has many potential benefits.

The third possibility is the subversive role - the conscious effort to change teaching and learning experiences inside and outside the L/GS classroom (as set out by JS above). The role strain here would be significant but it is likely that any lecturer who adopted this position would be aware of what to expect.

These three possible 'positions' were perhaps most apparent when the changes to L/GS in the 1970s and 1980s began to be implemented. With the development of technician education through TEC and BEC and then BTEC and the emergence of communication skills and social

and life skills for lower level courses, the open curriculum space of L/GS became 'defined' more clearly. Requirements to 'specify' General & Communication Studies Units to formally assess student work in line with vocational subjects saw the work of the L/GS lecturer begin to change. The 'professional tutor' perhaps found this process tedious, but also re-assuring. Following procedures might mean worrying about meeting deadlines, but it did mean the work was defined.

The 'negotiators' and the 'subversives' tended to react in different ways. It should be pointed out that these categorisations are very fluid. Most lecturers negotiated their position to some extent and subversion often included negotiation. What the developments after the early 1980s did, especially in relation to communication skills, was to more clearly expose the ideological positions of many L/GS lecturers. Some embraced the changes, recognising opportunities to help students while securing their own status. Others resisted the changes, fearing that all the potential for progressive education would be lost if the changes were carried through. Both positions are represented in the interviews. Here's how a couple of interviewees saw the shift to communication skills in their colleges:

I was trying to juggle children and a job. I do think there was some discussion about it and I think that what I would say about that whole era is that it was the time when people were struggling with those tensions and the fact that it was on the syllabus as a piece of liberal education which was clearly being challenged and tucked away unless you had some kind of justification for doing it which gave people an extra piece of paper. So I felt that we were being pushed to do that partly as a way of cleaning up our act because there were people who were seen as doffers and not really doing anything very valuable both by other members of staff and by the college and the students to some extent. But it was part of a massive trend to taking away the whole liberal education idea that had been strongly fought for and which went through every form of vocational teaching. (VT)

. . . there was a lot of politics going on . . . General Studies . . . 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll - a bit too much of that going on' . . . what they should be doing, we should be helping them to communicate, and it was the safer option, so then let's go for

communication! And then we had a coordinator come in who was buying that because he felt we would become more acceptable to the rest of the college, to the vocational people, if we did communication, and you could see that was the mood, and I assume with the day-release students it was the same thing. (VF)

By contrast, this interviewee was part of the London Communication Skills Project through which the Inner London Education Authority set out to replace L/GS across lower level courses in its colleges:

ILEA seconded a person from each college for half a day a week and we all met in the teacher centre in Islington and it was a massive ideas factory with materials and resources and brain-washing and philosophies and everything just pouring out of there . . . The Association of Liberal Education really regarded it as poison. (BP)

One aspect of the changes to the whole of the FE curriculum that began in the early 1980s is considered by many interviewees in different ways. They recognised that as the L/GS space closed down, many of the L/GS ideas about pedagogy survived and many L/GS lecturers found themselves well-placed in the new and sometimes entrepreneurial marketplace for new course provision. L/GS lecturers often had the best overview of what happened in other parts of the college, they knew the students and they were more aware of the activities of other agencies outside the college.

I became a principal and HMI, the second guy became principal of a sixth form college, another became VP of a very big college in West London, another one principal of the further education college in Jersey, two went into academic life and stayed as researchers - so we kind of did alright for ourselves but we took a lot of that experience out with us into different parts of the system. (BP)

. . . some of the things that General Studies teachers were perhaps at the forefront of . . . like student participation in class, the whole thing about having individuals, looking at individual progress and all the rest of it, as much as you

could manage that within an hour or two hours a week. That has become mainstream, some of those aspects now, the whole thing about having activities that grab people and get them involved and the tutorial systems, which would have been unheard of in some of the vocational departments that we taught in. You would now find that quite common, I presume. (PG)

The difference in the roles that L/GS teachers took in response to the changes in the 1980s is perhaps best illustrated by the opposition between the ethos of some communication skills schemes and that of a General Studies focused on identity politics. From the perspective of the latter, the Communication Skills Workshop was seen as dealing with 'coping skills', enabling young people to work with the system, to be 'schooled' in learning communication techniques. By contrast, some General Studies teachers had by this time begun to explore cultural studies approaches. This meant looking for ways to help students develop their own understanding of who they were and how to articulate how they felt and what they wanted to do. Both approaches might be 'student-centred' but the cultural studies approach is more about 'education' than 'schooling'. Ironically, the ILEA, which was attempting to introduce communication skills in all its colleges in the 1980s, was also funding the Cockpit Arts Workshop working with young people on a range of projects from a cultural studies perspective and discussed in its journal *Schooling and Culture*.

And in the end . . .

L/GS teachers found themselves in very different institutional contexts, in colleges in different parts of the country with different groups of students and different kinds of organisational structures and management regimes. Teachers were themselves 'formed' and positioned by their own educational and workplace experience which meant that they reacted to the coming of communication skills, common skills and later core skills in very different ways. Here's a flavour of the breadth of responses interviewees gave to questions about how they understood what happened to L/GS and how they felt about it.

I showed a thing on Clint Eastwood on TV - it was a fantastic lesson, because they all thought he was great. So to start unpicking

some of that. There was something about raising their awareness, their self-awareness of the society they lived in - so I think those kind of things about citizenship and personal and social development, those are the kind of key things for me. (FM)

But everybody approached it differently . . . ultimately BTEC kind of put their foot down, and said, 'OK, we don't want people going off willy nilly and treating the communications aspect of our course as being whatever you happen to want to walk into the classroom and talk about, we want them to actually do communication skills'. And I had no objection to that at all. I don't think I completely agreed . . . (PS)

I wanted to make sure that people did have an understanding that politics wasn't just something about government and distanced from them but that it was something that affected all their lives and that the distribution of wealth and power was something that people should understand and know how to change really. Not that you probably ever got that far but it was something that I think you had to develop quite a lot of skills to manage as a teacher because you could set off a train of real negativity and anger which didn't actually go very far or could go in a direction that wasn't very good and you needed to manage that so that you could show positive outcomes. (VT)

. . . underlying it all was the object of encouraging the students to communicate, to think about things differently, and to develop academic skills. So basically, whatever we did there was an element of they had to think critically, they had to look at things, discuss them and decide, sort of, where things were coming from, and when they were reading things they had to say, well, what perspective has this person got as opposed to that? (GT)

And in the end, I suppose, that's what drove me out of General Studies . . . it had become corralled, something I didn't want to do any more, as it became assessed and as it became set what we had to cover, which was the antithesis of what I

went into General Studies for, which was an open-ended curriculum, unassessed. (JS)

Note:

1. In a conversation with the interviewer after his interview was recorded, this interviewee explained that his reference here was an example only, and did not imply anything that he actually did or wished to do.

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