

Editorial

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In this issue of *Concept*, class plays a central role. This is appropriate. In discussions of social justice, of education, of 'big society', the issue of class is seldom made explicit. Class-related experience is described through circumlocutions, such as hard working families, social exclusion, lack of upward mobility, even poverty. Moreover, in many educational contexts, class interests are overlooked in favour of individual learning – or classified as a deficit from the standard of middle class education.

This issue of *Concept* starts with two articles derived from research in which working class researchers have been conducting investigations into aspects of working class experience. For Natalie Sinclair, her own community in Glasgow experiences many barriers in accessing adult education. Whilst many of these barriers are class related – poverty, poor school experience, internalised educational inadequacy, being failed by middle class teachers - her respondents largely didn't express these in class terms. This lack of class consciousness makes it easier for people to interpret barriers to education in individualised terms. Drawing on Freire's conceptions of naive and magical consciousness, Sinclair argues that conscientisation has a role in reaffirming the class nature of the barriers which are experienced.

A very different interpretation of the working class experience is analysed by Paul Gilfillan. Again drawing on research from his own community in Fife – in this case ethnographic research into the working class experience of national identity – he proposes that the current generation of working class Scots, under conditions of affluence and literacy relative to previous generations, experience a working class nationalist politics of being. Gilfillan differentiates between forms of existential relations to the nation, and in particular between bourgeois liberal versions of nationalism and a postmodern, pluralist 'systemic integralism' form of nationalism which emerges from working class consciousness. The domination of liberalism (privileging abstraction, separating public and private) oppresses working class individuals by excluding from consideration their situated being in particularist relations to class, culture, environment, nation and politics. On the contrary, Scottish working class being embeds a postmodern nationalism which reflects the diversity of experience within Scotland.

The remaining two articles address educational strategies for addressing the working class experience. Rosa Valls describes how in post-Franco Spain, working class communities reclaimed adult education through the transformation of schools and education centres into learning communities. In contrast to the barriers to education in Glasgow described by Natalie Sinclair, Spanish learners have emphasised collective learning in the interests of the working class, and have developed a politically empowering and learner led movement. Learner led processes in the UK usually mean a version of individualising the 'student experience' or meeting the 'learning needs' (ie the deficits) of working class adults. Valls demonstrates that there are ways in which learning needs are collectively expressed and the provision of

education democratised at the level of the community which are politically empowering as well as beneficial to the literacy levels and cultural participation of the individual adults, children and whole families.

Back in Scotland, Stuart Fairweather assesses the current context of economic austerity, its impact on politics in Scotland and the implications for practice for community educators. In the embryonic alliances between communities, service users and the trades unions mobilising public sector workers, Fairweather emphasises the importance of viable working class communities in constructing spaces of resistance. However, such alliances – tentative and fragile in most places – are being forged to resist the cuts, and such political action generates pedagogical opportunities in which improved public services can be generated. The alternative to the ‘big society’ of privatisation and a weak state, is to develop, design and deliver services collaboratively and with appropriately divided responsibilities, between workers and service users. This transcends arguments about whether there should be more or less service, or public or private services, and takes the debate into how adequately funded public services run by alliances between workers and users can be forged from the struggle against the cuts.

This issue is going to press in uncertain times politically, with the Scottish election approaching in May and the uber-Thatcherite Tory-Lib Dem coalition in London showing little sign of collapsing despite the best efforts of the students’ and others’ resistance to privatisation of education and health services in England. Times of political upheaval demand educational responses which often occur outwith the institutions of formal learning. It is an opportunity, and a responsibility, for practitioners of community education wherever they are employed or located.