Whither Adult Education in the Learning Paradigm? Some Personal Reflections

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…. a very deliberate effort is required to retrieve [adult education's] ethical and democratic impulse. (Michael Collins)

1. Introduction: trying to stay radical without getting too nostalgic

I officially ceased to be a paid employee of Edinburgh University two days ago on the 30th of June. One unfamiliar and slightly discomforting consequence of this is that I now have only myself to blame for what I have to say on occasions like this. It is a strange feeling: at last to find yourself sloughing off the chains of wage slavery, but still waking up each day to wonder what you will do when you grow up. In fact, I am retiring slightly prematurely partly in order to go to Edinburgh College of Art to learn to paint properly – or as properly as I can. And, in the process, I will also learn what it is to be a 'lifelong learner'. I had the choice, in the college's terms, of being a proper 'student', studying full-time or part-time for credit, or becoming 'lifelong learner' – someone, it seems, who is old enough, casual enough and rich enough to do his own thing and not to bother with exams and qualifications and all that stuff. So that is something to look forward to! Who said the liberal tradition was dead? Not for those who can afford to pay, apparently!

In conversation recently with Jean Barr, also newly retired from Glasgow University (some of you will know her important work in adult education, enriched with a distinctively Scottish and feminist inflection), she was curious to know what I had decided to speak about on this particular, and unusual, occasion. I replied truthfully but a bit pathetically: 'I don't know' – I simply didn't feel I had much, let alone anything new, to say. 'Och!' she responded, 'Just say what you always say'.

So, here goes! Some of you may have a sense of *déjà vu* about some of this.

I must start by quoting the Scottish-born philosopher Alasdair McIntyre (1987) who states in his essay 'The idea of an educated public': 'One can only think for oneself

if one does not think by oneself'. Much of my thinking and writing has been done in the company of others, and in recent times I must pay particular tribute to the contribution of my colleagues and comrades, Jim Crowther and Mae Shaw.

By way of introduction, I point to three Ds which I think tell us something about the state of adult education today: difference, diaspora and deficiency. The first D is about the necessity of entering the usual caveat about *difference*: there are different kinds of adult education with different histories and traditions of argument and engagement. We come out of different ideological and pedagogical stables. These differences can interrogate and, occasionally, illuminate each other – but we must often end the conversation by agreeing to differ. I expect that many of you will end up feeling like that about what I have to say today, but maybe we can also engender a little interrogation and illumination on the way.

The second D refers to the *diaspora* of adult educators: our migration – one may pause to ask if we are being pushed or pulled – into other fields of educational theory, policy and practice such as further and higher education, generic practices of teaching and learning, what is now being called 'educational development', quality assurance and performance measurement, academic management, professional development, human resource development, counselling and personal development, literacy and numeracy work etc etc. Of course, this may be partly the movement from, in the familiar words of Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997), the 'bounded modernist field of adult education' to 'open postmodern moorland of lifelong learning'. Be that as it may, it is certainly important to recognise that what John Field (2000) calls the 'silent explosion' in learning is part and parcel of the context of social and cultural (ie as well as political and economic) change we are living through. For instance, I find the phenomenon of reading groups particularly interesting in this respect; and in Australia, it seems, more attention is now being paid to what men get up to in sheds (Brown et al 2008).

The third D is more contentious perhaps: *deficiency*. At conferences like this, we seem to be getting used to people asking: 'Whatever happened to …. ?' Something seems to be missing. How do we name what has been lost? Is it an ethic, a vision, a purpose, an ontology, a teleology? Has adult education lost its soul? I don't know what the right word is, but I am reminded of Juliet Merrifield's use of the slightly archaic word 'lodestone' to express precisely this point in a paper presented at the 1997 SCUTREA conference: 'Finding our lodestone again: democracy, civil society and adult education'. I don't think we ever did find it again – and this deficiency may be partly the result of our experience of difference and diaspora. But to my

mind this does leave us with a critical gap. Crudely speaking, this is about what we do (or don't do) with what we know.

I was recently externally examining a sample of postgraduate essays from Glasgow University – incidentally, a department which still insists on calling itself the Department of Adult and Continuing Education. One essay – submitted for a course called, again in a determinedly unfashionable way, 'Principles and Theories of Adult and Continuing Education' – ended with a quotation from the sonnet 'Huntsman, What Quarry?' by the American poet Edna St Vincent Millay. Some of you may have come across these lines before:

Upon this gifted age, in its dark hour,
Rains from the sky a meteoric shower
Of facts ... they lie unquestioned, uncombined.
Wisdom enough to leech us of our ill
Is daily spun; but there exists no loom
To weave it into fabric ...

For me, the loom of my kind of adult education has always been about seeing it as part of something much bigger and more widely shared, what Juliet Merrifield calls the '"public work" of politics'. To see adult education in this way, as 'part of the road toward a democratic society' (Merrifield 1997: 321), is to embrace it as a vocation – and necessarily, I think, a radical and dissenting vocation (cf Collins 1991) – as distinct from merely a field of practice, professional identity or academic specialism. Understood in this way, adult education is part of the work we choose to undertake as distinct from simply the job we get paid to do.

2. Putting politics back into adult education

We did not really need Paulo Freire to tell us that education is political. In a sense, there is nothing new or remarkable about this. It is something we all know – when we choose to think about it. For Freire, however, the political nature of education is always explicit and purposefully acknowledged. This is his starting point in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For him the choice is stark (too stark, no doubt, for the postmodernists among us): education is either for 'liberation' or 'domestication' (Freire 1972). Indeed, he goes on to assert that there can be no neutral position in these matters: to sit on the fence is to take the side of the *status quo*. One question

which arises from this kind of argument is whether *learning* can be conceived of as *political* in the same way as *education*. Can 'liberation' be 'facilitated'? Somehow, there is surely something absurd about the notion of a self-directed 'andragogy of the oppressed'? Perhaps the point is that there can be no political intention where there is no pedagogical intervention. At any rate, it seems to me that one of the problems with adult education and lifelong learning today is that we tend to talk about them as if they are not political. This effect has been termed (wait for it!) 'depolitico-ideologization' (Steiner-Khamsi 2002) – which, of course, is precisely what it is not.

When asked about my own politics as an educator, I have taken to describing myself as a Presbyterian Marxist, occasionally with dangerously Fabian tendencies: Presbyterian in the sense of believing fundamentally in the democratic nature of the debate about the significance of ideas; Marxist in the sense that, now more than ever, we cannot do without this analysis and critique of the political-economy that rules our lives; Fabian in the sense that something we need to remember in these neo-liberal times is that, properly managed, the state can be transformed from being a beast of prey back into being a beast of burden.

I would say that I have always been a socialist, and therefore an internationalist. And, as I look back, I realise (perhaps like some other people here?) that this is one of the reasons why I chose to work in adult education. As a child of the Sixties, I believed we could make a better world, and that education – and, in particular, a particular kind of adult education – had an important part to play in this process. And I still do. I don't mean 'socialism' in some complicated or dogmatic sense, but actually in a very simple and straightforward way. This expresses three core beliefs: first, that all human beings, whatever their differences, share what Raymond Williams called an 'essential equality of being'; second, that as human beings we are social and political animals, ie our individuality and humanity reaches its highest expression (or what Freire termed our 'ontological vocation') in relationships and collective endeavour and caring about each other; and therefore, third, that human society, including its material and cultural resources, should as far as possible be organised to honour this shared equality of being and, in doing so, enhance our capacity to be human and to live in a meaningful, fulfilled and useful way. This is essentially an ethical position which has political consequences. That seems to be the proper order of things.

And when it all seems hopeless or preposterous we must use our agency as human beings to stop and cry out 'No!', 'Basta!', 'Another world is possible' – as ordinary

people everywhere are crying out today. EP Thompson put it well in his essay ‘Socialism and the intellectuals’:

If men [sic] … choose wisely, they will open new vistas of communal achievement, devising social arrangements which will foster the influence of “virtue” and limit the havoc which “vice” can do. And if the weight of evidence seems to deny this hope, then we can still protest, refusing to be victims of circumstances or ourselves. (Kenny 1999: 323)

There is, of course, a key role for education in all of this – particularly the adult education of social purpose and political engagement, as our history has shown and as some of our number continue to insist (for recent examples, see Newman 2006, Thomson 2007 and Steele 2007).

3. Trends, treadmills and traps

A few years ago we ran a conference in Edinburgh called ‘Metamorphosis: Adult Education in Scotland Today”. I ended my introduction to the programme with this quotation from Franz Kafka’s story about the young man who turns into a grotesque insect:

Gregor gave a start when he heard his own voice ….; it was unmistakably his own voice as of old, but mixed in with it, as if from below, was an irrepressible, painful squeaking; and this only left the sound of the words clear for a moment, before distorting them so much that one could not tell if one had heard them properly. (Kafka 2000: 78)

The question is: Do we ever get that Gregor feeling?

In pursuing the radical project in adult education today, we confront a variety of difficulties, obstacles and contradictions. These inhere in what is increasingly – and, in the context of globalisation, pervasively – expected of us as adult educators. The danger is that as they do their work in us, so we come to discipline ourselves within the terms of an alien and alienating discourse. We become, in short, the agents of our own surveillance and self-censorship. Elsewhere (Martin, 2000, 2006) I have identified ten particular trends which de-radicalise our work and cut it off from

popular struggles for equality and justice. I reproduce these below and add a brief comment:

1. We are increasingly exposed – and expected to conform – to the hegemony of technical rationality and narrowly conceived and economistic forms of vocationalism and competence.

These are, of course, the curricular effects of broader systemic processes. For instance, despite finding interesting evidence of ideologically distinct and competing conceptions of the learning society in different parts of the world, Julia Preece's recent international survey reveals, unsurprisingly, a 'dominantly economistic and deterministic trend for lifelong learning' (Preece 2006: 318) because it is part and parcel of capitalist globalisation. I once wrote a short article called 'What is lifelong learning for: earning, yawning or yearning?'. There is not much yearning going on.

2. To a greater or lesser extent, we are forced to operate in an educational market place in which knowledge becomes commodified and credentialised, and educational institutions and agencies exist in relationships of competition rather than co-operation or collaboration with one another.

On the inside, we may be getting used to 'academic capitalism'; some of us may even be learning to like it. On the outside, however, it can all seem a bit absurd. Such is the nonsense of the current research assessment exercise (RAE) in British universities that a recent account of it in the *Observer* newspaper concluded that under the present dispensation 'Cambridge University would have to sack Ludwig Wittgenstein. He might have been a genius, but it took him decades to produce a book' (Cohen 2008: 30). There must be something wrong here. In reality, the problem is that too much, rather than too little, is being written and published – all too often premature, half-baked and mediocre.

3. This market place – and, in particular, its workers – are subjected to the rigours of the new managerialism, enforcing an accountant's view of the world in which we seem to know the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

In organising this conference, my colleagues have had to deal with an independent company set up by *this* university which is required to make a profit from its internal business with the departments of *this* university. So, believe it or not, 1 power-point projector for 1 room costs £150 per day – not to mention £7.00 corkage

for each bottle of wine opened at the conference dinner! This seems to be a strange way for a publicly-funded educational institution to operate.

4. The construction of the 'self-directed learner' as consumer or customer puts the emphasis on the non-directive 'facilitation' of individual and individualised learning – as distinct from purposeful educational intervention (and our own agency as educators).

This, of course, touches directly on the main theme of the conference. When I was thinking about this presentation, Linda Cooper of the University of Cape Town, suggested that we might consider the question: 'What should we as educators be educating about if we are going to make a difference to the direction in which our globalised society is moving?'. Perhaps we need someone with a background in real political struggle – and, incidentally, in old-fashioned workers' and trade union education as distinct from work-based/workplace learning – to ask such a question.

5. There is a growing and seductive tendency to celebrate the authenticity of personal experience rather than test its social and educational significance.

It seems to me that there is a retreat into personalism which – whatever its *pros* and *cons* in other respects – is very bad for our collective politics. It is not that the personal does not matter, but it always needs to be connected and contextualised. This is necessarily an educational task. Robin Usher, the now celebrated postmodernist, once told me: 'I can see that you are not a structural determinist, but you are a determined structuralist'. I'm not sure it was meant as a compliment, but I took it as one.

6. The 'postmodern turn' in the current theory of much European and North American adult education seems all too often to cut it off from its historical roots in social purpose, political engagement and the vision of a better world.

We seem to have lost our sense of history, and of our own historicity as adult educators. I would reiterate Keith Jackson's (1980) insistence that we should try to see adult education *in* history. Have we simply given up thinking like this? Meanwhile, I am often reminded of the lines from WB Yeats' 'The Second Coming':

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

7. Rhetorical assertions about the importance of 'active citizenship' and 'social capital' in the 'learning society' take little or no account of the material realities of context, contingency and differentials of power.

Thinking, in particular, about the fashionable notion of social capital and all the research projects and programmes it has spawned in recent years, brings to mind Ruth Levitas's (1998) account of the competing policy discourses of *redistribution* (RED): Old Labour, *social integration* (SID): New Labour and the *moral underclass* (MUD): New Right. The point, for our purposes, is that certain kinds of theory become ideologically acceptable and politically expedient at particular times. It seems to me that educational research is especially susceptible to this kind of ideological beatification.

8. Despite its undoubted potential, the enthusiasm for information and communication technology (ICT) as the medium of instruction in adult education/learning raises crucial, if widely neglected, questions about the authority of the text, the privatisation of knowledge, the control of learning and the autonomy of the learner.

I find myself – somewhat reluctantly – impressed by the potential of the new media to stimulate new kinds of learning and new kinds of learner. On the other hand, there seems to be far too much uncritical enthusiasm, and not nearly enough concern to interrogate new ways of doing things with old ways of thinking about them. In this respect, I am sometimes reminded of the beguiling title of Harold Entwistle's book on Antonio Gramsci: *Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics.* Scepticism seems to have gone out of fashion. For me, the question is not whether the glass is half full or half empty, but what it is half full of.

9. In the increasing professionalisation – and what I would call 'respectable-isation' – of adult education there is growing evidence of a culture of hierarchy and deference and an unhealthy preoccupation with status and seniority.

My kind of adult education is essentially egalitarian and solidaristic, so it is important to recognise how a particular kind of meritocracy can undermine collegiality. This is certainly what will happen if we succumb to the 'possessive individualism' that lies at the heart of the dominant work ethic within the neo-liberal university. No solidarity is possible where the person at the top is paid mega-bucks while the person at the bottom gets peanuts – however nice we are to each other.

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10. Educational policy and practice, aided and abetted by research, is once again transforming structure into pathology by ascribing the contradictions of context to the supposed characteristics of individuals.

Just one example: the public issue of unemployment and the right to work has been transformed into the personal trouble of employability and fitness for purpose, and education/training actively colludes in this – what my Portuguese colleague Lucinio Lima calls the 'pedagogisation of social and economic problems'. We should never forget AH Halsey's salutary warning to avoid treating 'education as the waste paper basket of social policy – a repository for dealing with social problems where solutions are uncertain or where there is a disinclination to wrestle with them seriously' (Halsey 1972: 8).

Kathryn Ecclestone detects the emergence of a 'therapeutic culture' in contemporary educational policy and research. This is essentially concerned with helping individuals, especially marginalised individuals, cope and survive rather than with changing the structures which oppress them. The consequence is two forms of demoralisation. First, there is 'demoralisation' in its usual common-sense sense of loss of morale and self-belief. Second, and more insidious, there is 'de-moralisation' (with a hyphen) which refers to a deeper, existential process of 'stripping out morality from our lives that leads to a loss of purpose … the loss of belief in what might yet be possible' (Ecclestone, 2004: 124). This is a deeply pessimistic mind-set, which ultimately leads to the denial of moral capacity because it focuses on the individual's psychological and emotional state rather than the wider structural context. The result is a diminished view of the autonomy and agency of both our students and ourselves as educators. Ecclestone argues that managerial 'performativity', understood as the bureaucratic regulation of professional life around imposed targets, outcomes and sanctions, demoralises teachers in both senses.

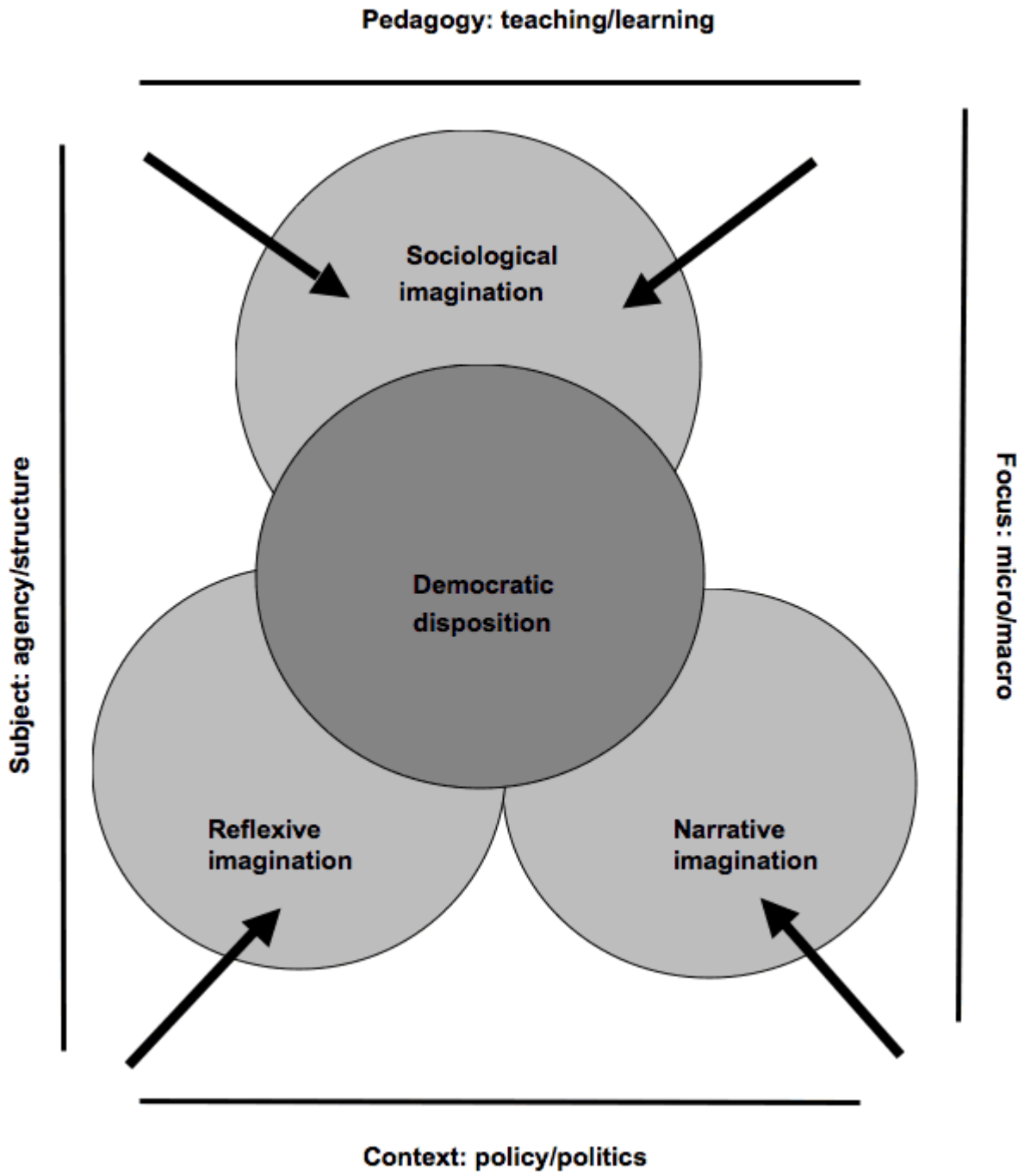
To sum up in the language of the radical tradition in British adult education, we may be in danger of becoming the compliant purveyors of 'merely useful knowledge' (ie knowledge that is constructed to make people productive, profitable and quiescent workers) as distinct from the active agents of 'really useful knowledge' (ie knowledge that is calculated to enable people to become critical, autonomous and – if necessary – dissenting citizens) (see Johnson, 1979).

Having said all this, I now want to go on to argue that those of us who are interested in these things need, in short, to recommit ourselves to the cultivation of

what EP Thompson called ‘proto-democratic spaces’ in our work and to the encouragement, when required, of democratic dissent. This means moving from the language of critique to the language of possibility by finding new ways of reconnecting adult education with the contemporary politics of citizenship, justice and democracy (cf Fraser 2005). It is to this task of reconstruction that I now turn.

4. Cultivating the democratic disposition (Shaw and Martin 2005)

TH Marshall (1950: 28) famously described citizenship as a common ‘status bestowed on all those who are full members of a community’. The notion of membership of a community suggests being part of something bigger: society as a whole. How is this whole and the art of translating between its constituent parts to be conceived? And how do we frame this process as curriculum and transmit it as pedagogy?



Citizenship in this holistic sense of association and membership is catalysed by three types of imagination. Imagination is understood to be the capacity and willingness to locate personal experience in wider external contexts and relationships and to project it into a more varied range of connections and connotations. In this respect, it is important to emphasise that the idea of

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imagination should be interpreted in both cognitive and affective terms; it is as much an emotional capacity as an intellectual capability. As such, it enables the individual to take the role of the other and to act with empathy – as distinct from merely sympathy. Ultimately, such empathy is a political practice which envisages, in relationship with others, the possibilities of a new and better world. The democratic disposition which characterises the creative citizen, understood in this way (cf Nussbaum, 1997), is constituted of three distinct types of imaginative capacity: sociological, narrative and reflexive.

Following C Wright Mills' (1970) classic exposition, the *sociological imagination* is the capacity to see oneself *in* society. Mills distinguishes between the 'personal troubles of milieux' and the 'public issues of structure'. He goes on to suggest that the sociological imagination enables us to grasp both the connections and distinctions between our own personal experience and relationships, on the one hand, and the wider context or structure of social and institutional relations, on the other. This particular combination of discrimination, empathy and contextualisation is a precondition for citizens, as both unique and socially constructed beings, to apprehend and forge a common sense of a common citizenship within increasingly diverse and pluralistic polities.

But this also implies, as Mills insists, historical consciousness, or the *narrative imagination*: the capacity to locate one's own biography within the story/ies of history. In an important sense, biography is always and necessarily historical because individual experience is the product of broader patterns of continuity and change over time – as, indeed, is the very notion of the individual. Contemporary democratic forms, however diverse, are all the cumulative outcome of countless struggles for freedom and justice over the centuries. And, of course, the fact that such struggles (and the compromises they often entail) continue to this day is, necessarily, part and parcel of the dialectics of democratic life. As such, re-making democracy is always the unfinished business of citizenship.

This requires of citizens a third type of imagination: the *reflexive imagination*, or the capacity to see oneself, one's identity and traditions, as simultaneously part of both the problem and possibility of democratic life (cf Johnston, 1999; Coare and Johnston 2003). In an increasingly globalised world human societies are becoming more and more cosmopolitan and pluralistic. In such a world one of the tests of inclusive democracy is how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within a solidaristic conception of a common citizenship. In an important sense, this question is never more than provisionally answered, and democratic life in the 21st century is

now more precarious and volatile than it has ever been. Nevertheless, trying to be democratic means each of us bringing our own particular entanglements of affiliation and antagonism to the unfinished public business of citizenship. This requires a peculiarly modern (some might say, postmodern) consciousness of our own coherences and contradictions, of the ambivalence that constitutes our social being.

The point is that understanding and enacting citizenship in this way requires of us the ability to translate between these constitutive imaginations of citizenship. Only then can we hope to glimpse what their synthesis in the democratic disposition might mean, and begin to apply this to the world we live in.

In educational terms, this way of thinking about citizenship and democracy implies a four-dimensional model of curriculum. First, it is necessary to consider *pedagogy* – and, in particular, the balance between teaching and learning. My own view is that in the era of lifelong learning not enough attention is given to the agency of the educator or, indeed, to the role of teaching in stimulating learning. Second, echoing the ranging work of the sociological imagination, there is the question of *focus* or scale – and, in particular, how micro/small-scale relates to macro/large-scale. In this respect, it should be noted that nothing exists in a vacuum, out of context. Third, *context* itself is actively constructed by human intervention. Indeed, the context of democratic citizenship today is often best understood as the tension between the top-down, imposed imperatives of policy and bottom-up, popular aspirations of politics. A simplistic distinction between the state (bad) and civil society (good) can get in the way of this fundamental perception. In this sense, one must be deeply sceptical about the current tendency to celebrate the cultural politics of civil society at the expense of the task of transforming the political culture of the state. As Kathleen Lynch (2006: 4) insists, ‘the state is the ineliminable agent in matters of justice’. The progressive imperative must be to reclaim the state, not to abandon it. Finally, the notion of the citizen as *subject* embodies the classical sociological dualism of agency and structure. It is clear that to be active, citizens must act, but it must always be recognised (and understood) that human action is never in any simple sense ‘free’; it is always embedded within a pre-existing structure of constraint and partial determination. Indeed, it may be said that the first lesson of freedom is to understand the reality of *un*-freedom. All citizens, irrespective of status or condition, who seek to pursue the possibilities of shared democratic life need to learn this lesson – a lesson which has always been at the heart of the radical project in adult education.

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5. Dissenting adults: learning for awkward citizens

This is the title of a conference we organised in Edinburgh a couple of years ago. An Irish colleague subsequently suggested that the notion of what she called ‘arseyness’ better expressed what we were after than plain awkwardness. The point is the same, however: cultivating the democratic disposition may mean nurturing the capacity for democratic dissidence and dissent. Raymond Williams (1961) expressed the dialectical nature of this process well when he identified the basic conflict between democratic, instrumental and elitist interests and aspirations in education policy and practice. This still seems to be a useful way of thinking today, whatever the changes in terminology may have been. In this sense, the key question is *always*, as Stuart Hall (1996) nicely puts it: ‘Are we thinking dialectically enough?’.

In terms of adult education for democracy, we seem to have gone backwards rather than forwards in recent years. For instance, the 1975 Alexander Report on adult education in Scotland contains the following passage – hardly something you could imagine reading in the glossily vacuous policy documents of today:

Society is now less certain about the values it should uphold and tolerates a wide range. Individual freedom to question the value of established practices and institutions and to propose new forms is part of our democratic heritage. To maintain this freedom, resources should not be put at the disposal only of those who conform but ought reasonably to be made available to all for explicit educational purposes. The motives of those who provide education need not necessarily be identified with the motives of those for whom it is provided. (Scottish Education Department, 1975: 25)

It was in an attempt to revive this way of thinking about our work that led a group of us to circulate an ‘Open letter: Whatever happened to learning for democracy?’ in late 2006. This read as follows:

We see our work in community-based education as part of a broader democratic process. This is about enabling people to demand social justice and equality for themselves and others. There is now an historic opportunity to renew democracy in Scotland, and yet we are beginning to feel a profound sense of disappointment

about the way in which both our own work and the lives of people in communities are being managed, regulated and controlled.

Community learning is being tied into state policy rather than policy being informed by democratic learning. Despite much good practice on the ground, there is a systematic and debilitating reductionism at work in the policy agenda: lifelong learning is largely reduced to instrumental and economistic terms, to learning for a living rather than learning for life; community development is largely reduced to delivering the community to policy through pseudo-democratic forms of participation and partnership; working with young people is largely reduced to surveillance and preparation for employment. There can be no vision of a different kind of Scotland in this systematic reduction of democratic purpose to managerial procedure.

This is not the way to activate citizens for democratic renewal or enthuse them about the possibilities of democratic life. Moreover, there is a real danger of a new kind of democratic deficit developing. The real threat to Scotland's new democracy comes not from apathy but from cynicism.

What is required, in the first instance, is a much more open, democratic and imaginative dialogue and debate about what kind of society we want to live in, and how we can begin to build it in Scotland today. Education and learning in communities can contribute to making this vision a reality, and they are a rich resource for tackling significant problems in society. Ordinary people need the opportunity to have their say, to be listened to and to talk back to the state. This is essentially a democratic process. It cannot simply be managed and measured; it has to be nurtured and cultivated in communities. It requires faith and trust in the people, and a valuing of genuinely democratic dialogue and debate.

To cut quite a long story short, this seemed to strike a sympathetic chord (or did it hit a raw nerve?) with many workers throughout Scotland – as well as further afield, as responses from South Africa and New Zealand indicated. This culminated in a meeting in the new Scottish Parliament and the formation of various working groups to take matters forward. A key outcome, conceived in terms of what Chomsky once called the 'threat of a good example', is a laminated wall-chart, published earlier this year, which contains Ten Propositions (statements of principle) and Ten Proposals (statements for action) about Learning for Democracy. This wall-chart is designed to be publicly displayed and discussed as widely as possible. What we

have been trying to do, in Juliet Merrifield's terms, is to find our lodestone again by reasserting our educational role in the '"public work" of politics ... [as] ... part of the road toward a democratic society'. This is what the wall-chart looks like:

Learning for Democracy

Ten Propositions – Democracy is about:

1. Freedom

Human flourishing is achieved through freedom to act individually and collectively, only constrained by due consideration for others.

2. Equality

All people are of the same moral worth and are obliged to mind the equality of others.

3. Justice

Justice and democracy are interdependent. An unjust society is an undemocratic society and an undemocratic society breeds injustice.

4. Solidarity

Shared aims and values arise from the pursuit of common purposes and mutually supportive ways of living.

5. Diversity

Dialogue between different cultures and identities can enrich society and help to build a common culture.

6. Accountability

The state is accountable to its citizens for providing the policy framework within which judgements about common good are made and contested. Those who hold power are answerable to the people.

7. Dialogue

Democracy requires dialogue and the possibility of dissent. This means learning to argue, articulate beliefs, deliberate and come to collective decisions concerning what constitutes the good society.

8. Responsibility

Consistency and coherence between private and public behaviour are essential to the quality of democratic life.

9. Participation

Democracy is something to be negotiated from below rather than handed down from above. Citizens require the opportunity to talk back to the state.

10. Sustainability

A commitment to the environment and to future generations requires determined opposition to those forces which are wasteful and destructive.

Ten proposals – Learning for democracy means:

1. Taking sides

Educational workers are not merely enablers or facilitators. The claim to neutrality can reinforce and legitimise existing power relations. Practitioners need to be clear about what they stand for – and against.

2. Acting in solidarity

Practitioners should proactively seek opportunities to engage in a critical and committed way with communities and social movements for progressive social change.

3. Taking risks

Critical and creative learning is necessarily unpredictable and open-ended. Exploring official problem definitions and challenging taken for granted ways of thinking can be a liberating process.

4. Developing political literacy

Politics needs to be made more educational and education made more political. Learning to analyse, argue, co-operate, and take action on issues that matter requires a systematic educational process.

5. Working at the grassroots

Democracy lives through ordinary people's actions; it does not depend on state sanction. Practitioners should be in everyday contact with people on their own ground and on their own terms.

6. Listening to dissenting voices

Activating democracy is a process of creating spaces in which different interests are expressed and voices heard. Dissent should be valued rather than suppressed.

7. Cultivating awkwardness

Democracy is not necessarily best served by the conformist citizen. This means that the educational task is to create situations in which people can confront their circumstances, reflect critically on their experience and take action.

8. Educating for social change

Collective action can bring about progressive change. Learning for democracy can contribute to this process by linking personal experience with wider political explanations and processes.

9. Exploring alternatives

Learning for democracy can provide people with the opportunity to see that the status quo is not inevitable – that 'another world is possible'.

10. Exposing the power of language

The words used to describe the world influence how people think and act. Learning for democracy involves exploring how language frames attitudes, beliefs and values.

6. Conclusion: unfinished business

I conclude with two voices from the past which still seem to me to speak to us today – if we care to listen. Both insist that, whether in teaching students or supporting learning, adult education has a crucial part to play in the always unfinished business of democratic citizenship.

First, I quote from what might now seem a rather obscure little book by Harold Shearman called, quite simply, *Adult Education for Democracy.* This was published by the Workers' Education Association (WEA) in 1944, the year before the end of the Second World War but obviously thinking ahead to the post-war era of reconstruction and the hope of building a new society. The question is: In what ways, if any, does this account speak to us today?

Democracy implies the formation of social judgement on the basis of informed discussion. It requires that men and women shall decide on particular issues, not as a result of passing moods or casual opinions, but in the light of a philosophy of life. Such a philosophy, if it is to be anything more than the repetition of slogans, must be formed as the result of much reflection on the problems of social organisation in general and on the aims and purposes of society. Knowledge is essential; but it must be mixed with experience; and the pooling and comparison of experience in the light of new knowledge, in a group with common interests but bringing varied contributions to be drawn from daily life, is the essence of democratic Adult Education. (Shearman 1944: 77)

The last word I leave to Raymond Williams because he seems to me to give us a good way of beginning to think and argue about the theme of this conference 'Whither adult education in the learning paradigm?' – and because I happen to agree with him:

…. this is a social order which really does not know in what crucial respects it is ignorant, in what crucial respects it is incompletely conscious and therefore in what crucial respects this collaborative process of Adult Education is still central (Williams 1993: 264).

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Notes

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