

ALP’s Educational Trip from Edinburgh to Barcelona Contents

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ALP's Educational Trip from Edinburgh to Barcelona: An Overview

Nahid Aslam, Peter Gossip and John Player

ALP

Introduction

The Adult Learning Project (ALP) was established in 1979 with a focus on community education in the wider sense. ALP which is centrally inspired by the work of Paulo Freire is an umbrella project composed of a variety of learning circles and groups including, but not restricted to, Paulo Freire Reading Group, Small World, Democracy Group, EL Punto, Gaelic Song: Ceilidh nan Amhrain Gaihlilig, and (Re)Humanising the City: The Art of Social Activism¹. ALP endorses 'dialogical learning' as both an epistemological perspective to the understanding of social life and as a methodological modality for critical engagement with the elements of the socio-economic system.

One of the objectives of ALP is the organisation of study exchanges and educational trips. In November 2010 ALP secured a grant from 'Awards for All, Scotland' to take 23 ALP learners to Barcelona for a week to engage in a cultural learning exchange.² The educational excursion from Edinburgh to Barcelona which was symbolically dubbed 'Homage from Caledonia to Catalonia' was intended to create educational possibilities for active engagement in cultural learning and dialogue with sister projects in Barcelona. It was felt that such a trip would help redress some of the imbalances of the educational experience and opportunity found in Britain, in particular, in Scotland. Thus the key objective of the study visit was to learn how the Catalans educate, govern and empower themselves through grassroots learning projects and movements. Another related aim was to understand the nature of the methods employed by these projects to assist adults

¹ For more information about the activities of these groups see the website of ALP

<http://alpedinburgh.btck.co.uk>

² We gratefully acknowledge the grant by the 'Awards for All, Scotland' (No. AFS/1/010358043) which made the study exchange possible. We want to thank colleagues and officials at the City of Edinburgh Council for support. We want to thank, among other colleagues, Stan Reeves, Claire Soper, Tommy MacLean and Caroline Lamond.

overcome social inequality. The trip was an educational engagement between ALP and La Verneda (Barcelona's equivalent to ALP). Both adult education projects have a similar ethos and pedagogical approach. Both schools have initiated activities and extensive projects which give community development responsibilities to local people. Another objective of the exchange was to look at the social ownership of major football clubs in Barcelona, and how the clubs of Edinburgh such as Heart of Midlothian F.C. (a partner of ALP) could learn from Barcelona F.C, a club which is cooperatively owned.

ALP participants had the opportunity to learn from anti-racist and integration projects working with the Roma peoples, refugees and asylum seekers. Working with La Verneda was central to the exchange programme. ALP participants mutually performed and informed Catalonia about Scots tradition and culture via music, poetry, dance, and celebration. Reciprocal events were organised by the Catalans. Excitedly, ALP was able to inform Barcelona F.C. about the Scottish Government 'Kick Racism out of Football' and 'Show Racism the Red Card' campaigns.

The co-investigative approach of La Verneda and other educational forums mirrored that of ALP. However, La Verneda has developed a methodology which has assisted literacy learners to move past initial functional literacy acquisition and engage with the classics, contemporary literature and critical literacy pedagogy and FACEPA (Federacion de Asociaciones culturales y Educativas de Personas Adultas) programmes which participants met and exchanged with.

To multiply the points of identity between ALP and the educational projects in Barcelona may establish a valid basis of expectations about the nature of the activities run by those projects. However, the ALP participants have learned about a number of intricate differences between and within the groups there. Each movement of education and activism is shaped by particular historical circumstances. And the knowledge about the activities of these educational projects could only be found out through situational interaction, observation and active engagement with these groups. The point here is that the study visit to Barcelona was an epistemic process in the sense that it intended to produce situated knowledge and information not just about the learning circles and

groups in Barcelona but also reflexively about ALP itself. The key objective of this special issue is to publish this knowledge which takes the form of personal reflections and commentaries on the trip. The phrase ‘personal’ reflections may deceptively imply that they are not ‘socially shared’ or, worst, they were constructed ‘after’ the trip finished. The fact that the participants could remember some of the intricate details of what happened there points to the conclusion that the personal reflections were themselves formed in interaction ‘there in Barcelona’. Hence they are in essence ‘interpersonal’ and dialogical. And this is part of the cultural history of these personal forms of knowledge.

To provide a contextual backdrop to the five papers in this volume, we provide an overview of the five-day programme. Although the presentation is chronological in organisation (we describe what we did in each of the five days), we strategically thematise particular activities. As a significant caveat, we should haste to note that the five papers in this issue do not and cannot exhaust the full range of the activities in which all the participants engaged. Likewise, this overview should be considered as a bird-eye coverage in which lots of intricate instances and details cannot be covered.

Exploring the cultural landscape: Catedral de Barcelona and la Rambla

The first day of the visit, saw a tour around Catedral de Barcelona - the first church built in the Gaudí³ style, in the 13th century (see Figure 1). The inside of the cathedral was Gothic⁴ in style, while the outside is Roman. It has Hebrew inscriptions on its outer walls, put there by their Jewish stonemasons, a significant sign of multiculturalism ‘in place’. We walked around the surrounding area of the old city. We was a lot of graffiti - an international ‘unofficial’ ‘voice-piece’ of Youth, we surmised.

³ Antoni Gaudí i Cornet was a [Spanish Catalan](#) architect and the figurehead of [Catalan Modernism](#).

⁴ Gothic architecture flourished during [medieval period](#). It originated in 12th century France. Its characteristic features include the [pointed arch](#), the [ribbed vault](#) and the [flying buttress](#), and is found mainly in the great churches and cathedrals of Europe. Its characteristics are said to appeal to ones emotions.



Figure 1: Catedral de Barcelona (November 2010)

Our tour guide explained the architecture of the city stating that the Cathedral Square was the oldest part of Barcelona. That the walls were divided into Roman (lower part) and Medieval (upper part) styles. The population of the city of Barcelona is approximately 1,621,537 people. The right side of the city housing the well-to-do, while the left housing the more margined sections of Society. The city of Barcelona is surrounded by villages whose populations provide workers to the city. Retail-work practice is much more relaxed in Catalonia with workers having an extended lunch break between 2 and 5pm, when the day is really too hot to work in. Shops re-open at 5pm and stay open until 8.30pm. As we walked around the town we passed a Human Rights office, displaying a poster demanding ‘no discrimination’. La Rambla – a well-known tourist area sold gifts, flowers and even caged birds was a defining feature of Barcelona (Figure 2). Here

tourists were enticed by human ‘statues’ of various characters, including Charlie Chaplin, a headless chef and damsels in distress to part with their money.⁵



Figure 2: Human statues in La Rambla (Nov. 2010)

We attended a class at the Escola d'Adults de la Verneda - Sant Martí , an adult school run by the participants' associations Agora and Heura. The school is located in the Centre Cívic Sant Martí. Sant Marti is predominately a working class area with a mixture of private and social housing. It was noticeably well maintained, with wide open roads and pavements and seats along the pavement. It appeared very ‘civilised’. No betting shop or pub was in sight, only café bars. However there was a slot machine shop! The Centre Civic’s building was five floors high. La Verneda is open Monday to Sunday, from 9am to 10pm, and is attended by around 2000 people from 18 to 90 years old, who represent all the different cultures present in the country, both women and men.⁶ The women’s

⁵ The La Rambla’s human statues reminded Nahid of the ‘silver box dancer’ often performing in Princes Street in Edinburgh.

⁶ For more discussion see Sanchez Aroca, Montse (1999). Voices inside Schools - La Verneda-Sant Martí: A school where people dare to dream. *Harvard Educational Review*, 69(3): 320-336.

music study class we had been invited to was on the 5th floor. It also housed a computer suite, a number of small workrooms and a large classroom.

The classes at the Centre followed the Freirein⁷ method of teaching. Freire is purported to have said: "The more education you have, the more culture you get, and as a result you are freer".. Our hosts at La Verneda stated that their ambition was to 'read and write the word, and then transform the world'. They reflected that Catalonia appeared to have a similarly difficult relationship with Madrid, as Scotland had with London. The tension created in them a desire for separation and independence.

We talked about our desire to learn more from La Verneda on how to become more effective in educating disaffected groups such as the migrant communities, illiterate groups and those who found themselves socially excluded because of Class. We were told that La Verneda was not, in anyway, easy to set up. They had faced much opposition, yet activists persevered in setting up courses to benefit marginalised groups. It linked up with the Centre of Classical Studies at the University of Barcelona to give it more credibility. Our hosts informed us that they held Classical Music workshops on a weekly basis. Students worked and learnt at their own pace. One 87 year old student said that she came to the Centre to keep her mind active and alert. Our workshop session included a music appreciation class. We listened and discussed Peter Maxwell Davies' 'Farewell to Stromness'. We were reminded that people are able to construct meaning from past events and that the language of music needs no translation.

After our music lesson we joined the La Verneda School's 'Celebration' where we listened to various pieces of music and even had the opportunity to sing Auld Lang Sang on stage. One of our participants - Deirdre - sang a Gaelic song too! Local people were invited to join in with the Centre's celebrations. There was much fun and laughter.

Monserrat School as the voice of the subjugated

⁷ Paulo Freire (September 19, 1921 – May 2, 1997) was a Brazilian [educator](#), [philosopher](#), and influential theorist of [critical pedagogy](#). His best known work is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which is considered one of the foundation texts of the [critical pedagogy](#) movement.

On second day we were taken to Montserrat School which is a state school – comprising, among others, migrant students from various cultural backgrounds including North Africa and Latin America. We observed two classes and noted how children were encouraged to learn from each other. It wasn't as if the teacher 'knew it all' (in our view this 'as if' is itself a Freirean-motivated strategy). Parents also got involved in the school's curriculum (see Deirdre's paper in this volume in which she reflects on ALP's visit to the school).

Combating gender inequality: FACEPA'S women's group and Homes en Dialèg

On the third day we visited members of FACEPA women's' group. We discussed gender issues in Catalonia and Scotland. We noted that many of the issues of sexism were similar in both countries – not surprising since both are predominately patriarchal in structure (Figure 3).

Later we visited Homes en Diàleg (Men in Dialogue) which was set up by men who felt that true masculinity ('true' in the sense of a non-violent / a passionate version of masculinity) was under threat and hence there was a real need to educate men and boys about equality and the prevention of gender violence. It uses the work of sociologists such as Jesus Gomez to look at masculinity models already present within Society. ALP members took part in a session examining masculinity models preventing and promoting gender violence. The following key arguments generally guided the discussion of some film clips depicting a variety of masculinity forms:

- Hegemonic (violent) masculinity currently perceived as 'attractive';
- Masculinity based inequality often perceived as boring, not self-reliant;
- Gender-based violence not ceasing until current models are changed



Figure 3: FACEPA'S Women Group (Nov. 2010)

Participants said we needed to stop glorifying violence. Yet once beer, football, women, or politics is taken out of male conversation, what is left to be talked about? Jesus Gomez's work was mobilised to support the argument that love is a social phenomenon. Our time at Homes en Diàleg generated much heated discussion particularly from the female members of our group (see Abdelhay's paper in this Issue).

Living Utopia: Visiting the Head Office of the CNT in Barcelona

On day four we had the opportunity to talk with members of the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC)(the Catalan Republican Left Party) at the Headquarters of the CNT (Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo), in Badalona. Badalona is a large working class area and the CNT is housed within a neighborhood. It sees (institutionalised) religion as oppressive. Opposition to the CNT is commonplace. They talked about 'Living Utopia' – a film about the Catalan Independence Party – and gave us a history lesson on Catalan oppression by Madrid.

They stated that the Independence of Catalonia needed to take on board the views of all living in Catalonia – not just its original settlers. Apparently Spain had tried to prevent a popular Right-wing Party from taking control of Catalonia, by denying a territory of any country becoming an independent part of the EU – a point that Alex Salmond will need to consider when he decides to take Scotland out of the UK and into the EU. The members of CNT ended their talk to us with the words “we don’t want Borders. We want a strong UN or international organisation that will give Catalonia a voice in the EU and in the world”.

The contributions in this volume

The above highlight of the key activities during the five-day trip was intended to provide a contextual backdrop to the individual contributions in this Issue. It is worth noting that the educational trip to Barcelona has been conceptualised as a learning process. This is evidenced by the fact that upon return from Barcelona, the participants engaged in a round-table discussion to reflect on the processes and aspects of the various activities with the groups there. Some of these reflections have been codified in a short documentary film which was made available to the wider members of public on the internet⁸. The publication of some of the reflexive commentaries in this journal should be considered as part of the learning process.

The contributions in this issue should be viewed as a set of personal reflections and commentaries on the events and processes of the trip. They vary in modes of writing in which they are constructed. In her paper entitled ‘Minority language, cultural and Political Resistance’, Déirdre ní Mhathúna offers us her personal reflections on the various activities during the study trip with a focus on the relationship between anarchism, Catalan language and art. She shows that as a result of Franco’s censorship and control artists were driven to employ a stylised visual language as a symbol of resistance and a strategy of out-manoeuvring the top-down control of the State tyranny. Commenting on how the interpreters drew on their communicative histories to link the groups together, ní Mhathúna stated that ‘an idea, carried through language by a series of images that depend heavily on cultural context, manifests in our imagination

⁸ The full documentary is available on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yCao5INU14>

according to our personal “library” of signs and symbols that is itself dependent on the cultural landscape we inhabit’. In the second paper that follows, Déirdre ní Mhathúna provides her reflections on the nature of learning and teaching at CEIP Mare de Déu de Montserrat School (it is a multicultural school located in Terrassa).

In the third contribution, Billy Forbes gives a general commentary on the educational trip. He shows how the activities he was engaged with and his expectations were shaped by his biography of schooling and politics in Scotland. The fourth article by Ashraf Abdelhay focuses on a session organised ‘Homes en Diàleg’. Through a review of the interactions at the session, Abdelhay shows how the group examined some forms of masculinity with the intention to promote the ones which reject gender violence. The fifth contribution is ‘different’ in terms of the genre (type of text) in which it is written. It is a poem by Peter Gossip inspired by some of the engagements in Barcelona.

The final article is written by Mhairi Bain and Andreu Cabrero . They have participated in the construction and the implementation of the visiting programme in Barcelona. In this article, Bain and Cabrero, whose lives are shaped by both Edinburgh and Barcelona, tell us how the education journey in its various aspects has inspired them. For them, the ALP’s learning trip manifested in the activities and events in Barcelona is an act of identity representation. They relate that when the ALP members arrived to Barcelona, ‘we wanted to talk to the group about the importance of representing Scotland, representing ALP, and representing themselves each time they went into the city and the surrounding area’.

Conclusion

Our intent in this editorial was to contextualise the collection of papers in this volume by providing an overview of the key activities in the five-day educational trip from Edinburgh to Barcelona. We have also highlighted the similarities and the discrepancies between the educational groups involved in the activities. Our time in Barcelona was highly educational. Like Scotland, the socioeconomic variation in the standard of living is visible. Yet it seems that people there tend to be more relaxed, (maybe the sunshine has

something to do with it, or the fact that wine preferred rather than beers and spirits!). But whatever the reason, family breakdown and excessive materialism has not yet taken hold of the country to the same extent as in Scotland. We in Scotland can learn much from them.

Minority Language, Cultural and Political Resistance: Some Reflections on the ALP Study Trip (Caledonia to Catalonia, 2010)

Déirdre Ní Mhathúna

ALP

Setting the scene: a continuing learning process

Reflecting on the ALP study trip **Caledonia to Catalonia 2010**, I find that the learning points and connections it has engendered still inform my thinking, especially about how language can encode and protect. In this article I will attempt to show, through a few examples, how creative thinkers across the Iberian peninsula have made use of a highly stylised visual language to communicate the rallying calls of resistance while outmanoeuvring censors and right-wing political tyrants.



Image 3. "Homage to Barcelona", Joan Miró

Art as a symbol of resistance

The dictatorship of Francisco Franco dissolved the natural regional borders of Spain between 1939 and his death in 1975. That period in recent Spanish history stands out for its negation of basic human rights, following three bloody years of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). It is a time which remains etched on the Catalan psyche. Barcelona functioned as a hub of resistance where port workers, trades union activists and

revolutionaries stood in solidarity against the fascists. Artists, writers and dreamers lived with insufferable restrictions on creative freedom. Many fled – but Europe between two world wars had little respite to offer. For those who stayed or returned, Franco’s censorship pushed artists further into abstraction and symbolism, most notably through the Surrealist movement. To explore what this meant for the artistic legacy of the region, I visited Fundació Joan Miró one afternoon during the ALP Barcelona trip. Joan Miró (1893-1983) is one of Catalonia’s most famous visual artists, who explored surrealism but ultimately developed a visual language that was entirely his own (see Image 1). His colourful ceramics can be found on murals and in pavements all over Barcelona. But his legacy goes much deeper. When fascism outlawed any nationalistic demonstrations, Miró proudly incorporated the stripes of the Catalan flag into his work, in gestures of solidarity with the people (it is interesting to note that government buildings in Barcelona ‘flag up’ both forms of nationalism, see Image 3).

I am now re-investigating the works of Juan Miró - always among my favourite artists - with an increased awareness of the issues he addressed in such an abstract visual language. In a series of *homages* to his beloved land, he redefined firstly the peasant – signified by a moustache and a wide-brimmed black hat; then the stripes of the Catalan flag - banned under Franco, but in Miró’s hands abstracted to bring succour to his community without attracting political censure; and thirdly, the archetypal woman of the Mediterranean – signified by the curving, grounded feminine form as in “Homage to Barcelona” (see Image 1) . It speaks for itself that this abstraction was widely appreciated by the people of Catalonia. Miró, in my view, responded to the constrictions of the repressive society in which he worked with a courage and wit that confounded the unimaginative dictatorship and brought real hope to everyday people. Of course Miró was not alone. Picasso, another artist closely associated with Catalonia - though originally from Andalusia - made perhaps the most significant European contribution to twentieth century visual culture. Yet for me, there is a magical quality to Miró’s work that could only have come from this great place, steeped in sunlight and full of colour. From Gaudi buildings to the Picasso Museum, the medieval Cathedral Quarter to Las Ramblas, all in warm sunny November weather, the city was a joy to explore (see Image 2).



Image 4. Gaudi's unfinished masterpiece, Sagrada Familia

Reflecting on the discourses of ‘anarchism’

In our final event at CNT on Sunday afternoon, we met local anarchists and socialists. Impassioned discussions brought the struggles of the Catalans vividly to life. The Spanish-wide anarchist union CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) was founded in Barcelona in 1910 and continues to play its part in promoting freedom of thought for Iberian people. The CNT maintains a huge archive of leaflets, books, posters and underground newspapers from the fascist years - which many local artists and poets contributed to. We met organised, self-educated anarchists at CNT - busting a massive hole in my image of an essentially woolly activism. That idea simply didn't hold up to what we saw at CNT. What's more, without this ALP study trip I doubt I would ever have made the connection between anarchism, Catalan language and abstract art. But our contextualised visits, coupled with investigations into the art and architecture of Barcelona, brought these rich facets of culture to my attention.



Figure 5. Spanish and Catalan flags above the government buildings

Throughout those tightly packed Barcelona days, I was aware that language use formed a crucial aspect of our mediated encounters. Below I attempt to separate the layers of meaning and draw some conclusions.

A mediated understanding of FACEPA: Interpreters as cultural makers of meaning

Our interpreter-members stand out in my memory for two occasions in particular. One was the visit to FACEPA Women’s group, where Carly clearly understood in depth the background the group presented. Her knowledge of the subject brought an impassioned reading of voluntary women’s support work in Catalonia to our ears. We then responded, through our interpreters, with our experience of Scottish women’s issues. And on our first visit to La Verneda, I’ll always remember Barbara taking David’s just-composed poem and extemporising her translation of it to the assembly (see Image 4). “Everyone has a right to be heard” she said. Although all of us working in community development sign up to this philosophy, rarely do we get to see it so powerfully illustrated.



Figure 6. Barbara translating as David (right) listens to his poem in Spanish

Language as a vehicle for notions of identity

The semi-autonomous state of Catalonia has become largely successful in conducting its affairs through its native language. Catalan is the first language of schools, community centres, small businesses – truly the language of the people. Because of my own trilingual (Irish-English-Gaelic) identity, I was curious about the 9.5 million people across the west mediterranean coast who speak Catalan. The Catalans have overcome every attempt to suppress their language from the late middle ages onwards, although most people we met can switch to Castilian-Spanish when required. For the ALP group visits, our hosts each made a major concession and spoke to us in Castilian, so that our interpreters could understand with ease. Language as such didn't come up as a topic. It was there, like the Meditteranean, unacknowledged and incontrovertable.

In discussions with Ashraf Abdelhay back in Edinburgh, he picked up on these linguistic points. “What we are observing here is not a simple ‘transfer’ of objectified substance from one linguistic code into another,” he said. “Rather, translation/interpretation here is a very complex act involving multiple but ordered processes such as decontextualisation and recontextualisation of indexical meaning”. The point is that we serve no-one by assuming that all is understood, through the translated text or the interpreted, spoken

word.⁹ An idea, carried through language by a series of images that depend heavily on cultural context, manifests in our imagination according to our personal ‘library’ of signs and symbols that is itself dependent on the cultural landscape we inhabit.

Conclusion: Reading and renewing our adult learning experience

Friendships formed during the 2010 Barcelona trip have brought us to this reflective discussion within ALP. The primary sources for this ALP-Concept project were the sound recordings I made. Although hesitating to record our first meetings, the minidisc soon became an important archive tool. Our hosts made sure that we saw the real Barcelona and that we learned the story of the people, from the people. The warmth of our welcome was tangible, not least from our two on-the-ground organisers, Mhairi Bain and Andreu Cabrero. For them the district of La Verneda was the pivotal point of what they wanted to show us. There is nothing flash or arty there, yet when the people party, the whole district shines brightly. For the fiesta that week streets were closed off, stages erected, lights festooned the squares and hey presto, the worries of the everyday could vanish - for a while at least. Many crimes against the Catalan people could be cited in defence of the dour, but they can party - as indeed can we. Our encounters with Catalan folk were full of warmth. We held hands with new friends, with each other – a symbol of common bonds, of solidarity. We raised our voices in “Auld Lang Syne” to close most of our historic meetings with the working, thinking people of Barcelona. It was a celebratory gesture that still resonates two years later and enables us to gloss over the inevitable cracks in our collective experience.

This ALP-Concept Writing Project can be seen as a natural progression from ALP’s PFRG¹⁰. We have invited our Catalan colleagues to continue the dialogue here on these pages. We are writing the Caledonia to Catalonia World, considering our shared experiences and seeking to use this knowledge to refresh and renew the much-loved association that is ALP.

⁹ Mhairi, an experienced translator and interpreter, explains that “translation” is the term always used for the written form and that “interpretation” relates specifically to the spoken word.

¹⁰ Paulo Freire Reading Circle, monthly ALP reflective practice group

**‘He really does not know how to kiss a woman but there is also sexuality in this too’:
Men en Diàleg of Barcelona**

Ashraf Abdelhay

ALP

Introduction

In this paper I intend to provide a broad analytic description of what happened when participants with various biographical trajectories came to reflect on certain mediated constructions of masculinity. This was the case when a group of learners of both sexes affiliated with the Adult Learning project (ALP) of Edinburgh took part in a session organised by ‘Homes en Diàleg’ (Men in Dialogue) in Barcelona¹¹. Homes en Diàleg was established in 2006 to critically deconstruct hegemonic versions of masculinity which promote gender violence and to consider the alternatives which prevent violence¹². The review of the various opinions, particularly the contradictions, point to the conclusion that masculinities and femininities are cultural inventions. The discursive struggle over the exact identification of the substance or connotation of specific gender roles is attributed to their temporal situatedness and the relative positionality of the interpreter. Even when there is a collective consensus over the rejection of a particular social configuration of masculinity (e.g., ‘violent masculinity’), there is an interesting discrepancy over the creative effect of this form of masculinity (e.g., whether it is attractive to ‘women’). The analysis shows that the participants navigated through various layers of history and social lives to contest the social value of a set of localised subject-making practices. Although the overall rationalising framework for examining the

¹¹ Since I was a participant in the same session, I do not claim any ‘objective’ neutral position on either the key issues discussed at the session or the way they are analytically described in this paper. My review is conducted from a particular perspective tainted by traces of specific cultural biography.

¹² For a discussion of gender violence see Valls, R., Puigvert, L., & Duque, E.(2008). Gender Violence amongst teenagers: Socialization and prevention. *Violence against Women*,14(7), 759-785; Flecha A., Pulido C., & Christou M. (2011). Transforming violent selves through reflection in critical communicative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17 (3), 246-255; Aubert, A., Melgar, P. & Valls, R. (2011). Communicative Daily Life Stories and Focus Groups: Proposals for Overcoming Gender Violence among Teenagers. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17 (3), 295-303.

relation between ‘violence’ and ‘sexual/emotion attraction’ presupposed a particular physical configuration, this mode of thinking was negated by other generally subordinated ideologies (e.g., the influential social role of the physically ‘disabled’). The review also demonstrates that the value of constructs such as ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ is not permanently fixed; they are contextual and dynamic. Thus one solid conclusion is that ‘masculinity’ in its (ideological) monolithic mode could not sustain the test of the group’s reflections.

The paper is structured into four sections: the next section presents a brief historiography about Homes en Diàleg. The third section provides a review of a discussion facilitated by Homes en Diàleg of some parts of classic films with the aim to illustrate how the group is reflexively engaged in the interrogation of the various forms of subjectivity. The focus is on the productive contradictions that emerged from this engagement. The final section concludes the piece. The key data sources for this review are tape-recorded interactions, photographic documentation, and other textual materials¹³.

A biographical note: Homes en Diàleg

Homes en Diàleg is an association of males dedicated to the combating of gender violence, particularly that inflicted by men on women. It is run on a voluntary basis and its membership embodies men from various walks of life. Homes en Diàleg takes the issue of gender violence as a serious social problem and strives to overcome it through educational praxis and socio-political activism. The group has been a member of the Plataforma unitària contra les violències de gènere¹⁴ (Platform against Gender Violence) since 2007. Homes en Diàleg derives its insights from the sociological theorising of Jesus ‘Pato’ Gomez¹⁵ and Paulo Freire¹⁶.

Since 2006, Homes en Diàleg has been in action to achieve two key objectives: to reveal the hegemonic model of masculinity with a focus on the way it is naturalised and

¹³ I am grateful to Déirdre ní Mhathún for providing the tape-recorded data.

¹⁴ <http://www.violenciadegenere.org/pcvg/index.php>(accessed 17 sep. 12).

¹⁵ Gómez, J. (2002). Learning Communities when learning in common means school success for all. *Multicultural Teaching*, 20(2): 13- 17.

¹⁶ Freire, P. (1993) [1970]. *The pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.

normalised in mediated interactions (e.g., films), and to examine alternative models of masculinity on the basis of key parameters including equality, respect, solidarity as opposed to violence and domination. Since it is generally believed that the education system plays a central role in the cultivation and rationalisation of specific forms of masculinity and not others, Homes en Diàleg primarily targets schools (primary and secondary) and universities with an awareness-raising agenda employing a theoretically-informed and politically committed dialogue as both a perspective and method of engagement with gender issues. The next section reviews the various positions of the contributors on the nature and patterns of masculinity (in relation to other roles) in particular social orders (e.g., 1950s) and their current relevance.

Interrogating the hegemonic category of ‘masculinity’

The session was opened by the coordinators¹⁷ with a brief introduction about the formative history and the objectives of the group. To show that masculinity comes in multiple forms, the organisers played some carefully selected clips from three classic films: ‘Streetcar Named Desire’ (1947); ‘Play it Again Sam’ (1972), and Dirty Dancing (1987). The chosen clips were intended to highlight three key forms of masculinity practices in relation to femininity ones as a ground for the group discussion. They contain various femininity and masculinity practices. The space limitation can only allow for a brief sketch of each story.

The ‘Streetcar Named Desire’ (1947) is a classic movie depicting the then very patriarchal nature of the American society. The film is about love, violence and social stratification. The second story is ‘Play it Again, Sam’, which is 1972 film (based on a play) written and starred by Woody Allen. The story revolves around a romantic, non-violent but unconfident and shaky male identity. The third film ‘Dirty Dancing’ (1987) is about a love story developed in a holiday resort between a caring, romantic and professional dancer and a young girl. The next section looks at how the participants reacted to a set of structured questions for discussing the masculinity forms displayed in the clips.

¹⁷ In this article I will refer to the organisers of Homes en Diàleg as ‘coordinators/facilitators’, while I use ‘participants/contributors/colleagues’ when referring to ALP members.



Figure 1: Facilitators introducing Men en Diàleg

Decoupling the ‘violence-attraction’ link: Group discussion

It is worth asserting that only some parts of the above movies were shown to the participants with some broad contextualisation by the coordinator of the missing parts. Three questions were set by the facilitator for the contributors to have in mind before they saw the selected clips:

- 1) Which model(s) of masculinity do you think prevents gender violence?
- 2) Which model(s) of masculinity do you think promote gender violence?

3) Which model(s) will be attractive to women?



Figure 2: Men en Diàleg (participants watching a clip)

After a clip from ‘Streetcar Named Desire’ was shown, the contributors were asked to attend to the following question: Why is Stanley so attractive to Stella? Is it ‘because of’ or ‘in spite of’ his violence? When the coordinator signalled the start of the discussion, the order of speaking opportunities was unclear for some contributors (who should speak first?). This is evident in the following legitimate question posed by a female contributor: ‘shall men speak first and women after?’. Although the coordinator’s reply to this question was that both sexes have equal speaking rights, the very fact that the question was raised points to the conclusion that ‘the right to speak’ is gendered and gendering to the core.

One of the responses to the set question is that the relationship between Stanley and Stella is based on power and sex in the sense that ‘he is attracted to her as an animal man’. To stimulate the discussion further, the coordinator queried: ‘does sexual attraction have to be based on violence?’ Another female colleague believed that there is interplay between two kinds of power: ‘intellectual power’ associated with Stella in a dialectical interplay with the ‘physical power’ of Stanley. At this point, one of the male participants tried to disqualify the dominant interpretive frame by arguing that the discussion of the link of violence and sexual/emotional attraction excludes ‘disabled’ persons. He

contended that some disabled people provided better role models of masculinity. A third view by a female contributor argued that Stanley's violent acts were provoked by the insensitive commanding style of his wife. The point here is that for this contributor, Stanley's violence was an interactionally motivated behaviour. This point led the coordinator to provide further contextualisation of the shown clips (by narrating the missing scenes). When one of the male colleagues argued that Stanley's violence was class-based, the coordinator responded that violence cuts across class (it can occur within the same class). Further, one of the female contributors thought that the wife (Stella) had to be appreciative of what her husband was providing for her (i.e., in his capacity as a bread winner).

What we are witnessing here is the fact that female contributors in particular invoked forms of femininity as a relational way of making sense of the practices of Stanley. Another participant noted that Stanley's moments of 'weakness' was indicative of the Freirean insight that the oppressors present themselves as 'victims'. The facilitator summed up the discussion by stating that 'Stella is not ignoring violence' but rather she is 'attracted' by Stanley's violence. He explained that violence is not natural or inherent in the genetic make-up of the person; rather it is a product of socialisation. He noted that Stella would not change him or he would no longer be attractive to her.

The coordinator asked the participants to watch some clips from 'Play it Again Sam' and answer the question as to whether Allan's model of masculinity was attractive and whether it could prevent gender violence. One of the answers by a male colleague was that Allan's model of masculinity was 'very unattractive' since he was incapable of performing a kiss. A female participant believed that Allan's character was not attractive but funny; however, she said she would love to spend time with him. She elaborated that Allan could end up hurting himself physically or psychologically if he failed to get his needs fulfilled. The coordinator argued that Allan's model of masculinity was not attractive because he lacked self-confidence. In his view, Allan's version of masculinity was egalitarian minus sexual attraction. He added that the masculinity model portrayed by Allan asserted the link between violence and sex by the implied contrast to Stanley's violent and sexy identity in the 'Streetcar Named Desire'; thus this model of masculinity,

in his view, is not really promoting the overcoming of gender violence. However, a female participant provided the following interesting counter-view:

I think he [Allan's model of masculinity] is attractive to me, because he is [a]gentleman. He really does not know how to kiss a woman, but there is also sexuality in this too. I think he is attractive to me ... because sex can be different, can be animal sex, but can be very gentle sex. So his gentleness attracts me personally as a woman.

The coordinators reacted by making a reference to some studies which, as they stated, proved that a lot of women feel attracted to violent men. Now the contributors were asked to watch some clips from the third film 'Dirty Dancing'. By way of introducing it, the organiser noted that Johnny provided a successful model of masculinity in 'Dirty Dancing' since Johnny is said to have successfully combined both physical strength and passion/love. They also invoked Gomez's argument that love is a social practice. Now the participants should reason the question of whether Johnny's role was attractive, the kind of masculinity model he represents, and whether it prevents gender violence. Let us see how the participants reacted to this model of masculinity: One female colleague thought that the notion of violence depends on the experiences of women. She stated that 'I [have] hated violence since I was a child', thus for her, 'to be violent is not attractive'. Another male participant noted that the dancing scene in Dirty Dancing was 'a dream' (unrealistic). However, a female contributor responded that 'sexuality is situated and contextualised in your physical body' in the sense that equal sexual relationships could be embodied and physically communicated and celebrated. A third male contributor countered that there is a 'beast' in everyone, whether a man or a woman, and he believed that it is written in the DNA; however, he added, through socialisation people learn how to control this 'beast'. This view was rejected by a male participant who believed that our identities are a 'product of construction'. The session ended with a rounding-up by the coordinator of the various models of masculinity exemplified and their attributions with an emphasis on Johnny's form of masculinity as comparatively the most reasonable one.

By way of concluding: towards a situated understanding of 'masculinity'

In this brief contribution I have provided a descriptive account of a session run by Men Diàleg in Barcelona. The session which was actively attended by ALP's members from Edinburgh addressed the question of how violence practices are manifested, interpreted and rationalised. I have broadly examined the construct of 'masculinity' and how it is situationally constructed and contested by inspecting the responses of the participants to the clips shown. The review of the various views on (the displayed) masculinities and their values has shown that there was a common consensus over the rejection of physical violence. Yet, the participants differed significantly on the exact cultural load or value association of some masculinity practices. It is clear that all agreed that violence in all its forms (not just physical but also symbolic forms) is a reality in this society and generally in all human societies. For the female colleagues, the cultural formula 'violence is attractive to women' was rejected. However masculinity practices portrayed and cued as 'sexually unattractive' and 'egalitarian' were found to be emotionally appealing to some female participants. The conclusion here is that value attributions such as 'attractive', 'unattractive', and 'sexual' are rendered deeply cultural and shaped by the individual's biographical history. One of the implications that can be drawn here is that to interrogate the hegemonic version of masculinity (which should not be necessarily correlated with men) what is required is a historical and socio-economic contextualisation of social practices. This brief paper which is based on observation and audio recording of a single session cannot do justice to the full range of the activities the group is involved in, nor to the complex context in which it is operating. There is much need to understand how the foundational concept of 'masculinity'(and 'femininity') can be turned into a productive research tool without falling into the essentialist trap of correlating it with a particular sex. We need also to understand whether and how the current gendered system of social relations justifies or reinforces itself through the very discourses of equality it purports to promote.

“We talk about adult things here, not just children’s things”: ALP’s visit to CEIP Mare de Déu de Montserrat School in Barcelona

ALP group member

I remember five tightly-packed sunny Catalan days in November, when Edinburgh temperatures were below freezing. We displayed the normal catalogue of gripes that you’d find in any group of adults who are far from their comfort zone. Sometimes over-long days led to clashes and we retreated into smaller groups to establish a calmer territory - an instinctive, unspoken usage of dialogical methods. Friendships emerged, communities of interest were nurtured.

The broad programme we followed was designed by two great friends of ALP currently living in Barcelona, Mhairi Bain and Andreu Cabrero. Mhairi pulled lots of strings to arrange our visit to the multicultural school in Terrassa, some way outside the city.

The extraordinary thing about the CEIP Mare de Déu de Montserrat school. is that they teach all subjects to even their youngest children through dialogical methods,. The ten year olds we met there were funny, confident and articulate. They were not in the least bit thrown by the assorted bunch of Scottish visitors standing around them as they concentrated on a dialogical reading of Cervantes, or sharpened up their arithmetic skills - in English, their third or maybe even their fourth language. For our benefit, the discussions we had with the young students were conducted in Castilian and in English where young people were comfortable enough, rather than Catalan in which most of their daily work is conducted. We saw their small radio studio, where skills are learnt and shared among young students, parents and friends of the school. We met the Roma school inspector, doing his routine check of Roma children’s attendance. He spoke openly about his difficulty in persuading the Roma that school is important. Billy Forbes from the ALP group picked up that point and described issues in Scotland where local authorities can be unsympathetic towards traveller lifestyle and culture. The issues were the same here, we were told. All the schoolchildren come from complex cultural backgrounds. One young girl, her fellow classmate told us, spends part of the year in a

school in Morocco, but prefers it in Montserrat. We got the sense that everyone in and around the school community was highly valued and always welcome. The concierge moonlights as leader of the men's dialogical reading group; one mother is known as the 'radio teacher'; other mothers take groups swimming, or attend literacy groups with the youngest children in tow. The head teacher explained that this participation is a key part of the success of the school. Parents are deeply involved in the running of the school and are welcome informal assistants in many of the classes, where their supported and well-prepared contribution is encouraged. The mothers who spoke to us confidently explained how an over-large class can allow the opportunity for breaking into small dialogical groups, which adds dynamism to the learning environment for adults and children alike.

Q: "Why do you like the circle?"

"We talk about adult things here, not just children's things"

"If somebody doesn't understand something, everyone talks about it together"

The innovative teaching methods at Montserrat are heavily geared towards assimilation into mainstream Catalan life, which is clearly a priority for this school. The neighbourhood it sits in is predominantly North African and most of the children we met came from outside Spain originally. Our understanding was that the main festivities celebrated there are local to Catalonia. The languages taught at the school are firstly Catalan, then Spanish (Castilian) and International English. We did not hear mention of Arabic, or French which might be a common language among North African immigrants, nor of religion. These questions aside, it was a complete delight to meet everyone at CEIP Mare de Déu de Montserrat school. The ALP group talked for many hours afterwards about how completely taken we were with the children and what they had to teach us about dialogical learning methods. A poignant moment from that day came just as we were leaving the reading group. We had moved back tables, all joined hands and sung "Auld Lang Syne" together joyously.¹⁸ Déirdre went back to pick up the minidisc, and noticed a very shy girl sitting down but trying to communicate something. She

¹⁸ The better-known of Burn's "Auld Lang Syne" tunes is already familiar locally, and is used for a song of farewell in Catalonia – "L'hora dela adéus", which undoubtedly helped us to convey our message of friendship and solidarity - a happy coincidence that we discovered from Mhairi Bain afterwards.

caught the attention of the teacher and asked her to interpret. “I really love to dance” the shy girl told them, “but I don’t like to sing very much”. Déirdre tried to explain. “Singing is an important link for us. The boys in our group are football-mad, but most of the girls aren’t very interested in that at all. Singing is a way we can keep together”. Afterwards we learned that this little girl was opening up for the very first time in the school, telling her story and contributing to the discourse. We like to think the positive energy created together that day - Caledonians, Catalans, football and song - helped her along that journey of participation.

My Reflections on Adult Learning Project's (ALP) Barcelona Trip

Billy Forbes

ALP

1. How my social background influenced my particular interests

I was taught at Kelvin School (Glasgow) which catered for the Partially Sighted/ Blind. I was there between the ages of 8 and 13 and I was in a class of 15 to 18 children. I studied Scottish History, Geography, Highland Dancing, English, Arithmetic and I learned to play Musical instruments. I particularly enjoyed hearing about Scottish History - the Lochs, Mountains, Glens, the Clan-systems and the Battles with England. I moved to Lochend Secondary School (also Glasgow) at 13. It was within the Mainstream educational system, which meant that I was not protected as I had been at Kelvin School. In other words, I was no longer 'wrapped in cotton wool'), I soon learned about the outside world. I left school at 15 years of age and, two weeks later, I got a job.

As a result of being a carer for my father, I had a lot of direct experience in the Care Sector. Through the Scottish Human Services Trust (SHST) I gave evidence to various Parliamentary committees in the Scottish Parliament regarding Educational issues, in particular regarding Mental Health and Community Care. I did quite a lot of research into the situation in Northern Ireland, so that my contribution could be based on a well grounded, balanced knowledge of the situation in the UK. as a whole. The Community Care Act was passed in 1990, but there was still a lot of work to do before it was implemented in 1993. For example, some areas of the Act were seen as to be carried out by Social Services while others came under the jurisdiction of the NHS. I felt good that I had contributed to the end product.

I worked with such people as Hector McKenzie, a former Fund Manager for the Scottish Executive Health Dept, and Mary Mulligan MSP who later became Deputy Health Minister under Malcolm Chisholm. I learned a great deal about our Parliamentary

System, in particular the ways in which ordinary voters could contribute to getting legislation passed. Even though the SHST was disbanded, I was able to use my skills on the Scottish Civic Forum which was set up 1999.

In due course, I became a Volunteer Advisor with Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). I enjoyed this work which lasted for 6 years. My boss once said that I was known for getting things done - like a dog with a bone – determined!. Of course, I had to help with a wide range of problems which only added to my knowledge of community life in Scotland.

2. My comments on our experience of visits to four sites of learning in Barcelona

Men en Diàleg (Men in Dialogue)

We were informed that this group was started because men thought it was important to consider male issues. I was able to speak about a Men's Health Group which was set up in Drumchapel (Glasgow). I informed that group that in the late 70s/early 80s, the adult male population of this suburb, who worked mainly in Heavy Industry, began losing their jobs, because shipbuilding contracts were slackening, coal-mining was being phased out and the steelworks at Ravenscraig had closed. The Drumchapel Health Group was set up to address mainly dietary issues. To give them an idea of the problem, I said that life-expectancy of men in Drumchapel at that time was 45 - 55, while half a mile away in Bearsden, it was 65 - 72 years! This was mainly due to the better diet of men in Bearsden.

The discussion of the Barcelona men's group was mainly centred on male identity and image on that day. We heard about the expectations that adolescent boys had of how they should grow up - this seemed to be mainly "Macho". This is the main image boys get from Western media, especially films. The whole session was based on comparisons between different Hollywood films.

FACEPA'S Women's Group

Here we heard how older women remembered the hardships under Franco's rule, in particular with regards to Women's Rights. Nowadays, girls have better educational opportunities. This has been helped by Spain being part of the European Union – an institution that has insisted in equal opportunities for boys and girls.

We had the opportunity to get involved in their music/poetry workshop, which I found most interesting. For the women in that group, it seemed 'strange' to have men present, and we had the sense that they could not really open up as freely as they might have done without us being there. I found it to be a moving experience.

Political Group: CNT

We visited the Headquarters of the CNT (The Confederación Nacional del Trabajo), and we were shown around the archive of books, magazines, tapes, CDs etc. The premises were not large but there was a lot of material stored there - on tightly packed shelves and cases. We sat through a presentation and discussion in which we were able to contribute. I felt that this session was nothing more than a potted history of the resistance movement against Franco and its impact on 21st century politics. Yet it was done in an interesting way.

I have to say that the thrust of the argument was biased entirely towards the far left. (There was a great deal about Communism and the Anarchist Movement.). It was interesting to hear that the Anarchist vision was not the same as Communism. In some respects, it could be seen as superior because it allows for different viewpoints to be considered, not in a chaotic way, but within a structured system. It seemed to me to be ironic, therefore, that the presentation did not include a more balanced range of views (especially as our hoped-for visit to the Catalan Parliament did not in the end take place!)

Montserrat School

We visited a multicultural primary school. The pupils came from a variety of backgrounds - travellers, refugees, ethnic-minority communities. The children were taught English (literature and language), arithmetic and art and all the general subjects normally taught in a state primary school (the school has its own radio station). They

were taught to read Spanish through well-known stories such as Don Quixote. This meant that the class was divided into 'interactive groups'. Each group had between 6 to 8 pupils. The school appeared to enjoy our visit and we sang "Auld Lang Syne" to the children, they joined in by clasping hands with us in the traditional way. I was very impressed with this visit. In fact, it was the most enjoyable and positive of all my experiences on the trip.

Conclusion: Looking back on the Barcelona Trip

I have mixed feelings about the experience the Barcelona trip afforded me - a mixture of frustration and positive feedback. I was particularly disappointed by our visit to the CNT headquarters. As I have said already, there was too much emphasis on one side of the argument - one needs to see both ying and the yang. I was also expecting to find out if our Scottish system of public participation in government had been influenced by the Catalanian experience at all. Also, how similar (or not) forums of public debate were in the two political systems. (Of course, it did not help that we did not visit the Catalanian Parliament as we had hoped.). The other group which caused me discomfort was the Men's Group. To me, it seemed all focused on different films and endless comparisons between them. There did not seem to be the same depth of discussions that I had experienced in Glasgow. I felt the visit was not relevant to ALP's interests. We do not hold such a discussion group in Tollcross.

As I said before, I was moved by our visit to the Women's Group. My experiences at the Citizen's Advice Bureau had shown me that most women prefer a female advisor for Women's issues otherwise they do not feel able to open up and talk. I felt privileged to be involved in the frank and open discussion with this group. It is possible that they could not be as open as usual, but I feel they did their best to make us men welcome.

For me, the highlight of the whole trip was the visit to the school. In so many ways, it was like the experience I had had at Kelvin School. I felt it was even better because each group had only 6 - 8 pupils. I was impressed at the level of knowledge of these young people. Of course, the fact that the Paulo Freire system of education was used helped! This is what I also believe in, and it was good to see how well it can work.

The cherry on the cake was that the children were obviously so pleased to show us what they could do. The school was creating confident boys and girls, something which is key to education.

DAY OUT IN BARCA

Peter Gossip

ALP

Breakfasted and all prepared,
we traipsed through a thinning vapour
to the platform as we breathed mist out
while we walked and talked.

But, hey, ho!
the drivers had struck for two hours.
The locals were evident by the absence of the clatter of their patter -
it was just us with a half hour to go,
standing, sitting, pacing
in the heatening melt of the missed.*

The birds around the station were silent except
one warbler refusing to sing
but giving out a plaintive contact-call
not answered. The World was Wrong.

Normality resumed and, yes,
the train was full and we lurched off
to the city.

Arrived, and, thanks be,
one of us of an autistic bent
directed us accurately through the maze
of the stances and corridors
up and out at the exact exit we needed.

And, then came the paradoxes
(of any great metropole)

There were the wide streets of the centre
and the alleyways of the outskirts -
there were the bright flashes of green parrots
wrecked by their screeching -
there was the Gaudi Cathedral
still being refurbished long after
an official reopening by the Pope -
there was siesta time through noon
and family parades at night.

But the constant
was matter-of-fact-warm welcomes
whichever group we met

and interest in our interest.

Caledonia has U.K.'s oil
Catalonia has Spain's grain.
Discuss.

.....
*the spelling "missed" is not a typo !!

Inspiration

Mhairi Fiona Bain and Andreu Cabrero

Translator (Barcelona), Secondary School Teacher (Barcelona)

The original dream of an ‘exchange of experiences’ between ALP and primarily the Escola de persones adultes La Verneda-Sant Martí (hereafter Escola d’Adults)¹⁹, FACEPA²⁰ and other organisations became a reality in 2010. We were lucky enough to help to organise visits and events for ALP members during their trip to Barcelona, and to share a lot of special moments with them, talking about education, love, Catalonia, Scotland and football.

Certain specific events are focused on in this article, since it would have been impossible to show the group all the different aspects of Barcelona, thus we concentrated on some areas, especially the learning experiences which have changed so many people’s lives.

The group that arrived in Barcelona from ALP was wonderfully heterogeneous, in terms of age, education, ethnicity, background, and almost any other ‘category’ you care to mention. This was fascinating to observe, and made the whole experience incredibly interesting and enriching. Here were people, many of whom had faced inequalities, and they were here to learn about others in a similar situation, within a different cultural context. Some of the people in the group had never left Scotland before, one person was in his eighties, others had but recently become literate, there were people from different cultures, and there was also a person with specific individual difficulties. We were amazed by their bravery, curiosity, interest and vibrancy, also by their wonder at being in such a beautiful city as Barcelona. A few days after they had arrived we went to their hotel to see how the visit was progressing. We wanted to talk to the group about the importance of representing Scotland, representing ALP, and representing themselves each time they went outside. The idea of forming part of a group, working together, helping each other, trying not to think so much about oneself and to think more about the group as a whole, and especially the idea of solidarity were all ideas presented to the group after dinner. They were now all part of something important. By the end of the trip,

¹⁹<http://www.edaverneda.org/>

²⁰<http://www.facepa.org/>

wonderful examples of solidarity were displayed by many members of the group, the group member with individual difficulties was helped in many ways, friendships were formed, and a bond was created between highly varied and diverse group members. Some of the visits we made and events we attended are described in the text below.

Visits to the Escola d'Adults in the Verneda neighbourhood

Many visits were made to this school, since it was the true focus of ALP's visit to Barcelona. Both ALP and this adult education school were founded in the late 70s and implemented theories by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Despite one being located in Edinburgh, and the other in Barcelona, they were and are both fighting the same battle: trying to make education more democratic and more egalitarian. We had both participated in these schools in different ways, and had experiences there which have helped us to understand our worlds and ourselves better: this democratic interaction was very inspiring for us and taught us a great deal. Therefore the fact that ALP visited the Escola d'Adults was deeply meaningful and we hope that at least a part of this feeling was shared by ALP learners.

Visit to the CEIP Mare de Déu de Montserrat school

We arrived at this primary school on a sunny morning and were warmly greeted by the head-teacher. The Escola d'Adults in la Verneda was the first Learning Community that ever existed in Spain. The excellent results it has obtained and the way it includes all social groups into society mean it has become a positive example to follow. Later, many other schools began to be transformed into Learning Communities, including this one. The Learning Communities project has been effective in improving the results of all children, including migrant children, and more and more schools have begun this transformation, the project now involves 121 schools in Spain and other countries²¹. There is a strong feeling of positivity when you step inside, and this intensifies when you see the cheerful smiles on the children's faces as they walk through the corridors. However these children are not just happy, they are also learning.

²¹ http://utopiadream.info/ca/?page_id=1645

ALP visitors were interested in how multiculturalism is tackled in this school. The educational approach of the CEIP Mare de Déu de Montserrat is not to use an innovative method, nor is it an assimilative approach. In this school, Successful Educational Actions are implemented that have been shown to overcome school failure, truancy and coexistence problems, especially in contexts where cultural minorities such as Roma or immigrants coexist. One of these Successful Educational Actions is family participation and education. Families participate in all the decision-making and learning areas in the school. The activities carried out, as well as their focus, are decided on in mixed committees consisting of teachers, families and other community members. This is exactly the opposite of an assimilatory approach. The voices of all cultures living in the area are considered when any decisions are made in the school, no matter the type: organising festivities, deciding which courses families will be offered or how and what children will learn inside the classroom.

Moreover, families are also present in the classroom and participate as volunteers in Interactive Groups, another Successful Educational Action. This is a form of classroom organisation that has proven to be highly effective in overcoming school failure and coexistence. Classes are organised into small groups which are heterogeneous in terms of cultural background, gender and learning level. A family or community member encourages the children to help each other to complete the activities. In these Interactive Groups children carry out 4 activities, each one lasting 15 minutes. Every 15 minutes the group changes activity. Priority is given to instrumental subjects such as mathematics, reading, Catalan, Spanish and English, all of which are skills these children need to avoid social exclusion. If the best actions to acquire these competences are denied to these children, a great injustice is committed, denying them the opportunity for social inclusion. Since the school became a Learning Community, there has been a great improvement in the schools' academic results. In the reading assessment of Catalan schools undertaken annually by the Catalan Government, there has been a huge improvement in linguistic competences, while the number of migrant students has

continued to grow²². English language levels are also very high among students in this school, and they are making significant improvements in all instrumental subjects.

In an Interactive Group, it is possible for a Moroccan mother wearing a headscarf to volunteer in English classes. This mother has lived in London and her spoken English is very good. This helps to remove the stereotypes that children from the hegemonic culture believe about Arab women. They see a woman with a headscarf teaching English. She has therefore become a good cultural role model for both Arab and other children in the class.

The focus in this school is based on the equality of difference. Each of the decisions and activities that are undertaken are based on the equal right all people have to live differently. This is one of the seven principles of dialogic learning that is at the basis of all the actions that take place.

This school was chosen to carry out one of the six case studies that were undertaken in the *INCLUD-ED. Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education project (2006-2011)*. The INCLUD-ED project on school education is research of the highest scientific standards and with the most resources that has ever been carried out in the European Commission research framework programmes. It was coordinated by the University of Barcelona, and was undertaken along with 14 other universities from various European countries. The case studies were chosen in different European countries and the criterion was that they had to carry out actions that help to overcome school failure, truancy and coexistence problems, especially in disadvantaged and multicultural contexts.

The results of this case study were published in scientific journals indexed in the Journal Citation Report, the database containing the scientific journals with the highest impact factors, from all areas of knowledge.

Multiculturalism and different types of religion, cultural habits and differences are talked about in Dialogic Literary Gatherings with families and in others with children, after

²² <http://www.ub.edu/includ-ed/docs/4.%20D.22.3.%20Working%20papers.%20Case%20studies%204th%20round.pdf>

reading texts like Homer's *Odyssey* and other classics such as *Arabian Nights*. This is done based on an egalitarian dialogue between all the different cultures. We attended one of these Dialogic Literary Gathering in which children were reading the *Odyssey*, and at the end we all held hands and sang "Auld Lang Syne" which was a heartfelt and uplifting moment for all of us.

Further information about the CEIP Mare de Déu de Montserrat school and its successful educational actions can be found in the references listed below.

Homes en Diàleg (Men in Dialogue): will we dare to change our lives forever?

How can such a strong link between attractiveness and violence exist? Should nice guys accept their fate as the perfect husband in a relationship where passion is no more than a dream? How can a man be against violence but still have an extremely passionate relationship with his partner? How can we unite tenderness and strong, wild desire? Can we live a full life in which passion, love and stability go hand in hand? *Homes en Diàleg* is an association built up based on the love theory propagated by Jesus Gómez (Gómez, 2004) to try to face these issues and to overcome gender violence, which is closely linked to all those stereotypes. Science, hope and dialogue are the main cornerstones used to pursue this task. This is what the meeting between ALP learners and *Homes en Diàleg* aimed to address. The diversity of the members of *Homes en Diàleg* enabled a rich dialogue about how to overcome gender violence and to be able to achieve the affective relationships we all would hope to have. Within this framework, the dialogue was enriching for everyone who participated. Love and passion is an issue which is common to all cultures and countries and, indeed, is perhaps the most important one in all of them. Superstition has to be transformed into a strong mixture of science and dialogue, and an inter-cultural session such as the one that took place between *Homes en Diàleg* and ALP members helps us to move towards these objectives.

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