

Editorial

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I started writing this editorial shortly after Mervyn King, the governor of the Bank of England described the current global financial situation in these terms: “this is the most serious financial crisis we have seen at least since the 1930s, if not ever”. Since then, hardly a day has gone by when the economic crisis gripping the advanced capitalist democracies hasn’t been headline news. Unlike the 1930s we are in a post-colonial world in which rapidly expanding economies of the majority world – China in particular, but also India and Brazil – exert considerable leverage. Debates rage about whether we are seeing the end of neoliberalism or merely the adolescent growth pains of a mature, free-market capitalism far more vicious than the Thatcher-Reagan-Bush infant version. Or whether we are about to see a resurgence of Keynesian intervention, as various states apply state policy in order to stabilise the financial chaos. Or indeed whether the financial indebtedness, in conjunction with the ‘ecological mortgaging’ involved with destroying the regeneration capacity of ecological systems, will lead to total collapse - or optimistically, a revolutionary change associated with radical social movements emerging across the globe. Education in its broadest sense must play a significant role in negotiating our way through this crisis. One of the most significant (temporary) structures in Occupy London’s tent city outside St Paul’s Cathedral is the ‘tent university’ in which workshops, discussions, lectures and study circles take place throughout their occupation.

Community education practitioners have always been mindful of their social, political and economic location, and this issue explores the impacts of economic crisis and associated policies on a practice which finds itself both a victim and a critique. The arts are perhaps indicative of this, vulnerable to cuts when perceived as luxury, fetishized as a commodity in the service of economic recovery, a site of conflict between domesticated entertainment and the creative resistance. In Ireland, one of the first economic bubbles to burst, the complex relationship between the economic fortunes of capitalism and the arts is analysed by Rosie Meade. In this context, art and cultural production is packaged as ‘brand Ireland’ for the benefit of economic growth and capital accumulation, but also, historically and currently, an essential location for the imaginative practice of those excluded by such commercialisation to challenge the politics of austerity. As Meade says, “we are in that [cultural] landscape too, whether as activists, community groups or as individualised pleasure seekers. We are not merely tourists or consumers of culture, but makers, doers and communicators”. In Scotland, Jane Picton Smith illustrates the contested space which creative arts provide in a working class community in Dundee. Drawing on the community’s particular history, culture and experience of imposed regeneration, the arts provide a fertile source of everyday resistance.

Documenting the past struggle is an important part of mobilisation and rebuilding capacity in a community becoming alienated from its history of activism. Lynn McCabe, a long time community worker North Edinburgh writes how social history became a tool for a community to remember its own enviable history of working class activism and the achievements it had brought, and subsequently rekindle an activism

appropriate to a time which risks absorbing energy into managing declining public services. As with many working class communities, North Edinburgh had seen “excessive emphasis on promoting participation in official structures at the expense of the kind of active issue-based work which traditionally generated new activists who were motivated by anger or solidarity. The irony of the situation is that a decrease in community activism and a decline in the community’s capacity to assert itself is happening at the same time as participation, engagement and empowerment are, once again, key priorities for local and national government.” One product of the social history work is the publication *Never Give Up*, and this book, along with the process which led to its production, has been reviewed from the perspective of an activist, community worker, student and political activist.

The final piece in this issue is a review article based on the 40th anniversary conference of Friends of the Earth (England, Wales & Northern Ireland). Callum McGregor, who is currently researching adult education in the environmental movement, analyses this conference as a location for adult learning. He highlights the informal education which occurs in occasions such as environmental NGOs’ gatherings, as different struggles learn from one another and also from the judicious use of theoretical inputs derived from social psychology.

As the capitalist economy teeters on the edge of its next phase – or ultimate demise – and the damage to human creativity, social coherence, and ecological integrity is exposed, the locations of opposition in diverse places, from the new tent cities of anti-capitalists, through the environmental NGOs to the long history of resistance in the cultural production of the working class.