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The Tyranny of Academic Fashion: A Reject's Lament

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Preamble

Michael Newman has been making a distinctive and internationally recognized contribution to radical adult education and social action for over 40 years. His books include *Adult Education and Community Action* (1975), *The Poor Cousin: A Study of Adult Education* (1979), *The Third Contract: Theory and Practice in Trade Union Training* (1993), *Defining the Enemy: Adult Education in Social Action* (1994), *Maeler's Regard: Images of Adult Learning* (1999) and *Teaching Defiance: Stories and Strategies for Activist Educators* (2006). In this article he reflects upon his recent experience of being 'denied publication' by a 'learned' academic journal – and what this tells us about what we're up against today and how we must continue to struggle for what we believe in, however academically unfashionable this may be. Now more than ever, adult education needs 'eccentrics and enthusiasts' to challenge and counteract the common sense of the era. (Ian Martin, Honorary Fellow University of Edinburgh)

A worrying memory

I remember seeing a film with Anthony Hopkins playing an elderly mathematician. As a young man he had broken new ground. Now he feels his inspiration has returned, and he calculates with a passion, only to realise when others look over his work that he has been writing nonsense!

In the early part of 2011, I wrote an article and submitted it to a learned journal, which sent it out to three reviewers. I felt I had presented an argument well, so was surprised when the article was rejected. I tidied it up, broke one of the sections into

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two, and resubmitted. The article was rejected again. This time the official language from the journal was final: " … your manuscript has been denied publication."

Denied! Now I was worried. Had I, like Hopkins' mathematician, written rubbish? I reread the article, and two other articles I had recently published. All three made use of anecdote as well as analysis, messed around with philosophers and social theorists, and contained no empirical research. As far as I could see, my rejected article was on a par with the other two.

Reassurance

But the question remained. Had I lost the plot? Worse! Had I lost the plot to such a degree that I could not see that I had? I sent my article to an old friend, who I knew would pull no punches if she thought my article was rubbish. She wrote back reassuring me by talking of my article's "humanity", "hopefulness", and "eloquent argument." (Well, I did say she was a friend.)

My friend suspected that the reviewers had not engaged with my ideas, and she was right. None of them had challenged any of the arguments in the article. This was odd, because I had left myself open to attack. For example, in a section dealing with purpose, I made use of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre and, in so doing, was embracing the idea of free will. "Free will is a contested concept," one of the reviewers might have said. "What about the hooded prisoner in Abu Ghraib prison? Where's the free will in that?" In a section on reason, I referred to Jurgen Habermas. "Habermas is a rationalist," one of the reviewers might have said. "Our minds are too untidy. You'd be better off with the postmodernists!" But I am putting words into others' mouths. The reviewers said nothing of the sort, and, on matters of theory, they said nothing at all.

So where had I gone wrong? If the reviewers had nothing to say about my ideas and arguments, why had they taken against my article with such unanimity? The answer probably lies in the fact that all three had concentrated on matters of form and formality. And on matters of form and formality I am a heretic.

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Definitions

I was writing about "good non-credit adult education" and one of the reviewers wanted me to begin with a definition of the phrase. I dislike definitions. Many, if not most, are tautologies, written in leaden prose, and taking us nowhere much. A much quoted definition begins with these words: "Transformative learning is learning that transforms …" Surely, when we are writing to a specific audience, such as the readers of a learned journal, we can assume that the audience already has an interest in our subject and knows what we mean.

But there is more. Once we begin defining things, there is no knowing where to stop. We get trapped into a kind of *reductio ad absurdum.* Do I provide a definition of a whole phrase, in this case "good non-credit adult education"? Or should I define "non-credit adult education" or "non-credit" or "adult education" or "adult" or, heaven help us, "education"?

Communication is possible because language is a part of our lifeworld. We simply *know* what we and others mean. Providing definitions can be counter-productive. They render explicit the implicit understandings upon which we construct our lives. In this way they can disrupt the flow of an argument. We spend time and intellectual effort describing a particular phenomenon, rather than making reference to it naturally in our discourse.

Worse, definitions destroy the ambiguity upon which all communication is based. Once formulated, they tie us and our readers down to a single meaning. They limit our ability to imagine, to alter meanings as we go (as language does all the time), and to savour the insights that can occur with these alterations.

Literature reviews

Two of the reviewers wanted me to begin the article with a literature review. But literature reviews can clog up the opening section of an article and prevent us from taking our readers directly to the heart of the matter. And what do we actually mean

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by a literature review? Is it a review of all relevant literature? In which case we end up compiling an encyclopedia, and never get to write the article at all. Is it a kind of halfway house, in which we list some of the relevant literature but not all? In which case we are compiling an abridged encyclopedia, and may or may not get to the article later. Or is it a compilation of the two or three articles or books we deem particularly relevant? In which case we will cite these publications in the article anyway.

There is more. Literature reviews set the wrong tone. They mean that we start an article by looking backwards, and risk losing our readers before we say anything new.

And literature reviews are insulting in that they imply that our readers are incapable of doing a background search for themselves.

Conclusions

One reviewer wanted me to end with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of what I had said. The whole article was a discussion of theory and practice, and a conclusion of the kind the reviewer was suggesting would have been a repetition. Again, I have never understood why so many of our tribe end whatever they have been saying by saying it all over again! If the substantive part of the piece has been well argued, and the readers are equipped with moderately functioning memories, then there is no need to do this. And even if some memories are faulty, the readers have the article in front of them and can go back and read the relevant bits again.

This problem is compounded by the confusion of summary with conclusion. The writer may head the final paragraphs of the piece with the word “Conclusion” when in fact she or he is providing a summary. A conclusion is the final phase of an argument, the moment when all the pieces coalesce, and something new has been created. There is no clunky, unsatisfactory repetition here. If we have written well, we have arrived at a new insight. And sometimes this insight is best encapsulated in a story, or a description, or a couple of lines from a poem, or a metaphor.

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Register

One reviewer thought my article was too informal. This comment presumes that a particular style of writing is suitable to the world of academic literature, and other styles are not. But it is a presumption I do not share. Good academic writing is good clear writing. Nothing more and nothing less. I used to ask students new to the academic game to imagine that they were writing to an elderly aunt who read extensively, enjoyed great literature and police procedurals equally, and liked sentences that began with a capital letter and ended with a full stop.

You know your aunt well, I would say, but do not see her all that often, so you write to her with an easy familiarity tempered with respect. Avoid the passive voice unless it is really necessary because it distances both you and your aunt from the subject. If you are expressing your own opinion, use the first person. Use colloquialisms as much as you like, so long as they hit the nail smack on the head. Know that your aunt has several hundred more books she wants to read, so make what you write worth reading. Be succinct. And do not be afraid to use the words "I like …", as in "I like the existentialists' belief in free will", and the words "I do not like …"' as in "I do not like the critical theorists' concepts of the lifeworld". But make sure you say why.

If you have a writing block, I would go on, actually write the letter, opening with the words "Dear Aunty Florence". Or if you find that just too twee, write the assignment as a letter to me, opening with something like "Dear Mike, I am having real trouble getting started but I want to say that …" You can delete the opening sentences when you write the final draft.

And remember why you are writing. You want to make a case. You want to convince. You want to make your readers think like you. All writing worth reading is polemic, even if it is cleverly disguised. Pay no attention to academics who claim that they can write with objectivity and academic detachment. No one can.

Paragraphs

One reviewer thought many of my paragraphs were too short. But how long is a piece

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of string? If a paragraph has a clearly stated theme and elaborates well on that theme, then the paragraph is the length it is, and that is the length it should be. This reviewer suggested joining some of the paragraphs up. But if each paragraph has a separate theme, then joining them up may confuse, or antagonise, the reader.

It may be a truism, but content should dictate the form, and not the other way around. If we have something to say, if we have allowed our ideas to take shape, and if we approach the task with a tidy and untroubled mind, then the words will flow. And when the words flow, the chapters, paragraphs and sentences look after themselves.

I know of no rule that says a paragraph cannot be a single word.

No.

Nor, as far as I know, is there a rule saying that a paragraph cannot go on for the length of a book …

Balance

One reviewer said that, as well as good non-credit courses, there were bad ones, which could end in acrimony. I should, she or he said, make mention of this dark side. But why did the reviewer say this? Was it out of a belief that there should always be a balance: that if I write about the good, then I must also write about the bad, if I write about the pros, then I must write about the cons?

Searching for balance can lead us into traps. In my experience the light side of non-credit adult education has outweighed the dark literally a thousand-fold. I have been head of two adult education institutions, and only ever encountered a handful of disturbed individuals among the thousands of students who passed through those institutions during my tenure. I saw no reason to manufacture a balance that was not there.

I have never understood the need for balance. The readers of a learned journal are adults. They can go searching for the other side of things if they feel they have to. I prefer to concentrate on putting my own case, and to be as one-sided as I like. And I am certainly not going to state my opponents' case for them. Life, this accidental

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opportunity to make meaning, is too short.

Research

In my article I cited a small piece of informal research, in which a teacher set out to identify her students' motives for attending two of her classes. One reviewer felt the teacher's research did not contain the necessary "ingredients" of a research study. But why should an insight found in a small qualitative enquiry be less worthy than an insight found in a formal research project, with its pilot studies, random sampling, control groups, triangulation, statistical number crunching, and the rest of it? One of the teacher's students had said she attended her class "because I want to forget about the terrible day in the office today and that I'll have to get up tomorrow morning". It is unlikely that a research project of the current positivist bent would have elicited this office worker's anguished response. Imagine it. "Circle your answer: I like my work: 1. Strongly agree; 2. Agree; 3. Don't know; 4. Disagree … And random sampling may well have eliminated the student from the research altogether.

I sometimes think that we adult educators are too big for our boots when we talk about research. Adult education is not rocket science. There are precious few rules to be set, generalisations to be established, or hypotheses to be tested. People absorb new information, test it against their own experience, mull it over individually and/or in the company of others, and take what is interesting and useful away with them. There is not much in this everyday activity to be scientific about.

What makes the world of adult education so special is the extraordinariness of every single learning event, the uniqueness of every group that gathers to learn, and the distinctive nature of every learning outcome. If we can resist the temptation to prove ourselves to our scientific cousins, and simply write in wonder at the humanity of our field, all will be well. In this case our resources will be any and every field of knowledge we care to use. The ingredients of our research will be curiosity and delight. The qualities will be acuity of observation, clarity of description, and honesty of interpretation. And the goal will be to honour every act of learning, be it individual or collective. Any research we do will be qualitative, illuminative, speculative,

intuitive, and celebratory.

Learning is central to the mysterious business of being, and being is an entirely personal phenomenon. We cannot experience someone else's being, and we cannot experience the effect that learning has on someone else's being. If we could, we would become that other person. In writing about learning, then, we may draw from others' accounts of their experience, but we can only write with authority about our own. And that writing, by definition, will be subjective.

And so, to my title

My friend, Peter Willis, calls the concern with form and formality "the tyranny of academic fashion".

A paradox

Those of us with a passion for adult education are living through paradoxical times.

Adult education is everywhere, provided by government departments concerned with land care, road safety, health, ageing, transport, communications, you name it, in land rights and reconciliation programmes, in book discussion groups, political parties, prisons, on activist websites like Avaaz, in the workplace, in trade unions and employers' associations, in friends of a hospital, friends of an art gallery, friends of a zoo, in gyms and on sportsfields, in doctors' surgeries, pre-natal clinics, in the corners of coffee shops, in gardens and national parks, on the net, on the net, on the net, in cancer support groups, on the streets of Montreal, Madrid, London, Bangkok, Paris ... And a lot of this adult education is no longer voluntary. We need to go on learning throughout our adult lives. We enter new jobs, join new organizations, buy new bits of technology, and maintain our edge (or our licence to practise) in our profession by continually updating our knowledge and honing our skills.

This proliferation of adult education needs inventive adult educators to bring good practice and new insights to all of its forms. Yet amidst such a wealth of adult education, the institutions that promote adult education and the theories that inform it

are in decline. At universities, the study of adult education (and much else) has lost out to the obsession with business studies. In the world of leisure, the practice of adult education is losing out to the mind-dulling vacuity of social media and the instant gratification of the internet.

Aiming high

If we are to survive, we need to stop scrabbling around in the foothills, and start climbing the mountain again.

We need to hear from the eccentrics and enthusiasts. Studies of Freire still have a lot to give us. (Did he open *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with a literature review?) What about writers like Astrid Von Kotze and her analyses of adult and development education in Africa (see the stunning report on a popular education initiative in South Africa she has recently published on the Popular Education Network), and the ever-cheerful, ever astute Danny Wildermeersch and his writings on inclusion and exclusion, the risk society, lifelong learning and everything else? What about the towering work of Jane Thompson, the rigorous and profound writing of Peter Mayo (see his latest major work on Freire), and the inspiring, lateral thinking of Peter Willis? Get Mechthild Hart back. What about that mob in the Department of Informal Education at Chulalongkorn University who were fusing Buddhist problem-solving with western adult learning theory? Are they still going? And the Popular Education Network, carefully tended by Jim Crowther. We need bubbling enthusiasts like Larry Nolan Davis. Do you remember his *Planning, Conducting, Evaluating Workshops*? We need to bring on the young and the new. And please, oh please, let's not go down the gurgler worrying about the length of a piece of string …

Postscript

I found a home for my shop-soiled article in *Concept,* 2013, Vol. 4, No.2. You can download it free of charge, at
http://concept.lib.ed.ac.uk/index.php/Concept/article/view/235

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Activist Turns Professional: Living the Tensions.

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When practitioners are personally active in struggles or campaigns, tensions arise out of the intersection between radical politics and particular professional practices in the field of Community Education. I will use personal reflections of involvement in political activism and campaigns while completing the Community Education degree in University of Edinburgh to explore what these tensions are and what could be the constructive ways to navigate them.

For the purpose of this article, I will use two ideal roles: 'the activist' and 'the professional'. My aim is not to define and compare these roles exhaustively but rather to use them as a tool to explain and clarify my position. The notion of 'the activist' serves the purpose of conceptualising most of my personal identity and behaviour in the last few years. From a cultural context of grassroots environmental and anti-capitalist (direct) action, I have been involved in student campaigning for environmental and social justice, engaging in actions that range from petitions, media stunts and educational activities to industrial action and occupations.

Yet I chose to do a professional degree about education because I believe the margins are not enough and we ought to infiltrate the system to use its resources to create the world we want to see. Thus from the very beginning of the programme I identified with the radical model (Martin 1987), as opposed to the 'universal' (equal access to services for everybody) and 'reformist' (the attempt to include those excluded in society) models. The radical model is characterised by its criticisms of the current capitalist system as the one creating the conditions for oppression and inequality, that are experienced by most of the target groups that Community Education serves (Fairweather 2011, pp.55-56). Thus interventions are geared towards helping people learn about these structural forces and how to overcome them by creating autonomous networks free of exploitation (Player 1996). The intention is not to engage in an

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argument about what model of Community Education is more valid. Countless authors have argued that education is not neutral (Crowther et.al. 2005, De St. Croix 2007, Freire 1972, Kirkwood 1990, Popple 1995, Shaw 2011, Wiggins 2011) but, rather, I am using this article to explore the tensions and intersections that arise out of being a professional with radical politics.

When talking about youth workers, Sercombe (2010) argues that at the core of their professionalism lies the commitment to serve a client group with some vulnerability. It follows that this is a service which benefits the public and society. In this respect, as Banks (2012) explains when talking about social workers, "accountability to service users, the general public, employers and others is an essential feature of developed professions, and specifically public service professions" (Banks 2012, p.2). In practice, this means being able to justify and explain one's actions in relation to the agreed standards and values of the profession. According to the CLD Standards Council for Scotland, these are:

- Self-determination - respecting the individual and valuing the right of people to make their own choices.
- Inclusion - valuing equality of both opportunity and outcome, and challenging discriminatory practice.
- Empowerment - increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence issues that affect them and their communities through individual and or collective action.
- Working collaboratively - maximising collaborative working relationships in partnerships between the many agencies which contribute to Community Learning and Development, including collaborative work with participants, learners and communities.
- Promotion of learning as a lifelong activity - ensuring that individuals are aware of a range of learning opportunities and are able to access relevant options at any stage of their life. (CLD Standards Council for Scotland 2013)

While these are arguably in line with the radical tradition, the reality of practice presents professionals with difficult choices, the outcomes of which align individuals

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towards radical or more reformist/universal positions. Banks (2012) argues that "a key accountability requirement for professionals is that they can demonstrate that their work has both measurable and beneficial outputs (what is actually produced or delivered) and outcomes (the overall effect of what is achieved or delivered)" (p.8). In practice though, differing claims can be made about what is beneficial and how that ought to be measured. Finally, Banks (2012) argues that this professional accountability is what makes social work a profession rather than just a charitable act, and that "the 'boundaries' between the personal and the professional realm have always been a site of contestation" (p.10).

As I develop into a professional role, my personal realm (radical politics) and professional accountability have certainly played out this contestation. In order to provide some structure to discuss this contestation, I would like to set out different areas for professional action in the workplace:

1. The patrons (i.e. the state, funders, and any line managers or directors which may be a limiting factor to the work)
2. The relationships with people/clients/service users
3. The purpose of engaging in those relationships

Each of these areas is filled with different types of tensions, but for the purpose of this article, I have chosen to focus on the one that I consider to characterise each area, respectively:

1. The degree of autonomy and the constraints that might make the work disempowering no matter the radical intentions behind it.
2. The notion of expertise and power (and whether such relationships are needed in the learning process).
3. The balance between making change or managing it.

The Tensions: Autonomy and Constraints

The daily life of a professional requires dealing with many constraints. As De St. Croix (2007, p.9) and Kirkwood (1990, p.144) argue, practice is shaped by ideology

in various ways: formalised as 'good practice' guidelines, in the organisational structure, the relationship between users and agencies, the priorities of funders and policy makers, and in the beliefs and values carried by users and professionals themselves. All of these impact on the feasibility and probability of different types of interventions.

Indeed many argue that the issues around professionalism are mainly located in the "state interference and control [that] are corrupting any progressive potential." (Bane 2009, Loughrey 2002, Shaw 2008). In particular, authors criticise bureaucratic policy processes and the shift from locally negotiated plans to centrally determined targets and outcomes (Jeffs and Smith 2008, p.280) which intensify the accountability requirements placed on professionals (Banks 2012, p.2) and thus suffocate more relevant and creative forms of practice. As Meade (2012) argues, "the state seeks not to stop the community sector, but to bring it into line so that it governs and is governed more effectively." (p.902)

Funding is one of the ways in which the state achieves this. Panet-Raymond (1987) describes funding as a time consuming straightjacket, which forces the definition of activities in such a way as to fit with state priorities. For example, at an organisation where I volunteered, a lot of their funding comes from a state agency; thus at least one out of four of their youth group sessions has to be around the related issues that this agency works on. While these sessions can still be delivered in a way that feels relevant to the young people and encourages critical thinking, it is nonetheless an imposed theme that will sometimes clash with the youth workers' and the young people's desires.

Nevertheless, there are certainly benefits in having the status and legitimacy of professional validation, despite these constraints and disadvantages. Aside from the obvious benefits of having access to resources, being seen as a 'professional' is not only useful to negotiate with the state but to communicate with certain groups and individuals who would not otherwise feel comfortable engaging in other autonomous, independent or more radical types of provision. In this light, Shaw and Crowther (1997) argue that even though the degree of autonomy in Community Education has

been affected, "workers still have some room to manoeuvre and create space for more challenging and politically relevant practice" (p.269). This is because "the terminology which constitutes the professional discourse e.g. empowerment, participation and relevance, is sufficiently ambiguous as to be able to support a range of purposes." (Rosendale 1996, pp.65-66)

There are, then, clear limits as to how much autonomy Community Educators can have; but we must accept these to get access to the people we want to work with and the resources needed to do so (beyond what is possible with the time available to activists in their personal lives). However, it is paramount to always "consider our reasons for doing any work that is neither excitingly educational nor the practice of autonomy and adventure." (De St. Croix 2007)

Expertise and Power

By the nature of engaging in a specific practice over time, professionals will end up with a degree of expertise in the area they work in. Many people have problematised the idea of people being 'experts': it seems to create a distinction between givers and recipients (Kothari 2005) (Illich 1977), "at the expense of more democratic forms of knowledge exchange" (Meade, 2012, p.897). This distinction is problematic because it creates expectations that then influence learners in what they can bring to the learning process, and limits educators in what they can learn from the interaction; this makes the process less valuable and useful.

In a similar way, Kirkwood (1990) argues that "professionalism is theft – the theft of creativity, of co-operative responsibility from those who are supposedly being served with dollops of various public services." If professionals are seen as experts in a specific area of knowledge, it means that they are the ones that know the solution to be delivered, which keeps people in need of professionals (any kind, not only community educators) because: a. they are not trusted to know what is best for themselves and/or b. they are not helped to figure it out. Community Educators should indeed be experts, but experts on helping people take control of their own lives and learn for themselves, rather than being channels for what others have decided that the users ought to learn or know.

This is probably why Meade (2012) argues that 'it is difficult to imagine how community work as a process could ever be immune from expertise'. She makes the point that by the very nature of needing to be accountable, professionals 'must assert some form of expertise in the context of policy, funding or partnership negotiations with the state'(p.900), even though they might negate or disavow such status to engage with the community as equals. However, there are questions about how possible and honest it is for professionals to negate their status, especially when working with vulnerable or young people.

Sercombe (2010) insists that the serving relationship is not equal, and "recognising the power imbalances means you take responsibility for your power in the relationship" (p.13), which need not be oppressive nor dominating. Indeed, it can often be the case that as educators we need to retain authority because sometimes "hierarchies become established via the attempted negation of their very existence"(Scathach 2013, p.3). For example, in much of my youth work experience I have approached interactions with the desire to not exert any control over the group. I felt it would have turned me into yet another figure of control. However, the effect this has often had is that an informal hierarchy has then be an established between the young people under the guise that there is nobody in charge. The same can happen in campaigning groups or learning circles.

From a radical perspective, I would argue that Community education (like popular education) is not an aim but "a method of agitating for conscientisation where the conditions for this don't already exist. This means recognising the goal of popular education as planned obsolescence." (Scathach 2013, p.4). This is in the sense that, if Community Education seeks to help people take control of their own lives, it follows that they ought to take control to the extent that the role of a Community Educator is no longer needed. However, this is naïve if understood in the short-term: the presence of Community Educators is indeed very much needed today (and for the foreseeable future), when people are subject to internalised oppression (Brookfield and Holst 2011, p.111) and the state owns and controls most of the social resources.

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Managing Change – Making Change

While activists' goals are often about change (and systemic change at that) Community Education professionals are often concerned with responding to people's needs. These needs are sometimes defined by practitioners and/or people themselves, although most of the time they come from funders, policies, strategic objectives and recommendations from the government. Of course, from a radical stance people's needs arise out of the structural inequalities of the capitalist system, and thus responding to people's needs must involve some sort of systemic change. However, this does not necessarily alleviate people's immediate circumstances (or go well with most funders) and thus the tension arises as to where energy should go, and how much of it.

Kirkwood (1990) argues that "meeting their needs is an alienated and alienating way of relating to people" (p.147). Instead, he advocates that workers need to move from provision for meeting needs to a dialogue through which to discover and act upon interests and concerns. This is mainly inspired by the tradition of Popular Education (Crowther et al. 2005) and Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire 1972), which present us with the idea of education as a means to change the world rather than manage the change it confronts us with. Community education's goal is then "to support people identifying and challenging the root causes of their poverty and social exclusion" (Rosendale 1996, p.65) hopefully connecting to community organising and social movements.

To do this, however, we must still not forget needs. Rosendale (1996) warns us that it is difficult to move beyond pragmatic and specific problems and solutions, especially when communities expect practical assistance, "and a worker who fails to meet that need will be unlikely to be accepted in a more overtly educational role"(p.66). In my experiences with youth work, young people come to the meeting place with a baggage of what they consider to be relevant and worthwhile. If workers do not respond to that, it is unlikely that they will gain the respect and trust to engage young people in other activities.

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Therefore, engaging in a dialogue about people's interests and concerns does mean responding to their perceived needs, at least to some extent. (Shor and Freire 1987). These perceived needs, however, will be influenced by the discourses and the context that surrounds them, and to simply respond to needs without a critical stance will potentially result in "facilitating a process which actually 'helps people to tolerate the intolerable' rather than to challenge it" (Shaw 2011, p.14). Examples of these discourses would be the policy emphasis on economic and instrumental models of lifelong learning to the neglect of the personal and democratic aspects (Crowther and Martin 2010); or the increasing focus on the potentially dysfunctional or deviant young person as the purpose of Youth Work (Jeffs and Smith 2008, p.280) instead of understanding the structural inequalities that limit the choices that young people have.

In this article I have argued that, despite the intensified accountability that workers are subject to, with the host of constraining targets and outcomes attached to it, there still seem to be windows of opportunity for radicals to develop work that is not too compromised. However, the tensions that I have outlined can be tiring, frustrating and stressful. It is very easy to say these things on paper with fancy words, but another world altogether to embody them at work where, on top of the aforementioned tensions, you might be surrounded by co-workers and learners who do not come close to sharing any political values with you. In those circumstances pursuing some sort of radical education can feel lonely and scary (let's not forget the economic climate and the increasingly unstable nature of people's jobs). De St. Croix (2007) argues that we need to develop collective autonomy as workers, because 'being part of a collective can address burn-out and isolation, and reduces the ease with which individual 'troublemakers' can be targeted by the state'. Examples of this down in England would be the Critically Chatting Collective (2008) and the campaign In Defence of Youth Work (2009), which has increased its activity over the past few months. It is time for Edinburgh to develop similar networks where they don't already exist.

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Our Conversations - Where are we now in our lives?

Bernadette Barry, Independent Practitioner, Sheila McCallum, Retired
Fraser Patrick, Community Learning Consultant

This article is about a series of conversations between three colleagues, previously significantly involved in community education practice and is the influences of their experiences, values and beliefs when encountering leaving full-time employment. The paper, which has been developed from transcripts of these dialogue sessions, contains some extracts and views from each of the participants about life and work, and suggests a re-visioning of retirement.

Introduction

The idea for the series of conversations and this paper was initiated by one of the authors, Bernadette, who wished to explore and retain the value of her professional life by engaging with others in conversation about ideas and experiences, which might have an added value of passing on wisdom about both the process and the content. An influence for her had been the style of Presence (Senge et al, 2005), which was the result of these authors getting together over a number of years posing questions to each other. In that text, four people met to have conversations, and convey experiences about their work and its results. They appear in the book 'as "characters" talking with one another, telling stories, and exploring our different points of view, woven together with ideas and perspectives from the interviews …' (16). Her hope was that these experiences of ours would lend themselves to a similar process and illustrate a deepening of collective learning and an opening up of a new awareness.

Bernadette approached Fraser and Sheila as former supportive colleagues who were no longer working full-time and were now on the periphery of their former professional roles. As the constrictions of our previous roles were now removed, we thought that in our own time and in our own way we could tell a story with the intention of sharing its findings with others. This paper is about that process and threaded through are our thoughts and extracts of our conversations; we consider

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dialogue as a concept and process, and the impact this had on our ideas, the expression of these and the sharing of emotions. The paper begins with a comment from each of us, continues with extracts of our conversations, and a conclusion completes the paper.

Bernadette:

I have been influenced, especially in the last ten years of my life, by the work of James Hillman (1999), who has made an important contribution to our thinking about ageing. This is what he has to say about retirement:

> Resignation," defined in the dictionary as "uncomplaining endurance of adversity", often accompanies retirement and may be an early indicator of decrepitude. Before we resign from positions of control, we should ask ourselves what might come after. Sheer collapse into uncomplaining (or complaining) endurance? Perhaps "re-signation" needs to mean – rather than literal stepping down – resignification, rethinking the significance of one's position, re-visioning the idea of control so that it serves values that we have come to know are important. (p17)

I have avoided using the term retirement myself as I have a negative reaction to it. Therefore I appreciate Hillman's notion of a rethinking of one's position with a re-visioning about one's place in society.

Hollis (2005), someone also significant for me, writes about finding meaning in the second half of our lives, especially in relation to the crisis of identity that occurs when we encounter and go through a personal life changing situation in the absence of support. He writes about experiences when individuals undergo passages for which their 'conscious life was unprepared, leaving them confused, frustrated, disoriented' (p28) and suggests that in our era 'such rites of passage, are generally missing, or weakened, and these periods leave the individual adrift, disoriented, alone' (p29). When the three of us began the conversations, I was not conscious of this thought but,

returning to the process and our discussions as I write now, I wonder if our conversations have served for us a rite of passage – a deconstruction of a previous self, a reconstruction into a new identity, in other words, by participating in this dialogue we were experiencing a deeper meaning of our life's journey, and that we could in Hollis's words 'learn that something transcendent to the old way of being always comes when one has the courage to continue this journey through the dark wood' (p29).

Meaning and purpose have been a constant, accompanying me throughout my life; Hollis suggests that it is only in the second half of our lives that clarity emerges, that we know who we are and that we can create a life of meaning. Perhaps that did happen in the second half of my life but now in this era I feel the loss of the 'stable state' (Schön 1973) and I experience an uncertainty and an ambiguity.

The thought to hold comes from Hillman when he asks 'how can we remain a force of character?' Even though he is discussing leaving in the sense of departing from this world, he suggests that:

'Long before you have left, you already comprise a tangle of images that compress your complexity into a "character," affecting others as an imaginative vital force. Because we do not imagine the image others perceive, we hardly know the impact of our own character. Images of this character enter the dreams and thoughts of others, sparking a response, awakening a feeling, raising a question, as if trying to call them to something.' (Hillman 1999: 157)

Fraser:
Should I be concerned about how others perceive me? Probably not, otherwise I might spend the rest of my life being or not being, doing or not doing that which I think others would want of me. To succumb to such a concern would be a recipe for inauthenticity; and a denial of my individuality. And my individuality is important because it is unique, like everyone else's.

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Yet nowadays I do wonder how others might remember me, particularly my daughters and grandchildren. They will, in a real sense, determine how I live on. They will, subconsciously, assess the nature and impact of the character that is me, and in the future beyond my physical presence. Such thinking does demand me to be positive and, challengingly thoughtful and funny. I want to demonstrate serious fun. I want to feed their curiosity and passions and compassion.

In turn I feel that the energy and innocence and wonder that the grandchildren exude challenges me. As I look back at my life, they walk on into their future. Will what they take from me and my experience help them in their journey onwards? In a sense that should not be my concern, although it will be, understandably, my hope. But I must complete my own life and they must live theirs. Any worries that I might have that I will be remembered with a smile, with gratitude, with love, are not only a demonstration of our wanting to be liked but also a realisation of our historicity - that we are part, all of us, of everything that has been and everything that will ever be.

I believe therefore that it is natural, a part of the human condition, to reflect on our ontological predicament as we move to, and maybe even past, our three score and ten years. For me, however, the focus needs to be on how I am now, as a contributing person in community and not on how others, no matter how close they may be, might see me.

I suppose I have created the character that I now am. I have no control, however, over the nature of the character that others perceive me to be. That is for them to determine and for me to accept.

Sheila:

I came into my work because of a sense of injustice and inequality I noticed around me the vulnerability of others, how children were being sidelined, labelled for not fitting in – according to the views of others. I could see that some children were not reaching their potential and I recognised the range of influences which can cause this. My later roles in practice and academia have allowed me to support staff to consider

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the broader picture, and the significance of working together with families and communities. For me the concepts of confidence and self-esteem are vital and my work has been about promoting and encouraging people to develop these in themselves and others. I realise and re-affirm that these principles are vital again now at this stage of our lives, based on what I see as values which can be common and fields of work with people and communities – these are respect, support and valuing individuality.

Coming into this process has made me consider the question about the impact we have made on people we may have worked alongside, and I hope that a small part of my work in people's lives has made a difference. I have completely retired now from practice and academia and the process of our conversations and undertaking this discussion paper has been interesting and sometimes painful but has attuned me to clarify my decisions for the future.

Our Process

A number of key questions guided our conversations. These were:

- What are the core beliefs and values of our work that remain with us still?
- In what way did our work give and continue to provide meaning for our lives, and how did it become integrated within our being?
- What about a stewardship of our work and new possibilities arising from it?

We began each meeting focusing on these questions. We allowed time for the ideas to evolve and become expressed and gave the person speaking time, without any interruptions or limitations, to fully respond to the thoughts contained within the questions. The conversations were recorded and then transcribed by Bernadette who circulated the results and made revisions when ideas needed further clarification. We recognised similarities in our experiences and how we embedded these in our lives and in how we were expressing them now. As we began to consider that others in our situation might have feelings and experiences similar to ours, we thought that it would be important to share, in Fraser's words, 'our predicament', even though this would be

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demanding because of self-exposure. But, as Sheila suggested, our process and the experience could perhaps provide a structure for peer support beyond ourselves.

A Word about Dialogue

The content of this paper has emerged out of our interactions with one another, and each of us has been surprised by the transcript of the conversations, thinking that this would not have been what we would have said had the questions been posed in an e-mail seeking a written response. We were influenced by the work of a number of authors in the field of dialogue, including especially Paulo Freire, David Bohm and Peter Senge. Bohm (2004) says dialogue is concerned with providing a space within which attention to notice can be given. This provides an opportunity to mirror back to the participants both the content of the ideas and also the way these are presented.

Our conversations contained all the elements suggested by Bohm: suspending judgement, paying attention, listening, and enabling the free play of thought. By engaging in this process, deeper and more subtle meanings began to emerge and new understandings came about. Fraser was interested in the work of Isaacs (1999) and especially the emphasis on dialogue being something you do with people, where you seek to reach new understandings, uncover shared meanings and form a new basis for thinking and action. We think we were engaged in a mix of dialogue and conversation as we considered new ways of thinking about a future after full-time employment, about the notion of retirement and our process, which has had an end result in this paper, has brought about some resolution.

A Medley of Similarities

It wasn't long into our first conversation before we discovered common ground in our professional lives. Sheila and Fraser have spent considerable time working in Glasgow, Fraser in the voluntary sector and in the former Jordanhill College, Sheila in childcare, and both share core values about making a contribution and a difference to people's lives. Our backgrounds have been in education, social work, training, informal and community education and the university/academy. We have all in different ways also been involved in projects in Dundee and its surrounding areas and

this is where Bernadette first met Fraser and then Sheila in 1988. It seemed strange to us as we were meeting about our work that more and more of the former regional council headquarters Tayside House was being removed layer by layer in 2012/2013 as part of the regeneration of the waterfront in Dundee, and that all three of us worked in that building, each of us in different roles but connected around topics, issues and projects in Dundee.

Sheila remarked on the significance of gaining empowerment in her own life and on the difference it can make to others when groups and communities are empowered by providing them with the knowledge and skilled facilitation to enable a release of their own potential. She said that Freire switched on a light for her, the ideas about letting change emerge slowly of its own momentum with little pushes on the way, opening up a path. Fraser informed us about his involvement with organising youth clubs and how this led to his youth and community work course which opened up another dimension about recognising the strength of folk coming together and influencing change. For Bernadette, the catalyst was her awakening of political consciousness when she was a student in 1968, and then her subsequent work in a housing department where she was exposed to seeing conditions that she had first read about in Charles Booth's classic studies of poverty. Her values were about seeing that justice would be done.

In our first conversation we discovered that there were common experiences between us in the paths we had taken and in our ideas about respect, empowerment and justice. Although each of us has been involved in the learning environment for a significant part of our professional lives we were not sure that learning was something that drove us in our early stages. For Sheila empowerment was an important concept. Fraser said that for him early on, it was more about social contact between people, Bernadette thought for her it was about fairness.

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Our Work - Our Lives!

Each of us spoke about how much our work was our lives and how we were having difficulty with the current concern of a work-life balance and, especially for each of us, with the notion of retirement.

One of our conversations was almost entirely about work-life balance and whether or not this had any meaning for us. Sheila said that once she became involved in voluntary work and community initiatives, for example her work with the housing association where she wanted to improve conditions, in effect 'I became a community activist and that became my work'. She went on to say that this 'was about my own beliefs, and work became about my beliefs, and you can't change your beliefs at 5 o'clock at night'. She wasn't sure about the concept of work-life balance in relation to herself, saying 'at times my work has been my life, it has been about living my beliefs'. She concluded with the thought that being retired made it difficult to find that sense of balance once again. Even though Fraser expressed his ideas on this slightly differently from Sheila, there was a similarity as he said that the notion of work-life balance was a false dichotomy and that for him it was more about work and leisure having a balance in your life; but he was not sure that he could say this is the way it happened for him as work was so much of a passion, so enjoyable that he did not consider it as work. Bernadette suggested that the idea of work and life in balance indicated that these were two distinct features of a person's life and she did not think this was the case in reality. For her, work-life balance was more about harmonious relationships which could then contribute to an overall emotional well-being leading her to feel well in her life.

We explored the purpose and meaning of our work and addressed a question about stewardship and minding: 'who is going to be taking care of what we have been doing and who is taking care of the values, ideas and pieces of work?' Fraser suggested that we must identify what it is that we need to take care of. Bernadette suggested that it is hard to pin down what this might be, as all of our work is so much connected with our own characteristics, our own approach. She said that 'we need to put in the missing pieces, the rhythm of our work, the set pieces of the work emerge when we

are talking, but we are not capturing the story'; and she did not mean this in a chronological way, but 'how our work was held together, how we made it happen, nurtured it, the ethos, the little bits that pulled it together to make it a whole in relation to each of us – how can that element feature, so that it is not about the stewardship of a piece of work, but rather how can the spirit of the person who had developed the work, still continue?'. Sheila asked 'what are the essences that we would like to have carried forward?' and 'what are the ones that we have carried forward?' She continued by saying that to a large extent and even though we have left institutions, people there are carrying out pieces of our work, so we have left something behind, 'like a perfume whose scent lingers after you have gone'.

Fraser provided a concept from the rethinking in religious groupings and the 'ressourcement movement' of twentieth century theology. He said this means 'spring, the source of water and a returning to the sources and thus renewal'. He suggested this was used to signify meaning and purpose, and this movement considered where is this all coming from, why are we doing what we do, who are we part of in history?' This influenced his thinking and ideas about finishing the work, with people who followed in our footsteps shouting 'finish the work' and then crying to the next generation 'finish our work' and we are all part of a long historical movement'. Later on Fraser clarified that the work is the greater challenge for us as human beings in this society and that our work hopefully contributes to creating a better place, taking society forward in the face of significant challenges and with people who share a similar view cooperating together.

Returning to that conversation we considered that this era for us now is about 'pausing and considering what is the work we want to finish, how might we hand it over to others, how could it continue to be nurtured with each generation keeping the story alive bringing it into the next age, thus enabling the cycle to continue. Fraser said, 'our job is to keep remembering it and telling its story, making it stronger and then cry "finish our work" hoping that this will be taken up. It is an existential force in history, you cannot take it any further, this is what you are stewarding and you believe, rather than hope, that it will happen'.

Conclusion

We return to the beginning in our conclusion and the inspiration provided by Senge and his co-authors – also the practice of dialogue embedded in our process. Our conversations were meaningful, provided insights about the power of listening, hearing and providing space for thoughts to emerge as words – yet, we felt we could have gone further, taken our process in a new direction, even perhaps emerging with a renewed concept of retirement. But for now, it might be sufficient for the emotions to have been stirred and given time to settle, then a further phase either in our own small group or with others could happen to move things on – to develop a new vision for retirement. We are reminded of the ideas of one of the interviewees in Presence in discussion with others raising the suggestion about a type of learning in which the future becomes more active: 'Learning based on the past suffices when the past is a good guide to the future. But it leaves us blind to profound shifts when whole new forces shaping change arise' (2010 (reprint): 86). With that we conclude, for now.

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Note

Bernadette dedicates her part in writing this to Ian McGowan, wonderful mentor.

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Community Development as Resistance and Resilience.

An interview with Mahmoud Zwahre from the Palestine Popular Resistance Coordinating Committee, conducted, edited and introduced by Eurig Scandrett, Queen Margaret University and *Concept* editorial board. More on the Popular Resistance Committees can be found on www.popularstruggle.org

Community development in occupied Palestine is inevitably hazardous work and unquestionably political. Palestinians who remain in Palestine are divided between three territories with very limited movement between these: Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. In Gaza, Palestinians live under a military blockade and face regular incursions by Israeli troops and attacks by drones. Palestinians in the communities that survived the ethnic cleansing of 1948 and remain within Israel along with those that Israel illegally annexed in 1967 such as East Jerusalem, are treated as second-class Israeli citizens and subject to institutional harassment. The remaining West Bank is divided into Areas A, B and C: the urban centres of Area A are largely under the control of the Palestinian Authority albeit under the scrutiny of Israel. Communities in Area B are under Palestinian civil responsibility with Israeli military control. Palestinian communities in Area C, which constitutes over 60% of the remaining West Bank, are under complete control of the Israeli military, which constrains any form of development or community organising for Palestinians but facilitates the illegal construction of 'settlements' for Israelis. Furthermore, the wall, which creates an apartheid-style segregation between Israelis and Palestinians, has been largely built on confiscated Palestinian land.

In this context, the popular resistance committees (PRC) that have emerged in many villages in Palestine have become a key component of resistance to the Israeli occupation, building on and consolidating capacity amongst communities that have faced decades of dislocation, hardship and perpetual harassment by the Israeli military

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and Zionist vigilantes. In this situation, community development and education are clearly acts of political resistance. At a local level, PRCs mobilise through cultural and building projects (in defiance of the occupation) and support people facing land confiscation, house demolition and legal conflicts. PRCs also link together for joint action through the Popular Resistance Coordinating Committee.

In recent times, the popular resistance committees have succeeded in organising grassroots mobilisation in several high profile and strategically important protests. Early in 2013, PRC activists re-occupied land that has been taken by Israel for the development of the E1 settlement. E1 would join annexed East Jerusalem to the illegal settlement of Ma'ala Adummim, thereby splitting the West Bank into two discontinuous parts. Later that year, a 'day of rage' and protests by PRCs and others succeeded in disrupting – albeit temporarily - the Prawer Plan for evicting Bedouins from their land in the Naqab (or Negev) in order to create Jewish-only communities. And earlier this year, a forcibly depopulated village in the Jordan Valley was reclaimed by the PRCs. In Palestine, community development and popular education are inseparable from resistance to colonial occupation.

Mahmoud Zwahre is an organiser with the popular resistance committee of the village of Al Ma'asara in the district of Bethlehem and is a member of the Popular Resistance Coordination Committee. I interviewed Mahmoud during a study visit he made to the UK at the end of 2013. I first met Mahmoud during a visit to Al Ma'asara with the San Ghan'ny choir which sang at a demonstration against Israeli theft of village land. His determined commitment to nonviolent confrontation in the face of Israeli violent oppression impressed us all. Later, Mahmoud showed some of us around the work of various PRCs, including the remarkable Al Mufaqarah in the South Hebron hills, where a resilient community lives in caves in defiance of Israeli attempts to depopulate the area. The PRC mobilises volunteers to build houses for families and to keep re-building them every time the Israeli soldiers destroy them.

I started our interview by asking Mahmoud about the origins of the popular resistance committees.

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Let me go back a little bit to the history of popular resistance during the last 100 years, because it's not something new in Palestinian history. It's something that was in some periods more visible, in the 1930s and the general strike in 1936 for six months, and the uprising against the British mandate. Even action against the Israeli occupation started with a popular resistance, and ended sometimes with armed resistance. Palestinian civil society used different methods of popular resistance, from before the Belfour declaration (in 1917) up to 1987, which was the summit of the popular resistance: the first intifada. And in that intifada, all the people were committed to popular resistance, all the sectors, with a great harmonic relationship among Palestinian society towards this popular intifada.

Within the first two years there was a high level of commitment to popular resistance until the third year when some forms of armed resistance started. Palestinians did not kill any Israelis in the first two years, and I think that was the best moment for the Palestinians to achieve their goals, as an outcome of this intifada, which put Israel in the corner for violations of human rights. This was one of the reasons why Israel was forced to go into the negotiations [for the Oslo agreement], although unfortunately the outcome was not that good.

After the first intifada, the Israelis knew that the culture of the Palestinians is a type of popular resistance, with the habits and traditions of social solidarity. But Israel always tries to attach the terrorist label to the Palestinians, by pushing them into violence. Israel does not want to see a Palestinian popular intifada, they want to show that Israel is a democratic country, experienced in fighting against terrorism and this can be sold to the west, to Europe and to the United States.

The second intifada also started as a popular intifada but the Israelis managed to push the Palestinians into a cycle of violence, especially when they started killing 20 or 30 people each day, so the Palestinians wanted revenge by suicide bombing and by using armed resistance. And in this period, Israel started building the wall.

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In 2002 they started building the wall and at the same time they had the siege in Jenin, and in Bethlehem, in Nablus, lots of killing, and no-one paid attention to a wall built here or there. Journalists are focusing on the blood that is flowing everywhere in the West Bank and Gaza. They started building the wall on the border – in Jenin area in the north - until they arrived at Qalqilia. There they started to penetrate the Palestinian land to include it to the other side of the wall. And the people started to resist.

So from here the roots of the popular committees start to form in different villages, like Jayyous and other villages around, where in each village farmers started to resist. In the minds of the farmers: 'it's my belongings' you know, 'it's my trees, and my field, and I must resist'. And in a natural way, they go and stand in front of bulldozers, they try to stop this uprooting and this confiscation of the land. The idea was picked up by the people of the villages to form popular committees. This is not a new term by the way it is something that existed in the first intifada. So in the minds of the people there is some background for these things, with the difference in the environment they created these popular committees. With more visibility for the term 'popular' because in the minds of the people now there are two models in front of them: the first model is the first intifada, the second model is the two years of the second intifada which was full of violence and massacres. And I think that the people reacted against that. No-one is thinking to carry a gun and to shoot at the bulldozer – just 'I want to protect my land with my body'. This is not something that they educated themselves about but something that they lived, that they experienced and that they trust from the beginning. So they formed the popular committees to promote the popular form of the resistance.

So sometimes these popular committees take daily actions – every day they organise actions because there is work going on on the ground. So they go and demonstrate, and when they go they start to spread the information to the people in the village to come and protect the land. And this didn't manage to stop immediately the Israelis but they kept on going, building the wall in the north and the west, until they reached Jerusalem.

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The people who started organising the actions were the farmers, but then with other activists, the people who have some experience. So the members of the popular committee in each village can be activists, farmers, sometimes local council members, students, men, women. There is no clear structure for the popular committee. Whether I am a member or not, it depends how many times I participate and am committed to the resistance. So this idea started to spread in all the villages that the wall is going through.

The popular committee is not just to organise actions but also to advocate for popular resistance, to connect with Israeli activists, with international groups. So they start to build these networks with other villages where they formed popular committees and this also spread to the north west of Jerusalem. In Beit Iksa five people were killed, many injured, many people arrested. And the media was not covering this because of the situation in the cities with the second intifada. The media pay attention to ten killed in Nablus or Jenin, not to someone arrested or someone injured in a small village. But even so it was documented by the popular committees, by the journalists, by the local activist groups, and then later after 2005 when things calmed down a little bit these issues start to be more visible for the Palestinians and also for the international community.

And as the wall continued, other villages followed, so the popular committees start to think more about strategies, about tactics, about creativity, about joint actions all over the West Bank. But each village is thinking locally. The most interesting thing is how these popular committees manage to survive in some villages. I'll give you al Ma'asara as an example, we have 10 people committed, but those ten people are not tired, they keep going on, as if they are a rope eating the rock, you know, with time, even though it is tiring but they manage to keep on the model. And many other villages managed but in some villages after the wall passed them they stopped. But even if the work stopped you create some activists in these villages who are ready on call - if there is something going on in another village, they will join. This is why the activism idea in Palestine was created, which is not found in the first intifada. In the

first intifada it was the leadership, but now it is activists growing up, and I do not want to say a leadership, but there is a type of leadership that people start to relate to now in the popular resistance. So these are the origins and the shape and structure of the popular committees inside the villages.

Over the past ten years the popular committees have gained experience of mobilising. For example through social media - there are many facebook pages for the popular committees with the various things going on. Also targeting local media in Palestine, on the TV, radio, newspapers, you can find good media coverage for all that they are doing. Advertisements for actions and events – the public ones. Targeting international media and international solidarity, also through social media, email lists and so on, popular committees are doing well in this. This comes through training with the popular committees using capacity building: video training, radio training, social media, internet security, all of these things. Meetings happen in the villages, for example, a film screening, through theatre, through music, a debate about this movie, about the importance of popular resistance, and so we can recruit people and get commitment from the people. Sometimes we manage to reach schools and to mobilise the students at the universities.

Also for capacity building we have these programmes for increasing awareness of activists. We have a diploma programme and a Masters programme in order to increase knowledge of international law and Israeli law, about what can be done and what cannot be done. On the ground, we have legal campaigns to defend the prisoners, to defend the land, to increase awareness amongst the locals, if the Israelis give you a demolition order for your house, what are the legal steps that you must do and how you can defend your house, on the legal side and also on the popular side, because we can support you through popular actions, and also the legal actions to protect your land or your house.

The Masters is done between two universities: Birzeit and Al-Quds, and we are the partner who brings the people who want to learn and we design the courses with them, according to our need, not according to the agenda of the universities. So we

have, for example, this strategic plan: we want this course and we want this outcome from this course so we cooperate with the two universities to design these courses and the lectures. To learn to use video we go to the media centres; with the radio things we go to the local radio. For the legal things we have lawyers, we have local legal organisations. For the land, we know, through lawyers that we cooperate with, the process that must be done in order to protect the people's land and the people's houses.

We target the villages. We notice that village x has received demolition orders. So we go there with a lawyer. We have a workshop with the people in the village, explaining to them the legal steps that must be done in order to prevent the demolition. Because the Israelis are looking for the moment when no-one will object so they can do what they want. So this is like another type of resistance. And this is something that is important to accumulate victories. The people will see that at least we have prevented five houses from being demolished. And the same with access to land and confiscating land - we do the same.

We are pushing for the Palestinian Authority to invest in area C for a political reason – our struggle is in area C. If Area C falls to the Israelis then there will be no Palestinian state. If area C comes to the Palestinians then there will be no settlements. So this is the challenge - how to work in Area C - what is the priority? What is the use of investing in Area A? no need! We need to work in Area C, on agriculture, on building houses, to renew houses which were built some time ago, that they cannot demolish, to create life in these houses. So there are many ideas that can be done. If you have the funds for these ideas it will be good, so we are pushing for example now on the Palestinian Authority to do this. And we have succeeded. We have managed to have projects that must be implemented in Area C. For example the Australian government is supporting this, partly also the British government is supporting projects in the Jerusalem area, it is something that we must focus on. And in this case, the idea is to build the resilience of the people in area C.

In Al Ma'asara we have now a tourist project. This project is to increase the resilience of people and to attach the old generation with the new generation. And the new generation will carry the habits and the traditions of attachment to land, the same as the old. So the idea is to cultivate four fields next to the settlement, and to sell the products to the women's cooperative in the village. The women's cooperative will run a restaurant with traditional food. Some women will be specialised in traditional cooking, the traditional bread and so on. So this is to increase resilience and to create jobs for people. It's a continuity but keeping on the spirit and the traditions and the habits that the old generation was carrying because this is part of our identity, part of the culture. Of course you are supposed to get permission from the Israelis for such development, which they always forbid, so, you avoid it as much as you can, until you reach a point where you have a confrontation.

Settlers now are doing treks in the mountains and telling international people that this is Israel. But now we are inviting people to come and go through the valleys, we train people, young people to do the political tour for people in the mountains and so on, because this is also advocacy for the cause, and to advocate for resistance and resilience of the people in Area C. This is important in areas like Jordan Valley or South Hebron Hills, or even Naqab in 1948 [ie Palestinian land occupied in 1948, subsequently recognised as the state of Israel]. This is important to show what is going on, how the settlements are expanding and how the Israelis are cleansing the people from Naqab area and how popular pressure on Israel at least will make them stop and think 'we will not do it just now', because there is popular pressure in Israel. And this is a great success for the popular resistance with the Prawer plan in Naqab.

I want the people who read this to know that the Palestinians are resilient, and to see how Israel reacts to popular resistance. I want them to understand that we are not victims – no, the Palestinian people are powerful and their power is growing and the complete picture comes when all the elements combine with each other and international solidarity is one of these important elements. This is the face of the Palestinians that I want them to see from the popular resistance, not like a dry tree in the desert – people all over the world are trying to see us like this. No there is

something coming out of the popular resistance, with all this pressure from demolishing, arresting, killing, confiscating, the repression and the violations: there still are roots growing through these rocks, reaching to the water, absorbing it to the leaves to be alive and to be green. This is what I want them to see from the popular resistance, the story that is coming out that shows the resilience of the people.

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Review

The 2014 Popular Education Network Conference

Thinking Dialectically in Popular Education

The sixth International Conference of the Popular Education Network (PEN) was held from April 24-26, 2014. Hosted by the University of Malta, Valletta Campus, this conference built on the success of previous PEN conferences held in Edinburgh (2000), Barcelona (2002), Braga (2004), Maynooth (2007) and Seville (2011). The network brings together academics in higher education with an interest in supporting popular education in communities.

Established in 1997, the Popular Education Network was originally intended to politicise the theory and theorise the practice of popular education in a very particular and uncompromising way. As such, in this network, popular education is understood to be popular, as distinct from merely populist, in the sense that it is

- Rooted in the real interests and struggles of ordinary people,
- Overtly political and critical of the status quo, and
- Committed to progressive social and political change. (see Crowther, J., Martin, I. and Shaw, M. (1999) (eds) *Popular Education and Social Movements in Scotland Today*, Leicester: NIACE)

Recognising that many scholars who support this definition of popular education work in considerable isolation in their own institutions, as described on the conference website, this gathering was an opportunity to discuss such themes as:

- Acknowledging the effects of globalisation on our work;
- Sustaining political commitment and ideological coherence in hard times;
- Developing alliances and strategic collaborations;
- Radicalising research and making it 'really useful';
- Contesting managerialism and the culture of the accountant;
- Respecting diversity without abandoning solidarity;

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- Exploiting relative autonomy;
- Working with progressive social movements;
- Developing curriculum and pedagogy;
- Using ICT in subversive and counter-hegemonic ways;
- Engaging dialectically with the politics of policy; and
- Developing more democratic, creative, and expressive ways of working.

In the opening plenary, Carmel Borg, Jim Crowther, and Peter Mayo grounded the conference in the particular historical moment of Malta's and PEN's evolution. Mae Shaw and Jim Crowther then provided a helpful framework for action in the context of the paradoxical times in which popular educators currently work (see Table 1 below). The first group of researchers, Jonathan Langdon, Helen Underhill, Ted Scanlon, and Vitor Pordeus closed the first day with living examples of popular education "rooted in the Territories of Life" (as Pordeus suggested).

Table 1

Mae Shaw and Jim Crowther's Framework for Strategic Participation and Non-Participation, Presented April 24, 2014 (adapted from Shaw & Crowther, 2013, pp. 13-15)

Strategic Participation	**Strategic Non-Participation**
Making structures work more democratically and effectively	Providing convivial, open, inclusive democratic educational spaces
Holding politicians and institutions to account	Strengthening democratic processes outside of governance structures
Ensuring democratic processes have grassroots support	Sustaining autonomy of local groups
Challenging manipulative or tokenistic forms of engagement	Challenging the way in which democracy is framed in policy and practice
Testing the claims and limits of democratic engagement	Making demands on the state that reinforce its democratic capacity
Strategic non-compliance	Strategic compliance
Making alliances with anti-market actors	Highlighting the destructive role of the market and articulating alternatives

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This conference drew participants from over ten countries, with the mix of experienced and emerging scholars boding well for the sustainability of the network. Sessions included a range of plenary, panel, and concurrent presentations, as well as films, music, interactive conversations with Maltese activists, and a closing session in the National Museum of Fine Arts. Evening social events provided an opportunity for informal networking and solidarity-building while learning about the history and culture of Valletta. Three books were also featured: *Learning And Education for A Better World: The Role of Social Movements* (Hall, Clover, Crowther, & Scandrett, 2012); *Popular Education, Power, and Democracy* (Laginder, Nordvall, & Crowther, 2013); and *Learning and Teaching Community-based Research: Linking Pedagogy to Practice* (Etmanski, Hall, & Dawson, 2014).

In the final session, Ian Martin brought to the fore adult educator and Cultural Studies scholar, Stuart Hall's question: *Are we thinking dialectically enough?* Martin suggested that this question is helpful for popular educators' ongoing conversations and practice.

> Applied to the shifting relations and dynamics of popular culture it is important to make sense of the progressive possibilities that exist rather than to simply get stuck in a dichotomous rut of 'good' or 'bad' developments, 'progressive' and 'regressive' cultural practices and so on. (Crowther, 2014, p.1)

This question closed the conference with an important reminder to recognise and resist monological thinking in the context of the complex, constantly shifting, and often contradictory settings in which adult and popular educators live and work.

Following the conference, we asked participants to reflect upon two questions (listed below). Maria Brown, Cassie Earl, Budd Hall, Petar Jandrić, Liliana Maric, Henrik Nordvall, Vitor Pordeus, and Helen Underhill responded with the following comments (edited for inclusion in this review).

Question One: *What was the (intellectual) highlight of the PEN conference for you?*

The concept of limited citizenship experienced by inmates of rehabilitative/total institutions and other vulnerable social groups and non-citizenship experienced by rejected asylum seekers as the challenging contemporary quests in critical pedagogy. (MB)

The conference provided a convivial and supportive environment for exploration and reflection. The discussions were productive and supportive and there was the feeling that not 'knowing' but critically exploring was the key tenet, for the most part. Therefore, spaces of radical hope were created, supported by reflective criticality and a space to grow ideas and collegiality. (CE)

The intellectual highlights for me were the classification model for adult education and community development engagement done by Mae Shaw and Jim Crowther, and the lecture on museums by Darlene Clover. In general, the level of quality and commitment at this year's PEN conference was outstanding. Consistently good quality, very engaged scholar-activists, and wonderful access to the history and culture of Malta. (BH)

There was no particular highlight—and I mean that in a good way. Presentations were interesting, discussions thought-provoking, and the informal programme provided some great opportunities for discussion. Perhaps the NGO cafe, where we all did rounds from one organisation to another, was the most interesting learning experience—but I definitely would not call it an intellectual highlight. An important part of ethos, for me, is that there are no superstars and intellectual highlights in a traditional sense. (PJ)

The intellectual highlight was to learn what is being done in other countries including Malta. Points that struck me were that popular education is about: 'stirring things up'; developing radical margins by making explicit the relationship between knowledge, power and social action in educational work; regenerating the terms of engagement of

our professional identities, reinvigorating a pedagogical approach with political purpose; and recognising that engagement is not neutral but consists of struggles. Mae Shaw and Jim Crowther discussed aspects of strategic participation by a) ensuring democratic processes have grassroots support; b) challenging manipulative or tokenistic forms of engagement; c) testing the claims and limits of democratic engagement; d) practising strategic non-compliance; e) making alliances with anti-market actors; e) making structures work more democratically and effectively; and f) holding politicians and institutions to account. (LM)

This was my first PEN conference and the highlight for me was the fact that almost every presentation related to my intellectual interests (i.e., critical perspectives on power and popular education in relation to political processes and struggles for social change). Most often when going to academic conferences in the field of education (or adult education) I find—if I'm lucky—one or two papers that are related in a clear way to my research interests or my political interests. So this was a great conference which I really appreciate. (HN)

A highlight was to gather with Researchers of Life studying and researching cultural political life, community health issues, human oppression, racism and therefore interfering with the political life of the communities. *Research action* was demonstrated through social political cultural struggle, symbolic challenges, scientific challenges, cultural strategies, traditions, healing, theatre, music, and music from the jails. Traditional singing showed us the power of culture and tradition in maintaining our sanity. There's an epidemic of mental illnesses and the vaccine against madness is theatre. Or, in Shakespeare's words, "though this be madness, yet there is method in it" (Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2). This conference offered the opportunity for critical reflection on our own cultural rituals and symbolic practices. (VP)

This is almost impossible to answer in terms of one point that was raised... However, I was particularly struck by the notion of strategic participation and strategic non-participation raised by Mae Shaw and Jim Crowther. I think it will be really useful for

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my PhD study as I think through connections to political participation such as boycotting elections. (HU)

Question Two: *From your perspective, are there any outstanding questions that the PEN community could address at subsequent conferences?*

How can critical pedagogues support the personal and collective emancipation related to the experience of limited citizenship or non-citizenship? (MB)

I think that the question of how we, as academics, support and nurture not only popular education initiatives but each other as educators would be helpful, especially for those recently entering the academic world. We need to address the notion that we are living in interesting and potentially dangerous times and that not only is there a great need for resistance education, but also a resistance to it, particularly in universities—how do we sustain ourselves and others, building solidarity and resilience into communities of educators who attempt to do things politically otherwise? (CE)

PEN is lovely...and perhaps we could include a bit more time for interaction next time? (BH)

I'm not into popular education directly, so I do not feel I'm in a position to address this. Since my area is inclusive education maybe there could be sessions about how schools could develop popular education to foster inclusion of different minorities. Another issue related to form rather than content, is that there could be the suggestion that presentations be done in a more accessible way by having a good contrast between background and font (e.g., black on yellow slides), good font size, and a description of images. I felt that the possibility of having members in the audience with visual impairment was not given that importance. It is not a matter that one has to speak about it but preferably presentations would be done in an accessible format beforehand. (LM)

Apparently (see answer 1), from my perspective, the conference is working very fine regarding what kind of questions it addresses. The platform of the network/conference, which has a clear political dimension, is probably one of the reasons for this. However, although it obviously is fulfilling its purpose quite well, I still think it would be fruitful to discuss the platform in subsequent conferences. This includes a discussion about the definition of popular education. At this conference the issue was addressed at end of the conference, when few—if any—had the energy to discuss it. I think it would be interesting to discuss, for example, if the definition of popular education, used by the network, is related to a political vision about what popular education should be, or if it is relating to the actual practices taking place in progressive social movements, in communities, among activists, etc. (practices which, in my experience, often have a quite paradoxical character, where they both challenge and reproduce status quo at the same time but in various respects). (HN)

"Fit the word to the action, and the action to the word" Shakespeare (Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 2).We can learn to see cultural Rituals as generators of political organisation. As Freire says, we need profound coherence between what we say and what we do. What about more Culture Circles? What about developing dialogical circles and also "Cultural Actions for Freedom" as ways of making statements on our thinking with development of tools as theatre, poetry, web-documentary movies as the practice of hope now. (VP)

I think Ian's questions at the end of the conference were invaluable and should definitely be discussed at a future conference soon, or perhaps even sooner... I am also thinking about my role as academic activist and the tensions associated with many of the important themes raised through PEN. In the context of a higher education system that places increased pressure on academics to work towards impact, how critical can we be? This connects to my own concerns as a PhD student: what space is there for early career researchers to continue working within the objectives of PEN within this system? (HU)

All in all, the PEN conference was an opportunity for university-based teachers and researchers, student-activists, and others involved in higher education, who share a common interest in popular education to meet, exchange ideas, learn from one another, and enjoy some much needed solidarity and conviviality. More information can be found at: http://www.um.edu.mt/events/pen2014

The 7th international conference will be held in collaboration with the University of Glasgow in 2016. For more information or to join the network, please contact: jim.crowther@ed.ac.uk.

Catherine Etmanski Royal Roads University, Victoria, Canada. (With the assistance of Veronica, Maria, Cassie, Budd, Petar, Liliana, Henrik, Vitor and Helen)

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Review

Concept Seminar: "Political Education – Before and After the Referendum"
Edinburgh, Friday 28th March 2014.

Attended by around 50 people, a mixture of council Community Learning & Development workers, voluntary groups, students and academics, this event featured four main presentations about work in the field of political education for different age groups and communities. The referendum was considered from the point of view of *"the problems it raises in terms of curriculum and teaching as well as some of the new and unique opportunities it opens up for political education"*.

Jim Crowther introduced proceedings by reminding us of Paolo Freire's dictum that *"education is never neutral"* and envisioned *"permanently sceptical citizens"* as the desirable outcome from political education. Despite the "diminished" nature of the current referendum debate, centred around a dismal costing exercise, the apparent groundswell of interest places the fundamental question of what kind of society we are and want to become firmly in the frame – an unprecedented opportunity to refresh and reconfigure the usually constrained terms of political debate.

Will Golding, Political Literacies Project Worker for Edinburgh Council, perceives his task as being to bridge the gap between the powerful and the powerless. Through a series of thematic workshops, he had engendered interest amongst youth and community groups by seeking the connection between personal lives and the political. Reservoirs of creativity, enthusiasm and off-the-wall thinking had been evinced by his unconventional, multi-media approach and Golding's own jack-in-the-box energy explained how his work had been the catalyst for engagement amongst those previously outside the debate. He interposed a range of provocative slogans and catch-phrases, summed up in the optimistic signature line of *"making anger hopeful"*.

Callum McLeod, a member of the Broughton High School based CLD team spoke of his own introduction to the CLD world via involvement in Local Agenda 21

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environmental education. Echoing Will Golding's enthusiasm, but in a more down-to-earth style, he elaborated on the recent and ongoing Democracy project - featuring issues arising from the referendum debate - in which he and his team had blended the school curriculum with a distinctive CLD approach, to eager participation from his contact groups. McLeod several times mentioned his aim as being to produce "a pile (sic) of young activists", a notion which prompted much discussion in the subsequent group session (what do we expect activists to do?, how do they form a pile?..).

A more mainstream curricular approach was represented by Jenny Lindsay, Modern Studies Teacher and poetry workshop facilitator. She raised the challenging question of the requirement for neutral presentation in the teacher's role; particularly testing in her case as she has a personal commitment to one side of the referendum question (she didn't declare which, at least on this occasion). She gave practical examples of how she had maintained this balance, using the "some think x, while others favour y" response to leading questions from her students. Some of the educational opportunities arising from the debate in the classroom include studying research methods, undertaking mini-surveys, analysing political language and critiquing campaign videos. Drama, creative writing and multi-media arts are providing and benefitting from a two-way stimulus in addressing the exigent questions of nationhood, identity and community. Lindsay concluded with the day's only reference to Curriculum for Excellence, intriguingly leaving trailing the opinion that *"it has great potential but we've bottled it, or at least part of it"*.

Last up was Alex Wood, billed here as an Adult Education Tutor, but better known to those of a certain vintage as the all too short-lived radical Labour leader of Edinburgh Council in the mid-1980s. Wood had lost none of his fervour, and still exhibited the panache of the politician unconstrained by party purdah, combining sharp analysis and open-mindedness. Wood's adult education work had led him in a range of directions, including a passionate interest in genealogy, but he had more recently been invited to lead adult education classes on the referendum topic. Again, the question of neutrality had to be confronted: Wood's approach was to take a contrarian position to

the most opinionated of his students and encourage them to challenge their preconceptions. The confluence of identity with social/political attitudes is the recurrent theme of his classes' discussion and it has proved especially fruitful as a stimulus to learning and self-expression. One particularly interesting aid Wood had deployed in these classes had been to compare national constitutions, with unexpected and contrasting results, proving a useful conduit in stimulating debate about the Scottish case.

The subsequent group and plenary discussions shot off at a number of tangents, as several of those present drifted into well-rehearsed political positions. The nature of activism in the community emerged as a key theme, with the potential for the current debate acting as a route by which, youth groups in particular, move on from single-issue or identity politics to a broader engagement in civic and national issues. Following the outcome of the referendum, we wondered, would discussion within communities continue and grow, or would it be dissipated? The kinds of work undertaken in the case studies presented hold out the hope for building a more sustained engagement.

While this was a lively and largely optimistic event, a shadow was cast on learning that two of the presenters are now, or soon to be, at the end of their contracts, leaving doubt about the sustainability of such initiatives and the commitment of national and local government to community learning generally, a concern all too familiar to those working in other parts of the sector. Given the topic, it also seemed odd that few linkages to Curriculum for Excellence were made, given its aim "to achieve a transformation in education in Scotland" a process running concurrent with the focus on our distinctiveness as a nation. CfE surely has the potential to become a platform for promoting referendum-inspired political education, but only if skilled CLD workers are in place to facilitate the process. Likewise, the CLD role in community planning, highlighted in the Strategic Guidance paper, could channel the growing civic engagement the referendum debate has stimulated to make community planning a truly participative and meaningful process.

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A worthwhile event, then, but one whose subject needs to be part of the discussion outwith this almost entirely Edinburgh-based audience. From a CLD point of view, it was also a rather frustrating reminder that, at a time when there has never been a greater need for CLD to fulfil its role as catalyst and facilitator in broadening and deepening the democratic process, the capacity of our service continues to be depleted and overstretched. The arguments for turning around this lamentable missed opportunity are compelling; our pressing task is to build the case until the penny drops.

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Review

Unstated: Scottish Writers on Independence, (2012) Edited by Scot Hames, published by Word Power Books, pp. 204 £12.99

This book contains 27 essays by writers and activists based in Scotland with varying attitudes towards the question of independence. In his introduction, Stirling University's Scott Hames suggests that, since Scotland has already achieved a form of cultural autonomy led by its novelists, poets and dramatists, the question of independence for Scotland should be discussed in an open space that allows more radical and nuanced thinking to take place. What connects all of the essays is their authors' ability to imagine aims and outcomes for the future of British democracy that are not readily available elsewhere. Hames suggests that the book should 'set the choices before us within parameters chosen by writers themselves', as opposed to the deterministic narratives of organised politics. I think that this has been achieved.

When this book was first published in December 2012 only one of the essays, Alasdair Gray's 'Settlers and colonists', was discussed in the media, as critics accused him of promoting racism. It is a provocative essay, but the assertion that Gray is anti-English suggests his critics had not bothered to read it carefully. However, their interpretation does detract from what is generally thoughtful and challenging writing. All 27 contributions have something useful to say about what constitutes a state and how this has an impact on the way they think, write and feel. This offers an insight into the thinking of anti-Westminster political movements in Britain that goes beyond the nationalist portrayals that currently dominate the media.

Nevertheless, pessimism about the future, inside or outside the UK, runs through much of the collection. For example, Jo Clifford states that 'the truth is obvious, we are part of a disunited kingdom whose other title really should be Insignificant Britain. Mediocre Britain' whilst Denise Mina likens Scotland to an unhappy wife afraid to leave her bullying husband and so she is trapped in a 'union of unequals.'

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Continuing these dependency metaphors, both James Kelman and Janice Galloway picture Scotland as a confused adolescent who needs to break free of the constraints of the UK in order to grow up and lose what Galloway describes as 'our sense that somehow we deserve not only less than we hope for, but a smack for getting big ideas in the first place.'

Most of the essayists featured are firmly convinced of the benefits of an independent Scotland but Ken MacLeod concludes that he would be against the United Kingdom going the same way as the Soviet Union or the former Yugoslavia in reverting to a collection of independent states. Other writers are more ambiguous, with Jenni Calder expressing some wariness that independence will provide too easy a way of absolving Scotland of its imperial past, and Douglas Dunn reminding us that Scotland will always have to 'live' with English. He concedes that 'I haven't lost it, nor could it lose me' and wonders 'What's odd or treacherous other than the name?'

Other writers urge Scotland to take more risks and avoid the easy middle way. James Robertson, for example, argues 'I understand about not frightening the horses - but actually I think it would be good to see a few wide-eyed sidelong glances and hear a nervous clattering of hooves.' In a similar vein, Suhayl Saadi argues for a profound and radical change and wishes to 'see a brain, not a crown, above the Saltire' whilst Leigh French and Gordon Asher argue for 'working towards a post-capitalist society' and creating other, better worlds.

Overall then, this book makes an important contribution to the independence debate by challenging the old thought patterns and institutions that have dominated in Scotland in order to explore questions that have been shirked by the narrative of the Yes/No campaigns.

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