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ABSTRACT

This monograph offers perspectives that challenge the increasingly taken for granted assumptions about the renewed interest in experiential principles and methods. Chapter 1 identifies the different dimensions of experiential education. It describes contemporary examples to demonstrate the political, economic, and ideological differences in their use. Contemporary texts on experiential education are examined to explore how their perspectives contribute to and/or reflect these divergences. Finally, the chapter suggests how a critical perspective--one that does not take for granted the usefulness of experiential approaches, but seeks to identify the different and often conflicting purposes behind their use--can inform the development of learning and training. Chapter 2 argues that experience is intense, unique, and profoundly social. The individual may construct her/his own learning; yet the ingredients for such a construction come from elsewhere. It sees one central source of experience as the economic system that places people in and out of work, up and down the hierarchies of power and status. The chapter also explores why some experiences seem more persuasive than others. The monograph concludes by addressing the educational issue of the present, whether experiential perspectives are employed or not--the assault on traditional notions of liberal adult education. Contains 77 references. (YLB)

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# Education and Experience

Temporary developments  
critical perspectives

*Duncan W. Scott  
Ralph Ruddock*



## Manchester Monographs

The centre for adult and higher education.  
University of Manchester



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The inspirations for this monograph are the many men and women we have known, whose talents as people workers have become demonstrable almost in inverse proportions to their formal qualifications.

Duncan Scott and Ralph Ruddock have 'propped each other up' for nearly 15 years, but a strong support cast includes Miriam Jackson, Steve Bolger, Andy Wiggins and Neil Shenton.

Sian Jones and Michelle Morris made the text look more respectable than it warranted, and deserve a special 'Thank You'.

In the division of labour, which led to this monograph, Duncan Scott was responsible for the initial conception, overall editing and Chapter 1. Ralph Ruddock wrote most of Chapter 2 and shared the conclusion.

Duncan Scott  
Department of Social Policy and Social Work

Ralph Ruddock  
Centre for Adult and Higher Education

(Both University of Manchester)

May 1989

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**FOREWORD**

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A decade of experience of chairing national steering groups concerned to promote more effective approaches to the learning needs of those half million part-time and voluntary youth and community workers has given rise to much of what follows. A fresh look was proposed in the report *Starting from Strengths* (Bolger and Scott 1984). In essence it asserted that new strategies and policies should be based on the social circumstances of the part-timers and volunteers rather than (but not to the total exclusion of) the requirements of the full-time professionals and/or the variety of formal organisations of what we call the 'Youth Service'.

We also asserted that there were strong philosophical, theoretical and practical grounds for beginning such an exercise via an emphasis on what the part-timer/volunteer could do and felt 'good' about. There was to be an insistence on positive features (- on 'Starting from Strengths'). Contrary to the opinions of some 'snipers', hidden in the traditionalist undergrowth, we were not advocating a neglect of the needs and deficits of these same workers. Rather, we sought to approach these only after firmly establishing the self confidence of the relatively low status, low resourced, non-professional majority.

Since 1984 we have found that our assertions strike chords across the length and breadth of British youth and community work. Of course the application of ideas has been complex and uneven. Of course some modifications have been necessary. But, by and large, we are confident that putting experience at the centre of learning and training, (and not just at the edges) makes good sense. (See also Scott and Shenton, 1987).

During the writing of the 1984 report we were provided with an early copy of a study by Norman Evans - (i.e. 'Curriculum Opportunity', May 1983). His ideas about the identification and accreditation of learning from experience were *apparently* so close to our own that we included an important (fully-attributed) reference to them.

What became increasingly clear in the processes of discussion that followed, was how the similarity of *methods* stood in marked contrast to the respective *values* and *purposes*. It was soon apparent that the mutual advocacy of, for example, portfolio-based approaches, did not necessarily imply a convergence in their overall application.

The work of Norman Evans, as it developed during the 1980's, revealed a strong focus on employer needs and the centrality of training. Our unfolding concerns were at least as much centred on the social worlds of the learner and the processes of learning and education. We noted that the latter might not simply be concerned with alternative forms of access to courses, but also with informing a continuing and developing education, which was not necessarily course-based at all. Inevitably the 'continuing' element implies (for there are considerable intellectual and practical difficulties in making explicit) a high resource investment. Evans has concluded a three year research study in favour of processes which are "... simple, quick and cheap". (Evans, 1988, 26).

We have continued to value the work of Evans, and have observed its growing impact on those debates about Higher Education's responsibility to mature students, at a time when the number of 18 year olds is declining sharply. On the other hand, it has become increasingly apparent that a range of smaller, less resourced, more fragmented initiatives have appeared to be using experiential approaches in ways more nearly like our own. From community-based groups and their training networks, from radical church groups, from feminists, from ethnic and racial minorities, have come relatively coherent value positions around the centrality and educational usefulness of experience.

One early pioneer of a community-based approach to experiential learning received a major grant to evaluate its work, but this seems to have been 'lost' as resources and personnel were disrupted. Another advocate of 'apprenticeship' approaches writes of not having the time to write reflectively and at sufficient length, and of being completely unaware of Assessment of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL) programmes being conducted in a Higher Education institution, which she also uses as a resource. Of course some commentary materials have emerged from comparable organisations and settings, and Chapter One of this monograph attempts to provide an interpretive introduction to them. But, the general picture remains of an increasing output of reports and reviews and methods about 'things experiential' - more from the larger systems than the smaller ones.

This is an old story. The 'high ground' is captured by those with greater resources. Those confined to hacking out a rough path on the lower slopes may find it difficult to generate an overview either for themselves or for those who are called upon to sponsor and make policy decisions. There is a need for different perspectives which can challenge - even disrupt - the increasingly taken for granted assumptions about why we are renewing our interest in experiential principles and methods. This monograph, though not without its own contradictions, is one form of challenge. It is directed to policy-makers and sponsors, but also to trainers and workers, learners and their 'supporters', who want to contribute another view. As

this foreword was being written (Autumn 1988) the first post-graduate level course in Experiential Education began - professionalisation (for good and ill) is underway.

What follows is, therefore, as much concerned to enter the contemporary policy and practice contexts before they become too 'formed' and accepted, as it is with a 'finished' piece of work. A number of empirical developments, and a range of commentary texts are identified in Chapter One. The principle here is derived from the notion of a sketch-map which offers a rough but usable picture of what seems to be happening.

Chapter Two is both more general and more specific. It raises most of the major philosophical and intellectual questions and then connects these to contemporary social issues concerning prevailing assumptions about economic and educational needs.

The account as a whole is not neutral. It is not persuaded that the imperatives of a market economy should penetrate through every fibre of educational activities, whether these are experiential or not. On the contrary it argues for those values which are liberatory, which encourage learners to make connections between personal and private troubles and wider social inequalities. Experiential education may be about an exciting range of methods, but ultimately it is about the social experiences of the learner or student. It is about the extent to which processes of personal and collective discovery can be derived from these experiences. And, finally it is about the extent to which educational systems, at whatever level, become less elitist, less intolerant of the non-professional, more egalitarian, more prepared to view their work as a cooperative enterprise, and more determined to be continually angry about the misuse of power and privilege in all its forms.

Duncan W Scott

1989

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**CHAPTER 1**

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**CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS IN EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION****The need for critical perspectives****INTRODUCTION**

The fact that there is a renewed interest in using and giving credit to student learning from experiences originating outside the formal classroom is to be welcomed. But, it must be recognised that an uncritical admiration of this 'experiential education' will fail to uncover the inherent contradictions to the ultimate disadvantage of student and teacher alike.

This chapter seeks to:

- i identify the different dimensions of what is known as experiential education.
- ii Describe contemporary examples in order to demonstrate the political, economic and ideological divergences implicit and more rarely explicit in their use.
- iii Outline a range of commentary texts on experiential education to explore how far their perspectives contribute to and/or reflect the aforementioned divergences.
- iv Suggest how a critical perspective, i.e. one which does not take for granted the allegedly universal efficacy of experiential approaches, but seeks to locate the different and often conflicting purposes behind their use, can inform the development of learning and training.

Particular attention will be paid to the context of youth and community work. In relation to this work, education and training is provided by a range of different institutions - universities, polytechnics, colleges of higher education, local authorities and voluntary organisations. Such a broad spread of provision is repeated (with significant variations) in other sectors of the welfare state such as the personal social services. With respect to teaching and nursing the institutional spread narrows.

Youth and community work, education and training provision is noteworthy for its reflection of the very small minority of professional workers (5 or 6,000) on the one hand, and a huge part-time/voluntary majority (perhaps half a million workers) on the other. A small number of courses in tertiary institutions caters for the former. There exists a great variety of courses and support systems for the latter.

### WHAT IS EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION?

An adequate response to what is meant by experiential education would require greater space than is available in this monograph. Two dimensions are briefly identified, i.e. those of content and structure. Some aspects of the former are sketched in here, primarily as a prologue to their extension in the second chapter. Greater immediate focus is then given to the educational structures and conventions which contain and shape 'things experiential', however defined.

At the heart of experiential is the notion of first-hand, direct experience. It is argued that the impact of this is both more fundamental and more durable than second-hand, indirect experiences encountered in the words of teachers and writers. All sorts of analogies flood in. Perhaps their favourite theme is the 'hand in the fire'. We learn that flames burn from first-hand experience. Until such a point, no amount of words and pictures can achieve the same depth and permanency of learning.

Equally quickly, two linked questions are posed, i.e.

- 1 How can we interpret this learning - to be sure we know what it is, and even how we might encourage it.
- 2 How can we apply or transfer this learning to other situations - to be sure we have identified something which can be useful beyond the particular circumstances of its origin.

The disciplines of philosophy, psychology and sociology (among many others) pose awkward but appropriate questions.

- Why does direct experience often lead to deep and durable learning? Is it because the roles of teacher and learner become one?
- How far is *personal* experience able to 'shake off' the penetrating (often dominating) ideas and ideologies of institutions and societal elites? What is 'at work' when we consistently record the apparent 'loyalty' of an oppressed person to an oppressive system (the working class, Conservative voter, the faithful wife, the patriotic black person in racist Britain).

- How do we respond to learning from experience which appears to be efficient (there is a strong correlation between the specific experience and the structure/content of the learning), but is also damaging? Racism and sexism are obvious examples.
- How far is learning restricted to those directly involved in the specific experience? Is it useful to draw a distinction between
  - a. The primary experience
  - b. The secondary/anologous experience?

To return to the hand in the fire, must we all get burnt, or can we compare and contrast other kinds of 'hurt' and 'wounding'. Some boundaries are impossible or difficult to cross e.g. race, gender, age. What experiential 'stepping stones' exist in direct comparable experience, and via the words of others in imaginative presentation (poems, novels, plays, songs, etc)?

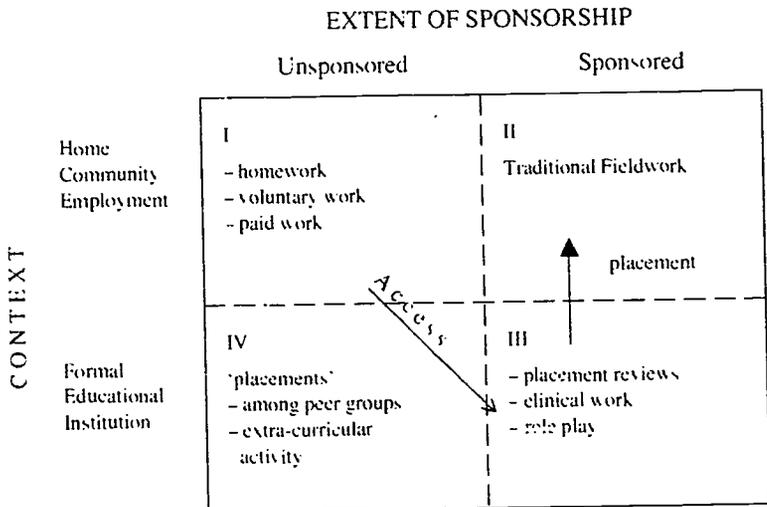
There are no easy answers, as the second chapter clearly emphasises. Yet, when attention is switched to educational structures - to talk of portfolios, access, role-play, placements and the like - so much seems taken for granted. Whilst it may be sensible to avoid talking about everything all the time, a cautionary note is clearly necessary.

In any consideration of contemporary developments the extent to which education institutions deploy experiential *learning* strategies can, in the first instance, be determined by the stress they place on the experience of the learner. Such a stress will be revealed in a consideration of the whole range of processes, beginning with recruitment and continuing into the structure, content and style of the curriculum. One initial and subtle distinction should be drawn between experiential education and experiential learning. The former is usually designed by professional educators, whereas the latter is something that happens to and for individuals or groups. Only they can tell or show whether they have learnt anything. The task for the professional then becomes to design (or sponsor) educational processes (i.e. which 'draw out' = from the Latin root 'educare') which lead to experiential learning as an outcome. We can then talk, therefore, of 'sponsored' and 'unsponsored' experiences i.e. which have been deliberately acquired with the specific educational purpose in mind, or have arisen as a perhaps unconscious by-product of other social activities.

Figure 1 below presents the sponsored and unsponsored dimensions as 'ideal-types' i.e. as simplified representations of a more complex reality. Sometimes the term 'prior' is attached to these experiences, particularly where a sub-set of them has been identified as having resulted in learning. Entrants to formal courses are said, therefore, to possess 'prior learning', which is then most frequently used to assist their *entry* to the course. The

fact that unsponsored experiences/learning continue *during* course work is less often a central feature. On the other hand, great attention is paid to those sponsored experiences which we call fieldwork placements.

Figure 1. Dimensions of Experiential Education.



N.B. The internal 'boundaries' (-----) should not be interpreted literally e.g. Traditional Fieldwork placements are physically within community/employment contexts. But *conceptually* they are to be regarded as examples of a sponsored experience - hence their location above.

Even a cursory examination of the different ideal-type dimensions will reveal the existence of a well-developed, and familiar, experiential model in use. For example, the young mother who 'follows' her growing children via pre-school, play-group, parent teachers association, youth club and the like, may accumulate experience as mother, volunteer and part-time worker. When they grow-up and away, she may seek to build on these experiences by applying to enter a course. Some regard will usually be shown for these prior experiences - normally of a symbolic kind on an application form - as access/entry to the course is negotiated (see 'Access' on Figure 1). Greater or lesser attention will be paid to the mix of home,

community and employment, dependent on the nature of the course, e.g. professional probation work courses take a majority of their recruits from those with part and full-time employment experience in probation or allied activities.

Once on the course the student will spend at least half the time on a placement (see 'Placement' on Figure 1). Together with the use of experience in the period of access/entry, these represent the traditional use of experiential methods of formal educational institutions; the centre of gravity lies within the course boundaries, and is managed by the course staff.

When greater attention is paid to the unsponsored experiences, this centre of gravity may be threatened. A shift of emphasis will partly depend on the extent to which the following additional dimensions of experiential education are accepted as legitimate and useful, i.e.:

- (i) that the existence of unsponsored experience/ learning is recognised as a continuing (and, potentially, developing) *process*, which can impact upon course structure and content beyond the entry point, into the very heart of the curriculum. For example, when a community-based agency argues that fieldwork placements should become the centre of gravity and not adjuncts (however important) to the course, this should be seen as an attempt to achieve such an integration. (See the description of the Turning Point agency's apprenticeship training model in T. Sinclair, 1987.) On Figure 1 such an example would constitute a hybrid of squares I and II, with relatively less significance attached to the formal contexts of squares III and IV.
- (ii) A further dimension, again noted in the Turning Point case, concerns the recognition that, as the unsponsored experiences of the student gain greater prominence, so the *roles of student and teacher* will require re-negotiation. A positive commitment to experiential education of this kind has consequences, therefore, not just for the content of the curriculum. There are also directly-related role issues which may manifest themselves along a spectrum to the point of parity or even reversal.

The notion of role negotiation is not unusual in discussions of experiential education. Consider the continuous needs for negotiation between course staff and placement supervisors within the traditional model. What is new or different is the possibility that the *student* really will be able to demonstrate

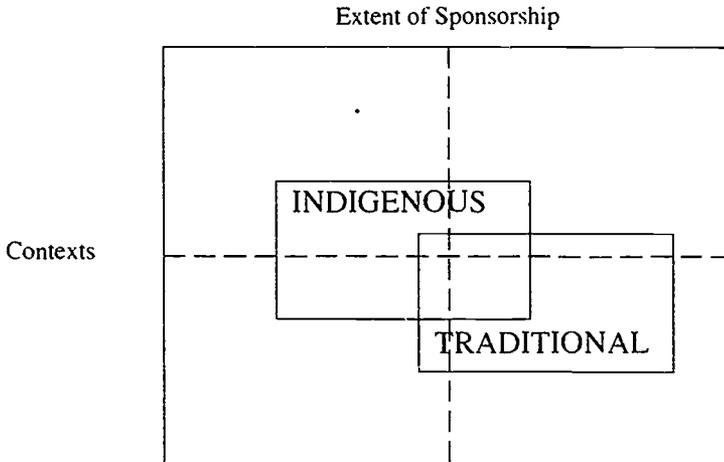
(and not just claim) that (s)he is entitled to parity or higher status than the teacher in some aspects of the education process.

- (iii) A final dimension concerns the extent to which experiences can be given 'credit' in such a form that allows the student to gain direct benefit, i.e. life experiences are 'cashed in' as an alternative entry route, or as part/whole credits instead of courses.

Accreditation (the recognition or crediting of learning from experience) has been written into the traditional system, via the insistence that a 'pass' in fieldwork constitutes a pre-requisite for overall qualification. This has not been without tensions and conflicts between the classroom components (essays, seminar papers, etc) and the practice-based ones. The tensions and conflicts between unsponsored experiences and sponsored ones are even more acute.

To sum up, the existence of experiential education models, based on the four dimensions previously outlined, is not new. But there are emergent tensions and conflicts derived from the increasing attention given to an alternative experiential model rather than the traditional one. Borrowing from Figure 1, with its depiction of contexts along the vertical axis and unsponsored/sponsored experience along the horizontal we can position two ideal-type models of experiential education, e.g. INDIGENOUS and TRADITIONAL as depicted on Figure 2.

Figure 2. Ideal types of Experiential Education.



I use the term 'indigenous' to reflect the emphasis on life experiences specific to the individual or social category - one can say that (s)he is 'native' to them. Such a term, however clumsy, is preferable to 'radical' or 'alternative' because it leaves open to further analysis how radical such a concern for life experiences really is. It will, for example, be demonstrated in a later section that much of the 'indigenous' experiential practice is being rapidly incorporated within traditional systems. Such a development reminds us that models of experiential education, whilst useful pointers to areas of curriculum conflict, cannot be discussed in a vacuum. It is to their political economic and ideological contexts that later sections are devoted.

The 'traditional' approach can be characterised as lying at one end of a spectrum, with 'indigenous' variants at the other. It consists of attempts by educators to give partial recognition to the experiences of the student, but *only as a preparatory device* for the more important tasks. These consist of such additional experiences as classroom role-play and fieldwork placements. Even here, their effectiveness as experiential methods is frequently seriously undermined by the inadequacy of supportive mechanisms to assist systematic reflection. Perhaps the classic example is that of the junior doctor who may work up to 100 hours a week as part of what is termed 'training'. Reflection is probably the last activity available. A similar conclusion has been made of nursing training, i.e.,

".... the student experience does not prepare the student for the work of a staff nurse. Instead it prepares them for picking up different ways of working and for 'fitting in' with any given system of nursing and importantly, to 'get the work done' "(Melia, 1987,175).

In the absence of systematic analyses of the processes surrounding the placement activities of youth and community work courses, it may be that things are no different there either.

### CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS IN EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Unless some attempt is made to identify the 'institutional geography' of contemporary developments, the drift into a mindless pluralism will soon follow. Such a tendency faces even those who do draw attention to the existence of difference, but then fail to draw out the implications. For example, a recent review of 'current developments' noted examples from:

- The Council for the Education and Training of Youth and Community Work.
- The Federation of Community Work Training Groups
- Local Authority Youth Services
- The Further Education Unit
- Church of England, Human Relations Education Accreditation Scheme
- The Adult Literacy Basic Skills Unit
- The U.S.-based Council for Adult Experiential Learning
- The Learning from Experience Trust
- The C.N.A.A. and its Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (C.A.T.S.)
- The National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education
- The Manpower Services Commission
- The Open College
- Regional Open College Federations
- Eight colleges and polytechnics
- A handful of national voluntary organisations
- The National Coal Board
- The Policy Studies Institute

(P. Bainbridge, 1988, 6-10)

The reader, overwhelmed by the sheer institutional weight and variety, is finally alerted - via a quotation from an unpublished paper - to the,

"sharp discontinuities of value and purposes".

But, frustratingly, we are then told,

".... that in forming judgements about these developments we need to be armed with a 'values and purposes detector'!"

The opportunity to construct, however sketchily a political and economic map of these institutions was lost. (1).

A first sketch-map, to assist in 'detection' can be constructed. Even within the overlapping territories of youth work and community work, there are small but significant contrasts in scale and status. For example, the very processes of consultation which were part of Bainbridge's report revealed exchanges between the first two agencies on the list. C.E.T.Y.C.W., largely financed by the Department of Education and Science to be a national co-ordinating and validating agency, operates with an annual budget of over £250,000. One of its panels (I.N.T.E.P. - Initial Training and Education) sponsored Bainbridge's work with a budget of £15,000. Although this is a small amount for an important topic such as 'Validating Learning from Experience', it is probably more than the annual salary of the single full-time worker of the Federation of Community Work Training Groups (F.C.W.T.G.). The latter operates via a grant from the Voluntary Services Unit of the Home Office which is less than 10% that of the C.E.T.Y.C.W. budget.

C.E.T.Y.C.W. and F.C.W.T.G. share a concern for greater recognition and status to be accorded youth workers and community workers. Despite some differences in orientation and role, there is a degree of common interest. Yet even here, Bainbridge's exploratory correspondence demonstrated divergences derived from real and/or perceived differences in power. The F.C.W.T.G. worker is wary of proposals for joint work because,

".... we fear that, by collaborating, a process might be designed which would validate experience receiving C.E.T.Y.C.W. recognition, but that accreditation, developed by Regional Training Groups, would remain unrecognised ..."

".... C.E.T.Y.C.W. has the potential power to assist accreditation or to undermine it."

[Correspondence provided for Bainbridge's steering group.]

At the same time as this correspondence, Bainbridge was discussing with the Director of the Learning from Experience Trust the possibilities of a pilot project with C.E.T.Y.C.W. The December 1987 Bulletin of L.E.T. listed a sample of the many enquiries it had received - top of the list was Bainbridge and C.E.T.Y.C.W.

These developments are not sinister or unusual, but they need to be made more explicit. (2). There are, moreover, patterns to be discerned, and the Federation Secretary/Development Officer has reason to be cautious. L.E.T., a recently established educational charity, is funded by the Manpower Services Commission and some foundations. Its Director came to it from the Policy Studies Institute and a network of contacts with colleges, polytechnics, C.N.A.A., The Further Education Unit and the Department of Education and Science. These are the 'big systems' in contemporary developments in experiential education. (3).

L.E.T. may claim to be independent of them all, but its intermediary charitable location cannot conceal the main orientation of its work, i.e. to assist large commercial and educational institutions make better use of the experiences of their trainees.

c.f. The justification for experiential education as a way for employers to,

"... gain time and money by assessing more systematically the learning and competences that already exist in your workforce." Jack Mansell - Chief Officer of the Further Education Unit - in a pamphlet by the L.E.T. Director (Evans, 1984).

All of which is not to say that the activities of L.E.T. can be simplistically explained as a direct function of relationships with formal tertiary education and employers. Rather, it is to emphasise that the 'interests' of those institutions most closely associated with L.E.T. in, for example, occupational competences reflect their primary purposes, i.e. production. This is not to deny the likelihood that experiential education processes, directed towards the identification and confirmation of 'competences' will generate a broader educational consciousness within students. For example, an access course for black students includes an accredited unit on 'Racial Harassment and Community Self Defence'. This is part of a system which,

"... will enable future students to claim exemption from part of their degree-level work on the basis of presenting evidence of their experiential learning..." (J. Hinman in C. Griffin, 1987, 23).

The focus on racial harassment is a means to an end, part of a route-way to a formal course primarily concerned to direct student attention to other competences. Awareness of racial consciousness is not a primary end in itself. On the other hand, to the extent that continued attention is given in the curriculum to such experiences - and those derived from the inter-relation of gender, class, disability, sexual orientation - so contradictions may be generated. The individual student may come to question critically the very systems (s)he has been seeking to enter. Nevertheless, the fundamental structures are clear; consideration of such life experiences is still located primarily in a marginal space, i.e. *access*, not the heartland of the curriculum. It can be argued that such activities most closely fit the characteristics of the 'Traditional' model of experiential education outlined in Section II.

The strengths of the initiatives and commentaries, which have emerged from L.E.T. and its associated network of institutions, lie in the confirmation of life experience as a basis for educational learning. In a recent report (Evans, 1988) about a dozen higher education institutions in the U.K. have demonstrated the complex yet potentially valuable changes which the assessment of prior experience and learning (A.P.E.L.) can promote. Despite the small student numbers per institution (never more than 30 and averaging less than half than figure), the case is made for the use of portfolios, manuals, group work and so on in the identification and assessment of prior learning.

Nevertheless, for all A.P.E.L.'s overall location in large and powerful educational institutions, *within* these it remains relatively small, under funded and marginal. Evans' initiative failed to locate enthusiasm for A.P.E.L. in the key areas of Maths, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. Most of his sample were part-time courses, and there was clear consistent resistance to A.P.E.L. beyond earlier parts of courses (Evans, Op cit, 29). The structures of Higher Education were most tolerant to these new challenges where they opened up initial and early access to traditional course structures. It is not yet possible to discern more fundamental changes to the educational fabric as a whole.

If the examples of A.P.E.L. are relatively marginal within the 'big systems' of Higher Education, they command relatively greater resources than a large number of smaller networks and federations with whom they overlap. At first glance, the latter appear to lay even greater stress on life experiences and the accreditation of prior learning than on the core competences and vocationalism espoused by the former. To some extent this emphasis reflects their present function at least as much as their values and purposes. Organisations such as F.C.W.T.G. and the William Temple Foundation (see Ruskin, 1985) are not formally part of Further and Higher Education. Even though some of their work brings them into contact with the large educational institutions, for much of the time they operate within community and voluntary groups such as women's groups and church

networks. They *are* concerned with core competence and vocational education, but their immediate struggle is for sufficient legitimacy and leverage for their constituencies. In such circumstances it is not surprising that 'little systems' should present those facets of their work which are relatively unique to them, and which appear to reinforce what for them is more of a political than an educational struggle. I have been told 'why should we bother about the finer details of competences whilst we're still trying to gather sufficient resources to mount a learning programme?'

It is, therefore, not so much that they are 'little' - for their networks are considerable across the non-statutory voluntary sector as a whole - but rather that their resources are small and uncertain. In one part of the Federation of Training Groups a newly established network of community workers, interested in training, positively glowed with pride at having secured funding for one and a half full-time co-ordinators for two years. Their course materials talked of 'empowerment', and yet their first community work learning programme had a budget of i) £750 from the local training network, ii) resources in kind from the Extra-Mural department which acted as host, iii) course fees of c£1,000, providing an overall total of only between £2,000 and £3,000. Relatively speaking this was an immense step forward, particularly in view of the imminent abolition of the major sponsor - a metropolitan county. Those involved,

"... are still proud of the hard work done to obtain that funding - if we had not got it, I believe we would not have got comparable funds from anywhere else, nor have developed the body of work which we have done in the past two and a half years". (4) (Correspondence with leading member of the Community Work Training Network, July 1988).

In an adjacent part of the same university at the same time there was established an outpost of the 'Pickup' programme (D.E.S. - sponsored professional, industrial and commercial up-dating education). (5) In its first annual report it noted an operating surplus of £16,000, the production of four substantial reports and visits by associates to North America to consider accreditation programmes.

Although the community work network never formally promised to link their learning programme with some form of accreditation, there were frequent early references to such a possibility. It was certainly the case that the students hoped to gain some recognition for their previous occupational experience. In the event, the pilot nature of the programme, and the limited resources have not surprisingly led to slow progress. Seventeen 'graduates' from the first course emerged in March 1986. It has taken two and a half years to produce a completed accreditation, and only one of the first three potential accreditees is from the original cohort of graduates.

Meanwhile accreditation of a different kind has been progressing at a much faster rate. The Council for National Academic Awards, responsible for the oversight of over half of all graduates, established a Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (C.A.T.S.) in Spring 1986. Within a little over a year over 200 companies, 35 universities and 60 public sector colleges had made serious enquiries. The first formal approval/accreditation of in-company (I.B.M.) experiences to count (1/3 of total) towards a degree course in a different institution (Portsmouth Polytechnic) was granted in June, 1987.

When, therefore, there is talk of the 'accreditation of experience/learning', it is important to identify the institutional contexts within which all this is taking place. One form of experiential education - with a focus on access and work experience - has witnessed recent and rapid growth as a result of the injection of relatively major resources. It has grown because it offers a more flexible, less costly, more controllable, more directly relevant product - a product which is closer to training than education, which has as its highest objective industrial requirements, rather than those of self or collective improvement.

Another form - with a greater focus on life experiences per se - has grown more unevenly and irregularly. There have been hardly any large-scale sponsors of pilot projects, a tiny number of national conferences and negligible evidence of multinational exchanges. Indigenous forms of experiential education do not appear to meet the immediate needs of either Higher Education or industry.

The under resourcing of these initiatives underpins all accounts of their progress. One example produced a remarkably honest evaluation of its 'crisis', and 'alienated and divided' students. Some of the lessons were about the need for clearer statements of purpose (even if divergences must be made explicit), more careful planning - particularly with respect to role definitions and so on. But, less developed, were the consequences of the inadequate resource-base from which these ambitious struggles took place. Experiential education, of the 'Indigenous' kind, was alive and well, but a long way from I.B.M. and the Portsmouth Polytechnic.

One exception to the above, where a *national* educational and training programme is being launched around the concept of the indigenous worker, is that concerning Inner City Indigenous Youth and Community Workers. The programme will begin formally in the Autumn of 1989, with a team of two advisers laying the ground work from January of that year. Details of what will eventually involve twelve million pounds of expenditure over four financial years (via Education Support Grants) are not yet public.

From the evidence that is available (6), there are strong grounds for seeing such a major initiative as politically (rather than economically or educationally) led i.e. it is part of central government's twin concerns about i) a range of law and order issues and ii) the largely labour-controlled councils within whose boundaries these 'troubles' are played out. Taking an initiative to recruit local young men and women (from inner cities and outer estates) may well promote economic and educational developments. For central government the political returns seem more attractive.

### PERSPECTIVES ON EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Part of the problem of trying to make sense of contemporary developments in experiential education has to do with the undeveloped commentary literature. It is clear that there exists both a range of general approaches to adult learning, and a number of primary and secondary, (7), commentaries with an experiential theme. This section will attempt to outline and review these commentaries as the basis for the subsequent discussion (in Section V) of their implications for youth and community work.

The practical relevance of any attempt to differentiate between perspectives - in terms of their theoretical orientation and level of focus - can be simply illustrated. Earlier reference was made to the Turning Point organisation and its commitment to working with 'ordinary' and 'local' people in challenges against their oppression. In the course of asserting the value of apprenticeship training which works towards these purposes, a range of authors is presented. We note that, in no particular order of importance, Kolb, Maslow, Carl Rogers and Paulo Freire are helpful sources. (Sinclair, *op cit*). Nowhere is there a hint that the first three are more psychologically-orientated, or that there is a world of difference (even conflict) between the humanistic approach of Rogers and the more radical political concerns of Freire. Similarly, the latter is quoted uncritically, without reference to the problems posed by his eclecticism (see Youngman, *op cit*, 150-196). An uncritical use of explanatory perspectives can allow the contradictions within them to disrupt practice - it is not simply what is vulgarly called 'an academic matter'. But given the current state of commentaries on developments in experiential education, an eclectic position may, somewhat ironically, represent the best of current practice. The challenge remains, however, to uncover the potentially conflicting assumptions buried in practice. This is a necessary step towards a more discriminatory use of these same perspectives.

It is not my intention to conduct an exhaustive review of adult education texts in general or experiential material in particular. But it may be useful to provide a simple categorisation, and some comparative illustrative

material, to demonstrate the heuristic value of being able to 'locate' perspectives in ways parallel to the location of institutions as sketched out in the previous section.

Figure 3 borrows from a simple three-fold categorisation of adult education perspectives which notes

- i psycho-chronological - biology and psychology
- ii psycho-social - psychology and small groups
- iii socio-political - sociology and political science  
(T. Ireland, 1987, 47)

It then uses a vertical axis, based on the idea of primary and secondary commentaries, and allocates positions to some authors for illustrative purposes.

Figure 3. Perspectives in Adult Education.

	Psycho	Social	Political
Primary	Kolb Maslow	Rogers <u>Knowles</u>	Freire <u>Youngman</u>
Secondary	C.A.E.L.	<u>LET/Evans</u>	Flynn <u>Cowburn</u>

N.B. No significance should be attached to the specific positions of the authors' names - that would be demanding too much from an heuristic categorisation.

Illustrative reference will be made, from the authors underlined on Figure 3, in order to demonstrate their differing/conflicting perspectives on the theme at the heart of this chapter, i.e. the assumptions (in terms of theory, ideology and in direct practice) implicit in the concept of 'experience'. (8).

Malcolm Knowles has made a major contribution to Adult Education commentaries with his explorations of the concepts of pedagogy ('teaching the child') and andragogy ('teaching the man'). His focus on the latter emphasises the variety of ways in which social experiences, at what he terms 'critical moments' (1984 op cit, 8-12), provoke a readiness to learn. Whilst there are many references to 'social' contexts (in particular to the formal contexts of school, college, industry and profession) the adult learner tends to be seen as an individual, whose self-directed learning will lead to and be assisted by self esteem and self actualisation. The contexts are well and truly 'social' in a diffuse unproblematic way, but the mechanisms and motivations are internal/psychological. As a result, he has a tendency to mystify (even patronise?) his adult constituents with reflections on,

".... the great importance of using the experience of adult learners as a rich resource for learning. The principle is especially important in working with undereducated adults; who, after all, have little to sustain their dignity other than their experience." (Ibid, 11) (9).

This value position, that the learners/students are not be regarded as in deficit, and may even be in some ways more knowledgeable than their teachers, is an important one. It has underpinned liberal adult education writings for a long time. All too often, however, too much is claimed for it. In some accounts it is posed against 'Traditional' methods of, for instance, social work education, as if it were self-evident that any experiential approach could be termed 'radical' (see Crawley, 1983).

The 'radicalness' of experiential approaches is, however, frequently confined to the extent that they disturb the contradictions of the Theory : Practice relationship. Their stress on direct experience, relevance, learner control, change - some common core characteristics - is all too often left floating in a vacuum. As a result, the 'disturbances' may be creative, but not always in a cumulative development. Some greater recognition is accorded to the experiences of the student. The teacher 'moves over' a little but the underlying assumptions and structures remain more or less as they were.

It is just this superficial and functionalist use of experiential which is critiqued by Humphries (Humphries, 1988). We are urged to locate a more radical approach within the contradictions of an unequal society. Not unusually, the strength of such an analysis rests in its penetration of the assumptions that experiential is radical, rather than in a worked-out alternative. Some hints of this, at the level of ideas, comes from the work of Youngman. His analysis begins from an explicit Marxist theory of society which stresses the way experiences become part of an ideological struggle. They are not simple reflections of 'life' or even of the 'critical' points within this. Rather they reflect the varying impact of daily

experiences and the dominant ideas/ideologies of the ruling class. The 'experience' of Knowles' under-educated adult may be as much or more to do with 'ruling ideas' imposed upon him or her as with the concrete social contexts referred to by an important British commentator. (Jarvis, 1987)

The intellectual and practical task of experiential education in this account becomes, therefore, one of unmasking,

".... ruling ideas so that people can penetrate surface appearances and see the reality beneath." (Youngman, op cit, 96-7).

The educational role is about,

".... helping the dominated classes to develop the intellectual capabilities, technical expertise and political awareness...." (Ibid).

At a secondary level the commentaries within the C.A.E.L./L.E.T. tradition have contributed to our understanding of:

- a The different *forms* taken by experiential learning within non-sponsored and sponsored settings - see Section III.
- b The different *elements* of experience - for example, the mixtures of specific and general life experience as conceptualised by Sheckley, 1986.
- c The different *methods* for accrediting the learning - e.g. Evans, 1987.

These essentially technical details are both strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand there has been developed a rich variety of tools for assessment (Henebery, 1987a, 1987b). But on the other hand there is much less attention to either

- i The way 'experiences' are 'experienced differently' according to such variables as social class, gender and race, or
- ii The structural inequalities embodied in the formal educational institutions which provide the context for the handling of experiential processes.

In relation to the first of these we are told that the central learning obstacle is a "psychological hump" (Evans, 1987), and that educational recognition is,

".... the psychological food which keeps people healthy ...." (Evans, 1985, 99).

Experiential learning then becomes an activity where,

"There are no restrictions on the nature of experience save those which *individuals* (my emphasis) wish to impose themselves". (Evans, 1987, 13)

When Evans' attention shifts to an institutional or societal level, an almost flippant carelessness creeps in. The debates of feminism are left 'on one side' (Evans, 1985, 30), the Manpower Services Commission (his L.E.T. sponsor) has no "... clear obvious sense of direction" (ibid, 25). Later, the M.S.C. miraculously is labelled an agent of the radical philosopher Illich,

".... licensed by government to de-school by proxy, because it cannot act directly." (Ibid, 101).

Although Evans refers to his Illich comparison as a 'half tease', it becomes an irresponsible generalisation in the absence of anything more substantial about contemporary developments in adult and continuing education in the real world. Everything becomes worth the same, in the absence of clear sets of purposes distinguished from their alternatives.

No such problems of vagueness of purpose beset commentators such as Cowburn. After an onslaught on community education as 'reformist' and 'bourgeois', we are led to assume,

".... the essential validity of working class experiential knowledge ... as self evident (10) and the questions revolve around adding to and sharpening that knowledge." (Cowburn, 1986, i63)

Unfortunately, the crisply outlined mini-biographies of half a dozen community activists, a few pages outlining an apprenticeship scheme, and an opaque account of the Northern College do not add up to much. What is clear and sharp is that value position advocating an education in the interests of the working class rather than an escape-route from it (ibid, 197).

We can see, therefore, that divergent theoretical and ideological perspectives, (operating at different levels) can contribute to our understanding of experiential education. It is clear that, within and between them, inconsistencies and incompletenesses are visible. Exploration of these will not bring the mythical consensus, but it can identify the strengths and deficiencies of whichever perspective or level is adopted.

## TOWARDS A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

If the taken-for-granted assumptions about experiential learning and education are to be revealed and challenged, a critical perspective will be needed. The basic elements of this may include.

- a An attempt to identify the distinctive and common features of 'experience', 'learning' and 'education',
- b An examination of the basic contradictions within the term 'experiential',
- c The identification of contemporary developments across a range of educational systems. Of particular concern will be the question as to why some developments have emerged more strongly than others, and why in specific forms. After all, it is worth remembering that experiential education, however defined, has been a feature of educational strategies for a long time. What does seem to be more prominent now is the accreditation of prior learning from experience,
- d An exploration of the extent to which elements of a critical perspective are discernible within educational and training processes in youth and community work training agencies. The latter will be selected precisely because they have chosen to emphasise the central importance of the prior learning experiences of their recruits, and the need to safeguard and develop these via 'apprenticeships'.
- e The location of all the above features within a model of society where professional educators or trainers, and their students or trainees, are not regarded as individuals and small groups somehow separate from wider influences. Rather, the search concerns,

".... a process of making sense of experience by means of general concepts taken to be representative of that experience." (Dawe, 1973, 41).

In this case 'experience' refers to the total constellation of previously mentioned activities labelled 'experiential'.

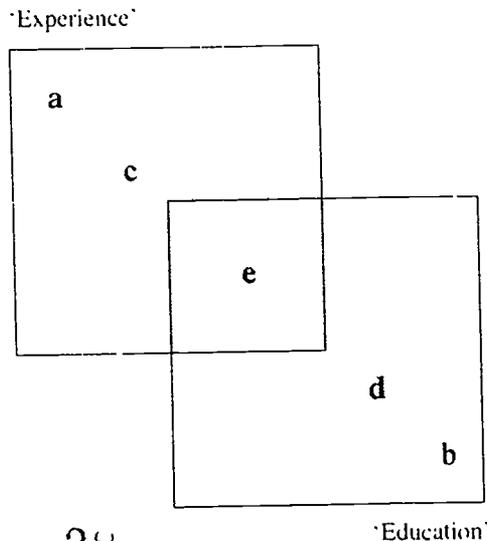
This chapter argues that the dominant conception of professionals as linked in a 'partnership' with their customers (whether concerned with experiential education or not) is at best unhelpful and at worst a deception. There may have been a time when there was less social change and fragmentation, when a broad consensus existed about the central importance of state welfare, and when the relationships between doctor, teacher or priest with patient, pupil or flock were more stable and underpinned by mutuality. (11).

The partnership model - often located in a hierarchical and unequal relationship - survives. But the social circumstances which once nourished it do not. There is more social fragmentation, a consensus about state welfare is less prevalent, and a range of social experiences (derived from gender and race in particular) have begun to assert their voices for a place in the scheme of things. In all of the prevailing talk about needing to make education and training more 'relevant' it is clear that the dominant strand is the link between training and employment. (12). The clients of educational systems are also crying out for relevance, but this is of a different order. We need, therefore, to 'grow' new knowledge as the basis for the education and training of tomorrow's workers. We cannot rely merely on those traditional systems which have led to the dominance of white, middle class men. We must extend the experiential franchise beyond this experience, and not simply as a recruitment device. The real issue is more than that of making traditional educational models more open, but of changing their structure and content to meet new needs and new possibilities.

#### EXPERIENCE, LEARNING AND EDUCATION

It is not 'merely academic' to search for greater precision of terms. For example, even Figure 4 below raises fundamental questions potentially of great significance for the way we approach 'things experiential'.

Figure 4. Experience, Learning and Education.



N.B. The diagonal shading represents the range of 'locations' where learning might occur, but the use of lines, rather than solid shading, indicates that, even there, learning is not necessarily the only activity. The terms 'Experience' and 'Education' derive from the distinctions 'unsponsored' and 'sponsored' of Figure I. They refer to what we can call 'life experience' and 'education experience'.

- not all Experience results in Learning (= area 'a')
- not all Education results in Learning (= area 'b')
- not all Learning takes place inside Education (= area 'c')
- not all Learning depends on experience (= area 'd')
- Experiential learning may take place either outside or inside educational systems (= areas 'c' and 'e')
- Experiential education may be defined as those activities within formal (courses, institutions) and non-formal educational systems (networks of distanced or open kinds) which depend *substantially* on direct experiences.

It will require individual judgements about whether particular courses and support networks deserve the prefix 'experiential'. For example, the formal course of three years duration which allocates less than 10% of its overall resources to experience-based role play, placements, the use of prior learning and so on cannot deserve the prefix. It may be allowed to acknowledge the subsidiary experiential element, but that is all.

More problematic are courses, such as those for social workers or youth and community workers, where fieldwork placements may occupy as much as 50% of the timetable. Here the term experiential *appears* to be more justified. But, much will depend on:

- a Whether the fieldwork assessment is allocated equivalent status to the traditional essays and exams - in many cases it is not.
- b Whether the fieldwork experiences are integrated across the range of tutorial, seminar and lecture provision - in many cases, the most intensive integration takes place on an individual basis
- c Whether the prior learning of the student is given initial and continuing credit - in many cases there are no formal mechanisms to ensure this is more than ad hoc.

It is evident, therefore that:

- a The sheer *quantity* of experienced-based approaches (as opposed to more didactic methods) is a necessary but insufficient pre-requisite for the award of the label 'Experiential';
- b Dependent on the amount, location and relationship of experience to other educational elements, so there will be consequences for the roles of student/trainee vis a vis educator/trainer. A fully experiential education can more successfully challenge traditional forms of professional dominance in education than a marginal variant. Where the structure and content of the curriculum is not solely dependent on the professional, so there will be possibilities for others to contribute whether as students or as their supporters. For example, the non-professional co-ordinator of a community centre into which the student is placed, may become more central to the extent that his or her non-professional status is seen as less significant than indigenous knowledge.

#### EXPERIENCE AND CONTRADICTION

Much of the previous section concerns structure, location and power. Just as important are meanings and values. To talk of 'experience' is to summon up competing models of society and the related disciplines used to interpret these. The psychologist and sociologist will handle experience in different ways; there may even be a contrast between a largely individual and a more collective emphasis respectively. Some interpreters (whether psychologist or sociologist) talk of experience in a relatively clinical way - there is much value in understanding how individual people learn. (e.g. Burnard, 1988). Others admit that experiences are social - an abstraction called 'society' appears (Jarvis *op cit*, and to some extent Crawley, 1983 represent this approach applied to social work education).

Still others place emphasis on a society which is unequal and in which experiences very largely reflect struggles between dominant groups, intermediaries and subordinate ones. We are urged to begin from the premise that,

".... our self-images, perceptions and desires are influenced by the lived relations of social oppression." (Hudson, 1983, 84).

A critical perspective would most resemble the latter. It would accept that 'experience', and the learning from it, will not prove to be unidimensional and homogeneous. Rather, there will be contradictions within it, derived in complex ways from the gender, race and class characteristics of the person involved. The contribution of psychology to the understanding of individuals would be recognised. But a critical perspective would place

greater emphasis on sociological contributions to an understanding of how whole social categories come to both experience dominant definitions (of being young, old, female, black etc.), and how they unevenly challenge these. A 'contradictory' experience - where opposed definitions and challenges interact - can become a catalyst for learning. In this context the personal experience becomes connected to the collective and social conditions - the individual begins to learn about the sources of inequality and oppression, as well as the possibilities for transcending these.

Handling 'experience' in this critical way is not easy. Even critical commentators find it difficult to make the distinction between 'real' and so-called 'false' experience. This is a familiar dilemma. Consider a prominent feminist writer talking of,

"... giving girls terms in which to express their experiential knowledge rather than having to fall back into the stereotyped expressions of normatively defined 'femininity' ...." (B. Hudson, 1984, 52)

So we have 'experiential' as opposed to 'stereotypes' and 'norms'. If only it was that simple.

#### CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS - AN OVERVIEW

The accreditation of experiential learning has grown fast as an alternative access route or '*passport*' into formal educational systems. It has also attracted commitment from industrial and academic institutions wishing to connect pieces of their organisation more closely together. Experience in this case is gained on '*placement*' in the factory or office and accredited via a mutual arrangement. Contemporary developments indicate that both these types are relatively traditional expansions of existing practices. Whilst there is much talk about the new 'openness', and the greater 'flexibility', a strong case can be made for the thesis that open forms are being matched by much greater specificity of task and core job competences.

A characteristic sequence would begin with:

- an identification of the required competences
- an identification of the content of competences, i.e. the knowledge, skills and values needed to ensure competence
- an identification of the processes needed to ensure the achievement of content, and therefore an assessment of competence.

At the heart of the work of the D.E.S., F.E.U. and M.S.C. are boxes, symbols, and hierarchies within which to define what is required of the trainee worker. (14). Thirty-three aspects of preparing vegetables and fruit for aspirant caterers. (Hermann and Kenyon, 1987), or eight core competences, sub-divided into nearly 40, for adult educators (W.J.E.C./A.L.B.S.U., 1987, 6-14), are typical examples. There are 'how to do it' manuals for supervisors or students. They reflect the concerns of both government and industry that sections of the labour force require new forms of training or re-training to meet the challenges of the late 20th century. Their 'interest' in the experiential route is primarily, if not exclusively, an instrumental one.

On the other hand, any use of global terms such as 'traditional' and 'instrumental', with reference to the complexities of educational form and content, must be underpinned with a note of caution. We can, so easily, become prisoners of our own categorisation.

For at least a generation, psychologists have used 'instrumental' in counterpoint to 'expressive'. It is not far from this terminology to the vocational/liberal dichotomy in secondary and tertiary education. But, there is ample evidence that the conceptual distinctions of theorists (who make a living from abstract classifications), and the administrative divisions of educational managers (who make a living from guiding the flow of students), have been accepted too readily. The existence of so many exceptions to this simple divide demands our attention.

Consider who are the largest sub-group in attendance at the most *liberal* form of adult continuing education provision - W.E.A. classes in history, literature and music. The answer is clear - teachers - who find such classes not a hermetically-sealed and separate diversion, but helpful for their own *vocational* needs in relation to fifth and sixth form pupils.

The converse can also be demonstrated. Vocational courses can be taught in liberal, less liberal or blatantly illiberal ways. Even within the most repressive regimes, there is evidence of the disruption of the instrumental and vocational. For example, in South Africa white volunteer teachers are only permitted to teach courses for adult blacks where these equip the students for employment. (Such a requirement has clear parallels with the rules and regulations of Employment Training in Britain.) There has developed, therefore, a preponderance of classes in literacy and numeracy. But, within these, the 'hidden' element remains. For a black South African it may be her first sustained experience of an easy, warm, even jocular relationship with a white person who accepts her totally, without regard to colour and gender. At such a moment experience, learning and education can be inextricable. (13).

Whatever the formal labelling of any particular educational system, almost any cluster or family of ideas may be mediated. Many young people in employment training schemes have been found to lack articulacy and to be clumsy in their self-presentation. They may find themselves in a Further Education setting ambitiously labelled 'life skills'. Freire demonstrated what is possible within such a context. A liberatory social vision can be conveyed, that contradicts all that the oppressed participants have previously been given to understand.

The instrumental/expressive, vocational/liberal divide can be viewed more usefully in relation to a formal hierarchy of objectives. One presentation of this would range from the informational, through technical and social skills, towards self-development as the ultimate value. In the latter would be included notions of cultural enrichment and critical consciousness. These would not emerge 'mysteriously' from the educational ether but in various interactions with the elements at other levels in the hierarchy. The process of self-generation may take place in the metaphorical upstairs bedroom, alone with a book, and or via the collective experience of self-transcendence with others. Such a tension, between a focus on the individual and the group, is reflected in the preoccupations of social theory.

Any use of the liberal/vocational dichotomy must have regard for the primary interests being served by such a use. It is suggested that a powerful element has to do with those who would divert resources away from self development and towards the formation of workers as productive instruments. Beyond a point, however, human interaction cannot be suppressed. Nevertheless, the worry remains that powerful institutions can manipulate experiential developments primarily to suit their requirements, rather than the collective and individual interests of the learners.

One step back from the A4 ring-binders, life-skills manuals, 'I can do it' lists, profiling and portfolio-building, reveals detail about the structure within which all this is taking place. It is becoming increasingly clear that delineation of competences and their accreditation is useful and relevant where individual tasks are separable and relatively routinised or predictable, i.e. at the lower levels of formal occupational hierarchies. As one moves up these hierarchies it is likely there will be greater discretion in the practice of defined tasks, and the increased possibility that individuals may work in teams. Therefore,

".... it becomes increasingly difficult to assess individual performance in those jobs as the outcome of competency-based training. So assessment of success in basing training on a standard of competence tends to become less and less reliable." (Chaplin and Drake, 1987, 68).

It is possible to conclude, therefore, that the greater prominence being given to prior learning and the identification of competences may not have the universal relevance for education and training systems that is sometimes implied. Much of the activity seems to be concentrated on practical tasks, and narrowly conceived 'life skills', to meet specific training demands to the relative exclusion of broader analytical approaches. (15). Similarly, we are presented with employer-provided training programmes depicted as existing in an industrial world free from alternative collective interests such as those of the workers. The possibility that the work-place, and the related training, might be contested territory is not directly considered. (16).

The overall impact of these changes on curriculum structure and content varies according to whether the focus is on the more formal systems of Higher Education, or the less formal networks within much of youth and community work. In the former, despite a strong consensus about the worth of such developments, it is clear that traditional course values and structures deflect growth towards,

".... those parts of the curriculum which are perceived as important but which are not academic subjects as such ... study skills and career planning .." (Griffin, 1987a) (17).

The very variety of practices within the latter precludes a single generalisation. There is some evidence from the work of PAVET that curriculum changes are not confined to marginal areas. Further discussion of examples is provided in the next section.

Even the growth of new forms of 'access' in Higher Education is not simply a product of new educational technologies or the logic of philosophies which call for greater openness. Life experience learning is being accredited *now* as much because of concerns about staff:student ratios as technological and philosophical concerns.

The overall growth of experiential approaches across a range of people-work activities is no less constrained by political and economic considerations. Recent proposals for the development of social work training demonstrate both massive inequalities in the investment of resources for training, and the continued acceptance of the primacy of the professional. A prominent Director of Social Services asks us,

"While it is *accepted* (my emphasis) that Q.D.S.W. holders need three years training, is it really right that they have 36 times as much training as the care staff who have the most continuous contact with clients?" (D. Lane, 1987)

Such inequalities have direct consequences for the allocation of scarce education and training resources within particular departments. For example, Strathclyde local authority community development section has the largest number of unqualified community workers (within one overall institution) in Britain. Yet, almost two-thirds of its training/conference time was allocated to the attendance of two workers on two courses (18).

A majority of the Strathclyde workers had over ten years post-school experience. Yet there was little evidence (A. Barr, 1987) of any systematic use of this in their support and development. Given that many of the most significant uses of experiential methods have been with non-professional/part-time/voluntary workers, resource inequalities have an added impact, i.e. they confirm traditional provision at the same time as preventing the development of perhaps more appropriate alternatives.

#### CONTRADICTIONS IN EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING PRACTICE

It is not easy to provide an overview of less traditional (more experiential) approaches outside the formal Higher Education systems. The very complexity of organisational forms and the unpredictability of resources have severely limited evaluative reports. One pioneering example of apprenticeship training for youth and community workers (Turning Point, 1984) did obtain £33,000 for a three year (1983-6) evaluation. Members of the evaluation advisory group had sight of an interim draft, but over two years on there has been no final and public document (personal interview with an evaluation advisory group member, October, 1988).

Another similar scheme (Sheffield, 1986) reported that there had been no time to evaluate any of the developments over the last seven years. (Personal correspondence from the scheme manager, September 1988.) She also noted a complete lack of knowledge of the parallel evaluation of the accreditation of prior learning, part of which was based at Sheffield Polytechnic (see N. Evans, 1988).

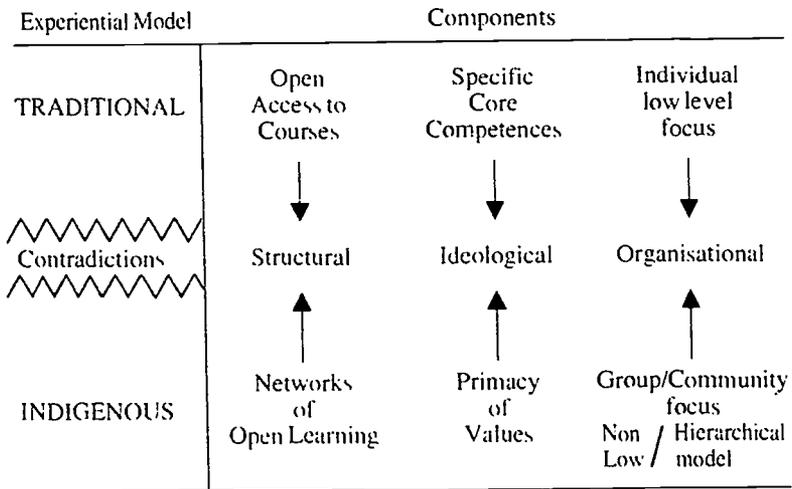
The account that follows is inevitably incomplete. It is prefaced by the presentation of an ideal-type identification of what are proposed as some of the central contradictions associated with competing forms of experiential education. Reference is then made to the course submission documents of three organisations which have given prominence to the concepts of the 'indigenous' worker and to 'apprenticeship'.

Attention will be paid to the ways in which contradictions seem to be recognised both by the endorsing institution (I.N.T.E.P., 1987) and the local agencies. The objective of this analysis is not to infer that submission

documents are accurate representations of subsequent curriculum practice. But, rather to outline a framework against which to assess any subsequent published accounts of this (e.g. Sinclair, 1987).

An earlier section noted the usefulness of 'Traditional' and 'Indigenous' as labels for two contrasting experiential approaches. The former consisted of classroom-based play and structured placements, whilst the latter depended on a sequence of processes designed to identify, recruit and accredit learning from experiences largely outside the formal ('sponsored') contexts of educational systems. In this context 'indigenous' refers to the knowledge, skills, values, relationships, statuses and influence which are derived from social experiences in domestic and community contexts. Some of these features may be very geographical - the neighbourhood contains them. Some may be more connected to membership of a social category not traditionally accorded high prominence in formal educational systems - the racial minority, women, working class activists. In these cases the person is 'native to' or indigenous to *social* territories which may not be confined by geography.

Figure 5. Contradictions in Experiential Education.



The 'Contradictions' of Figure 5 may be expressed in a variety of direct and indirect ways e.g.

- Structural* - 'Openness' rests upon fundamental resource inequalities which disrupt individual and institutional responses.
- Ideological* - Technical/instrumental objectives (core competences) may not 'fit' easily with philosophical ones (values and purposes).
- Organisational* - Hierarchy and division of labour affect the respective development of individuals and collectivities.

The general consequences of these contradictions may be more easily predicted than specific ones. The traditional model, sponsored and legitimated by the 'big systems', has such authority and status that it penetrates 'downwards' into the component areas of the Indigenous model. For example, those materials generated in a search for core competences may be adopted by a 'little system' (even a national voluntary organisation with a large constituency may warrant this label - in relation to its education and training - if there are only a few workers designated to work specifically in these areas). It is possible that the adoption of the technology - ways of defining, achieving and assessing competence - may obscure those questions of value and purpose which are its very *raison d'être*. On the other hand, it is also possible that a new clarity, about these very values and purposes, may be achieved.

At this point, a pluralist interpretation would exhort the virtues of a synthesis - a coming together of the best in each system. What could be better for all concerned? There *appear* to be advocates of such a process even within the Indigenous ranks. One commentator, on the contribution of working class women's experience to new forms of adult education (in particular, a youth and community work course), confirmed the essential importance of consciousness-raising. But, then went on to stress that,

".... women's strength is also, and essentially, developed through a closer attention to the detail of learning, to structure, to writing, to assessment, to validation ..." (H. Armstrong, in P. Flynn, 1986, 134).

On closer examination, Armstrong is not a pluralist in a philosophical sense - she advocates a methodological strategy which borrows from the best available, but harnesses this to a consistency of purpose based on a societal model which is some way from pluralism. She does not assume that the sources of her values (experiences generated by class and gender inequality) or the sources of specific core competences (the requirements of big systems) can be simply combined. She begins with a picture of an unequal society, and does not exclude educational structures and content

from it. Her vision is one in which working class women gain access to networks and courses, and are able to build their portfolios in curricular development which admit their experiences in a variety of continuing ways. But she accepts that the communal networks, with their concerns for greater equality (around for example, class, gender, race, sexual orientation and disability) will be compelled to contest their educational journey.

Some of the contests will be inward looking in the sense that they will be grappling with the incomplete and flawed features of individual or group experience. Still others will have a wider regard for the variety of ways in which unequal status and power is reflected in what is normal in:

- training budget allocations
- course shape and content
- recruitment
- assessment
- accreditation
- qualification

Arguably the most important normative element in education and training debates is the assumption that the overall impact of an individual's progress through a course or support programme will be beneficial both for the individual and her constituency. In the case of the professional course which 'certifies' or 'qualifies' this is described as,

".... professional awareness and competence." (I.N.T.E.P., 1987,6).

The inherent contradictions in all this are less evident. On the one hand there is a growing recognition that education and training institutions,

".... have to operate within a context that acknowledges and works against those forces that create inequality." (Ibid, 4).

On the other hand the contemporary *application* of the 'Equal Opportunisation' of the endorsement process is to particular aspects (not all) of gender and race. The possibility that the very structure and content of the endorsement process, and even the apprenticeship scheme, (let alone more traditional course/college-based provision) may work in contradictory ways with respect to inequality is less clearly evident. We learn, for example, that recruits to apprenticeship programmes may be from,

".... a particular 'catchment area' and/or 'market' (sic) ..." (ibid)

But the inherent dilemmas within this become dissolved in phrases about,  
 ".... competing demands on the workers in training as employees and  
 as trainees;" (op cit, 7).

The reference to industrial relations terminology is valuable but insufficient. This is particularly the case with reference to Youth and Community work. Most of the half million adults involved are volunteers (+90%), and even the part-timers (+7%) are unlikely to become full-time, paid professionals in large numbers. Any system of education and training in these areas should clearly have appropriate regard for what students and trainees bring from the 'most of the time' part of their *continuing* (not just prior) life experiences. Such regard cannot afford to be uncritical. The experiences of indigenous workers will contain their own contradictions (some of which will be drawn out in the very experiential education of their programme). These must be analysed alongside the contradictions inherent in professionalisation.

Even when the professional is numerically in a tiny minority or absent, the conception of him or her as *the expert* remains e.g. in adult literacy,

".... the sheer poverty of resources under which the adult education service has been forced to operate has led to the use of volunteer tutors for some functions. Without them the adult literacy campaign, for example, would have been impossible. Nevertheless the Association takes the view that teaching is a demanding and professional activity..." (N.A.T.F.H.E., undated document, 12 in Scott and Shenton, 1987, 76.)

If we had the money, this seems to say, we could do a better (- professional) job. (19).

It will not always be self-evident to particular agencies that any redefinition is necessary. Leaving aside those who clearly assert the professional as expert and non professional as subsidiary, there are many instances of organisations *being insufficiently aware of their assumptions* e.g. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureau, with 95% of its 14,500 workers as volunteers, stated,

".... you have in fact helped us identify a need for a policy statement or published paper about the training and development of our workers." (Personal correspondence in Scott and Shenton op cit, 75).

Presumably they had been concentrating their policy-making attention on the minority of full-time organisers.

Even when there is an explicit and clear commitment to integrate the 'most of the time' experience of many volunteers, part-timers and non-professional workers, this commitment must compete with other constraints. For example, the course-orientated, experiential materials generated by the F.E.U. and L.E.T. tend to agree that the time taken to identify and handle life experiences of students is too long. But they would, wouldn't they? Their concerns are with access. On the other hand, for most voluntary and part-time workers their unsponsored experiences are the centre - and a continuing one - of their lives. Experiential materials developed around access will not tend to disrupt the traditional teacher/course dominance. (20). When there is a need to maintain the experiential thrust beyond access, then these same roles may require re-negotiation.

The agencies which have attempted to develop the experiences of indigenous youth and community workers into a professionally endorsed educational package, face these dilemmas. Turning Point has emerged from networks of community activism in Deptford, South-East London. Its submission admitted that,

"... we are building a course, ours is not 'ready made', so we have no blue-print, but are learning through a continuing process."  
(Turning Point, 1984, 70).

Despite there being 63 pages of text and 47 of appendices, partly referring to the considerable experience of Turning Point in education and training since the early 1970's, the convention of submission for endorsement seems to have encouraged a sanitised account. There are hints that relating theory to practice is not easy (*ibid*, 21), and that apprenticeship can be characterised by "hazards and clashes" (*ibid*, 31).

Even when writing about all this from the 'safety' of a radical journal, the community work tutor represents the processes of professionalisation (i.e. the qualification of full-time staff within a nationally recognised framework) in a relatively unproblematic way. The clearly stated objective of Turning Point is to,

"... help facilitate the transformation of the committed but semi-conscious activist into a professional worker who is prepared for the challenges of promoting real change for the oppressed..."  
(Sinclair, *op cit*, 24).

Previously mentioned hazards and clashes become dissolved in the assertion that tutor-student relationships focus around the fact that staff are,

"... human beings first and tutors second." (Sinclair, 1987,25)

Earlier references to class, race and inequality remain 'out there' on the streets rather than part and parcel of the whole experiential education and training process. The possibility that the endorsing institution (I.N.T.E.P. in C.E.T.Y.C.W.), and/or the tutor/trainer, could be conceptualised as intermediaries in the relationship between a hegemonic (taken for granted) and dominant culture and the subordinate or indigenous culture is less apparent. On the contrary, youth and community work is seen as having,

".... a part to play in redressing the current imbalance of power and inequality." (Turning Point, 1984, 1).

The employment of newly professionalised working class and black workers must be firmly located within these same inequalities - this is not an unproblematic process. Just because black workers, for example, are increasing in numbers does not mean that they will not collude in the perpetuation of inequality. Indeed, one black commentator goes so far as to suggest that these,

".... have become part of that system, and are no more than an irritant for our new masters." (Williams, 1988, 117). (21).

It has already been inferred that the innovative Turning Point agency did not draw upon its considerable experience with indigenous workers in educational and training processes to point up the associated contradictions, because it wished to safeguard its endorsement. If its central actors believed that pointing up contradictions would be prejudicial, they were mistaken because:

- (a) there is a considerable, and not particularly 'political' or 'radical' literature, which makes the same point about experience-based training in general (e.g. Meila's work, op cit. with nurses) and youth and community work in particular (e.g. Holman, 1981, Jones 1982, 1983).
- (b) parallel submissions were prepared to make a prominent feature of just this central issue. In a series of four comprehensive diagrammatic presentations, the Community Work Apprenticeship Scheme (C.W.A.S.) makes a major feature of the contradictions of state-sponsored welfare.

".... this ambiguity cannot be removed ... one task of the programme is to ensure a clear and critical understanding of the ambiguity ..." (Sheffield, 1985, 5).

For some agencies, which share the radical values of Turning Point and C.W.A.S., the ambiguity may be lessened to the extent that their focus is not upon the production of 'qualified' workers.

In such a situation the educational process does not have learning as a passport to social mobility but,

"... towards the development of collective action, mutual aid and self-organisation." (Ruskin College, 1985, 14).

Turning Point and C.W.A.S. have pioneered new possibilities for indigenous workers (22) - black and white, women and men - to find new routes to qualification. They have highlighted the ubiquity of inequality and the need for education and training to challenge it. More unevenly they have been critical of the very processes in which they have become immersed, i.e. recruitment, selection, training and qualification. The worry remains that their critical concerns, about inherent contradictions and ambiguities, may still prove opaque to those who follow. Interface, for example, is the latest in line to submit its programme for endorsement (Interface, 1987). It is not easy to detect how far the explicit presentation of ambiguities outlined by C.W.A.S. has been developed. Indeed there is a very real sense (deepened by the absence of any form of bibliographic support materials) that the contradictions within education and training are still buried. Professionalism does receive a mention (ibid, 21, 41) as one of fifteen 'issues', but a critical commentary upon this remains latent.

### CONTRADICTIONS IN PRACTICE

The ultimate test of any learning and educational approach, whether experiential or traditional, is the effect it has on 'real' practice - not just the placement practice or apprenticeship. One version of the warning of Williams and Stubbs, about youth and social work training for black workers, is that their prior experiences become well and truly harnessed. But not for the further liberation of their black constituencies. They are incorporated as new recruits to the various forms of welfare caretaking.

Part of an answer lies in the extent to which a truly critical perspective is brought to bear on all forms of education and training - in particular on the new enthusiasm for things experiential.

Still another safeguard will be developed via a careful analysis of the real, practical contradictions of youth and community work. For example, of the ways in which indigenous knowledge is 'used' by the state not just around and within education, but in the direct recruitment of the 'natives' in ways which have been tried and tested all over the Empire for hundreds of years. A number of careful accounts have begun to emerge, which emphasise the dynamics of change in such contradictions. It is not just an endless circle of struggle and containment. There are innovative

developments hewn out of the struggle in ways which challenge traditional conceptions of 'experiential' and 'indigenous'. Just as the best of the educational technology of the Learning from Experience Trust can prove useful to learners and educators, so they must also look to the cultural forms,

"... ranging from the voices on pirate radios, microphone operators at sound systems and independent recordings to arguments and discussions at community education classes, conferences and political meetings". (Farrer, 1988, 112).

If the indigenous experiential model is to grow and challenge traditional conceptions of learning and education, it must continually be informed by these contemporary struggles and experiences. Only in this way can it too avoid romanticisation and incorporation. A truly critical perspective cannot do otherwise than to continually 'keep in trim' by its own forms and processes of practice.

#### THE CENTRAL ARGUMENTS REVIEWED

- i Experiential education encompasses a wide variety of principles, programmes and practices.
- ii The use of the ideal types 'Traditional' and 'Indigenous' can be justified to the extent that they encourage forms of comparative and critical analysis.
- iii These ideal types interact, even overlap, but they are different and often in conflict.
- iv The fundamental sources of this conflict lie not in their technologies but their values and purposes.
- v These conflicting values and purposes impact on practices in that
  - a) organisations and institutions concerned primarily to improve access to training, and the *production* of a competent workforce, pay limited attention to the 'most of the time' life experiences which lie outside their systems.
  - b) Those concerned to *change* individuals and institutions pay greatest and continuing attention to strategies which encourage learning from experience.

- vi In traditional models of experiential education the relationship between educator/trainer and student/trainee may be friendly, but the underlying power differential remains unchallenged.

In indigenous models, particularly when the student/trainee is part-time/voluntary/non professional, the power relationship can be addressed. This is more possible because the concept of 'empowerment' allows it to become both an integral (rather than an irritant) part of the curriculum, and one of the desired outcomes.

- vii The resource inequalities at the heart of the 'big systems' of education and training are not an historical 'accident'. They are a direct consequence of their purposes. The corollary is that the smaller systems, which are often more critical and challenging, are likely to remain relatively underfunded and marginal. Given an appropriate vision, herein lies the source of their energy and commitment to change.

## NOTES

1. The interim report was the forerunner of a Feasibility Study, i.e. D. Scott and N. Shenton, 1987. Whilst the latter clearly moves some way towards identifying the main political and ideological discontinuities, the assumption that it is sufficient to present uncritically a pluralism of purposes is not uncommon. This same 'Three cheers for variety' is prominent in the writings of the Director of the Learning from Experience Trust. (See N. Evans, 1987)
2. In the production of a parallel report (D. Scott and N. Shenton, 1987) from within a separate section of C.E.T.Y.C.W., I have encountered similar responses from representatives of small underfunded agencies. Their 'fears' are grounded in a material reality - they are not simply abstract 'fears'. Nor are they the consequence of particular personalities; rather they reflect institutional inequalities and contradictions within the systems concerned to promote experiential education. At the very least they should be described and made explicit. Polite correspondence cannot wish them away.
3. During a national postal survey of training agencies, concerned with experiential and open learning methods, (D. Scott and N. Shenton, 1987) it was suggested that a particular Regional Director of the Open University could provide further guidance. His reply was a terse, handwritten note 'The Director of L.E.T. is the guru'. (ibid, 58.) This is a common perception, and not without some foundation, for Norman Evans symbolises the links between the more established institutions in North America, and the new enthusiasms and networks in Britain.

In his book 'Post Education Society : Recognising Adults as Learners' (Evans, 1985), Evans prominently acknowledges three chief officers of a United States organisation C.A.E.L. - in a non-alphabetical list, they are the first three mentioned. (c.f. the first L.E.T. monograph was by the President of C.A.E.L., i.e. M. Keeton 1987),

"... because without his support and encouragement L.E.T. would not have evolved as it has ...." (N. Evans in introduction to J. Storan, 1988). These links are continuing and two-way. (N. Evans, 1988, 6).

C.A.E.L. was founded in March 1974 as a project of the Educational Testing Service, i.e. the Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning. During the next three years C.A.E.L. succeeded in attracting considerable funding and in February 1977 re-named itself as the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning - now the emphasis was more on an outreach role. Finally, in the summer of 1985 the name was changed again - to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning.

Evans is an important link between C.A.E.L. and innovations in adult and continuing education policy in the United Kingdom. During the early 1980's he worked closely with the Further Education Unit of the Department of Education and Science. The psychological testing influence of the founders of C.A.E.L. emerges in his publications from the F.E.U. (Evans, 1983, 1984).

In the mid 1980's Evans developed closer links with the Manpower Services Commission, from whom he obtained a grant to establish in November 1986 the Learning from Experience Trust. The overall thrust of these developments in experiential education continues to focus on testing and assessment. For example C.A.E.L., Evans, the D.E.S. and the M.S.C. are all involved in promoting a U.K. pilot of the 'Student Potential Programme' (S.P.P.) in a section of the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education.

4. The second community work learning programme has an overall budget estimated at c£7,000 (i.e. grants, resources in kind and fee income).
5. i.e. C.O.N.T.A.C.T. - a federation of five universities and polytechnics.
6. I have been directly involved
  - a) in a working group which never met, but which received papers,
  - b) in the appointment of the two national advisers.

Both processes were serviced by C.E.T.Y.C.W., which will continue to assist in the administration of the programme. Yet, despite the size and potential implications of this programme, there have been no detailed debates about the educational assumptions which underpin it.

7. i.e. 'Primary' commentaries operate largely at a general level (e.g. Malcolm Knowles' work on 'Andragogy' - Knowles, 1984, or Frank Youngman on a Socialist Pedagogy, Youngman, 1986). 'Secondary' commentaries are more closely derived from particular institutions (e.g. the C.A.E.L. literature - K. Knapp and I. Jacobs on setting standards, Knapp and Jacobs, 1981, or the relevance of Community Education, W. Cowburn, 1986).
8. The selection is 'partial' in the sense that the primary commentators do not span the entire psycho-social-political spectrum. There is relatively little attention given to the psychological end of the range, partly a function of my relative uncertainty in this area, and more, perhaps, because there are strong psycho-social connections in Evans' writing.
9. c.f. A recent British writer on the need to locate adult education within a social context. We are informed that,  
 "There is little reference to the role of sex, socio-economic class or the social origins of language apart from the work of Paulo Freire". (Jarvis, 1987, 98).

This may be somewhat sweeping but, more interesting in a comparison with Knowles, is that Jarvis goes on to offer a similar vagueness about 'society' and 'experience'. Despite passing reference to Gramsci's concept of hegemony, the prevailing tenor is of a plurality of meanings (ibid, 204), and 'structures of society' in an almost abstract sense (ibid, 188).

Most crucial of all is the conception of 'experience' as the 'learning resource' of the individual. i.e. "... *they* bring *their own* biography to every situation that *they* experience." (Ibid, 77). - my emphases.

10. c.f. The stress on meanings in context, i.e. actions take on significance not just in relation to the overall purposes or ideologies, but to how these are differentially shaped in specific struggles. For example, all women's struggles are not to be commended, because a,  
 "... stand for a better bus service into town, or a more humane method of rehousing in a clearance programme, did not challenge her role in the home." (Hancock in Flynn, 1986, 84).

11. c.f. Even Marxist inspired accounts of the Doctor-Community relationship borrowed from this tradition e.g. John Berger's study of a country G.P. in the Forest of Dean. J. Berger, 1969.
12. See Training for Employment, HMSO, 1988.
13. All of which is not to assert that this is *inevitable*. Indeed, there is comparable evidence that much vocational training of police and prison officers, of military personnel, and even of industrial managers, is given within a climate that completely rejects liberal values. It will often be assumed in advance that students accept this. The hidden curriculum may, in this case, be used to reinforce such an orientation.
14. The majority, (but not all), of 'trainees' are initial entrants, rather than those engaged in continuing professional development. Examples such as apprentices on Y.T.S. are numerically more significant than F.E.U. projects with experienced civil engineers, being assisted with 'D.I.Y.' learning because of the absence of coherent staff development policies.
15. c.f. This view as applied to the M.S.C. training programmes within Further Education - the 'Tertiary Modern' sector - (Gleeson and Hopkins, 1987).
16. Chaplin and Drake, op cit.
17. c.f. The conclusion of Jack Mansell, then Chief Officer of F.E.U., that experiential approaches were most developed to facilitate *access* to courses, rather than in the main body of the courses. Access was ".... the engine of progress." (in Griffin, 1987, 14.)
18. A. Barr - personal correspondence February, 1987. See also the same author's report A. Barr, 1987.
19. c.f. Beyond youth and community work training, across Adult Education throughout Europe, the majority of the educational tasks are carried out by part-timers and volunteers. (D. Legge, 1985.).
20. c.f.

- i Malcolm Knowles' work on the need to place great emphasis on social experience in adult learning. Yet, within his 36 case-studies of what he terms 'Andragogy' in action, there is only a half page on non-professionals in the whole book. We learn that paraprofessionals are useful for 'non-instructional' duties so that professional teachers can,

"... concentrate on instruction, curriculum development, and direct monitoring of individual student progress ...." (Knowles, op cit, 395-6).

The experiential process is thus used to reinforce the professional-paraprofessional distinction.

- ii Donald Schon's critique of traditional conceptions of professional knowledge. His 'reflective practitioner' is encouraged to allow,

"... himself to experience confusion and uncertainty, subjecting his frames and theories to conscious criticism and change ..." thereby becoming,

"... a danger to the stable system of rules and procedures within which he is expected to deliver his technical expertise." (D. Schon, 1983, 328.)

Still centre-stage is the professional or the in-embryo student version. The new alternative professional still rides in on a white horse, whilst the non-professional foot soldiers do not even rate a mention.

- iii Probably the best primer yet available for professional social workers wanting to make their work strongly orientated towards the needs of their local community is that by Roger Hadley et al (R. Hadley, 1987). It is concluded that there are few established models (ibid, 228), yet when the question is raised as to what forms of training encounter can develop between social workers and local residents, it is suggested,

"... training for members of a tenants' association in how to run meetings, talks for volunteers, help to community groups in setting objectives or designing forms, photocopying facilities etc..."

And so, yet another *Top-Down* model is unfolded, (ibid 235). The positive experiences of the local community remain hidden beneath their needs.

21. c.f. Paul Stubbs' critical examination of the recruitment of black social workers -
  - i.e. "Seeing race alone as the key factor, the suggestion might be that 'black professionalism' has an inadequate understanding of the problem ..." (1987, 489). See also P. Stubbs, 1985.
  
22. Turning Point is one of a handful of community-based agencies seen as 'flagships' of new developments in education and training. From Spring 1989 it will be linked with the D.E.S. funded three year programme attempting to establish a national network of apprentice youth and community work training for 'indigenous young people' in inner city areas. One of its workers (Trevor Sinclair) has been appointed to the National Steering Committee. A parallel connection has been established with the Birmingham-based Interface scheme.

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**CHAPTER 2**

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**EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION**  
**Positive Possibilities and Negative Practices****INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is equally convinced of the positive potential of the experiential approach in all educational endeavours. But it is also mindful of the huge philosophical and practical minefields thereby embraced. It argues that experience is both intense, unique and profoundly social - the individual may construct (or may not, or may be confused by) her/his own learning; yet the ingredients for such a construction come from elsewhere.

'Elsewhere' is too elusive. We see one central source of experience as the economic system which places people in and out of work, up and down the hierarchies of power and status. We puzzle over the undeniable reality that some experiences seem more 'persuasive' than others - persuasive, even in the face of what appears (at least to mere spectators) to be a more compelling reality. Examples spring to mind such as the unemployed single mother who blames herself or 'bad luck', rather than the practices and values which oppress her.

We end by touching on what for us is *the* educational issue of our time, whether experiential perspectives are employed or not. This is the frontal assault on traditional notions of liberal adult education. Such an assault - in the name of 'relevance', in the name of 'competitiveness', in the interests of employers - is based on a false assumption, i.e. that narrowly focussed training, *on its own*, will fit the square pegs to the round holes. No such drastic re-modelling can ever be more than superficially effective.

We end as we began from a sociological truism - people are both individual and social beings, whose experiences are all that many of them possess. Any system which wants to recruit the people - as volunteers, part-timers or full-time paid workers - will also inescapably recruit their experiences. When experiences are 'packaged' to suit the system, they have a strong propensity to break loose, and bring the machinery to a standstill.

Britain in the 80's was subjected to a calculated reinforcement of the institutions and instruments of competitive materialism. In education this was expressed as a massive attempted development of vocational training, and the attrition of educational provision for the humane, social and liberal development of individuals and groups. The recognition of living and working experience as basics for adult learning, in itself long overdue, may be in the service of either of these broad aims. This central issue is of long standing, even ancient. The present calls for an examination of 'experience' in relation to educational values, and in itself.

Chapter I has questioned what kind of experience is currently being elevated; more particularly, whose? One notes that the experience of the main-stream professional, usually a socially secure middle-class person, is what trainees in industry, in youth work, in teaching, are generally expected to assimilate. The effect is to marginalise and devalue the living experience of the trainee, and often totally to exclude it. Yet that experience is basic to subsequent learning. When fully recognised, however, the significance of it is revealed in sharp relief. A genuine attempt to bring living experience into learning will encounter the unexpected. It is a strategy that may run into minefields, quagmires or rich green pastures. No sure guide can be offered to one who enters this territory. Like Bunyan's Pilgrim, every tum may bring something fresh and surprising. Like Pilgrim, the educator will fare best if he holds firmly to basic values. He will be beset by false friends who counsel him to have regard to short-term material gains. To discern what is of most value in the experience of a varied group of learners is a heroic task, but one may be fore-warned against false trails.

#### THE EVALUATION OF EXPERIENCE

Several questions were listed on p[2] - How is learning from experience to be interpreted? Is it transferable? At what point might it become critical? What of experience that reinforces racism, and sexism? Are we to distinguish primary and secondary experience? The present chapter seeks not to answer but to encourage a more complex awareness of the issues at stake.

Despite the claims and the vested interests of older people who rest their authority and their right to speak on having lived through so much, some of the sharpest of them have not set the highest value on experience. Indeed, many have suggested that experience is to be avoided, as far as possible. Thus Bernard Shaw saying that experience is largely a matter of experiencing what one did not wish to experience; or Oscar Wilde 'Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes.' And Bismarck's view was that "fools learn from experience: I learn from other people's experience."

Hegel's well-known statement takes us a little further: 'What experience and history teach is that people and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.' We may define history as collective experience; then the question becomes, 'what principles can we possibly hope to deduce from it?'

We perceive some generally agreed connections, such as the relations between economic advance and higher technical education; but even here we hesitate to say the connection is causal. We begin to see both phenomena as deriving from a more obscure determinant.

So the question becomes how can we literally 'make sense' of our experience? Perhaps a few more words of wisdom from the great will be allowed; both have significance for education.

Oliver Wendell Holmes: "A moments insight - is sometimes worth a life's experience."

T.S. Eliot: "We had the experience but missed the meaning,  
And approach to the meaning restores the experience  
In a different form ..."

And Eliot again: "A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensitivity."

But we must also remember with R.D. Laing, (1967) that,

"You cannot experience my experience. We are both invisible men. All men are invisible to one another. Experience is man's invisibility to man. Experience used to be called The Soul ..."

These statements represent the furthest point in the exploration of the subjective self, and the possibilities of genuine relationships with others.

We must add that a total scepticism about the possibility of understanding another's experience may entail a corresponding doubt about the validity of one's own.

There are some clinically recognised conditions where a person has been unable to accept the reality of what has happened to him/her, especially where the experience has been a terrible one. On the other hand we may note that there are good philosophical reasons for our assuming that we can to some degree empathise with others. If one tries to assume that one's own experience is outside the possibility of others' understanding - and this often happens with the victims of torture - then it becomes impossible to sustain one's existence as a person.

In the illustrative examples that follow, the tensions between knowing and now knowing another's experience, let alone the meaning of one's own are indicated.

#### VARIETIES OF EXPERIENCE AND LEARNING: Good and Bad, Helpful and Harmful

- \* *After six months of work experience in a firm taking advantage of cheap labour on offer by the Youth Training scheme, a young man may say (as was reported recently). "My work consisted of off-loading sides of meat from the lorry into the cold-store. I didn't feel there was any value at all in that experience." So nothing was learned, or could be learned from such a routine operation. The work required no skill, no intelligence. It could have been performed by a machine. It was impossible for the young man to identify with his task. There was nothing in it for any kind of learning/teaching to build on. Many such jobs have been mediated by Y.T.S. It is clear that in such cases the system meets only the needs of an employer. The young person would probably be able to develop a richer experience if he remained unemployed.*
  
- \* *The case of a young woman with a failed marriage and two young children offers a total contrast, in that her experience has been very rich, very dense. Her problem is to survive, and beyond that to understand. She has learned something about home-making, about the management of money and about social security. She cannot understand what happened in her marriage; but who can? She cannot understand the behavioural and emotional reactions of her children to the trauma of the break-up; again, who can, in any complete sense? She has lived through a tremendous - negative - experience. It is beyond analysis, beyond conceptualisation or formulation. Can she then be said to have learned from her experience? If what she thinks she has learned cannot be communicated or even expressed, how is her experience to be rated as a basis for further learning?*
  
- \* *A young black woman, selected on the best 'indigenous' principles, is attached for place work experience to an experienced black male youth and community worker. He treats her as a sex object and appears uninterested in her working potential. She draws strength from a white woman colleague who is a militant lesbian feminist. Some*

*of these characteristics the black woman finds repellent. How do we assess her placement experience when she applies for employment in race relations?*

- \* *An unsupported mother who has lived through racial oppression, famine and refugee status in a third-world setting has also accumulated rich experiences, largely negative, but of great potential for the study of politics in developing countries. Would that be what she needs?*
- \* *A young man is 'fortunate' in his work placement as a sales assistant. He learns rapidly from his experience. He applies for advancement, and is sent for intensive training. In this he does well, and on completion is appointed to a responsible post in the sales department of a cigarette manufacturer. Are we content with this outcome?*
- \* *A sensitive young man opts for work experience in a psychiatric ward. His horror and distress at the impersonal techniques of patient control, which appear to be necessary where there are so many patients and so few staff, gradually gives way under the pressures of time and work-load. He becomes assimilated into the staff culture. How do we assess that learning?*
- \* *Similarly, a young girl finds her first employment in an office with all the characteristics of bad morale: work dodging, exploitation of the weakest, sexual harassment. She tells her story on interview for admission to a course. How could this experience be used?*
- \* *The experience of the wives during the miners' strike has been detailed by Tony Parker (1988) among others. For those of them who were active in the Women's Support Group, it was mostly very positive, and in a few instances resulted in a transformation, the realisation of a new social self. Similar transformations have been observed in the course of community action struggles - for better housing, welfare or leisure provision. If now they wish to train for new employment to support their families, would their experience render them more fitted for acceptance, or less?*

*The list could be extended indefinitely as every person has his/her working history, including of course non-employed homeworkers, many of them 'carers' - these are the unsponsored experiences as identified on pp[3] and [4]. But already we have the first varieties.*

1. *There are those, a great proportion of the work force, for whom work has been meaningless, the experience empty, characterised by 'alienation'.*

*This definition must be qualified, in that many have valued their work because it involved interaction with others. This was not a requirement, not mentioned in the job prescription, not part of the task. Often in fact it was suspect, and employers over the centuries have tried for example, to suppress talking as do school teachers.*

*Further, most of those who have lonely and meaningless tasks tend to ritualise their operations and attribute meanings to every operation. The experience of work is thus humanised in fantasy.*

2. *There are those whose experience in work or in the family has been confusing, even chaotic. They may have a sense that what they have lived through was charged with significance. They distinguish what was very good and what was very bad, but they find no intelligible pattern. They have not been able to take a position from which to develop a clear perspective.*

*A first-order classification of social experience as drama, ritual and routine may be useful (J.F. Morris, 1972). When we are involved in events of which the outcome will be of consequence for us, but cannot be predicted or controlled, that is defined as drama. Much management in private enterprise is experienced as a succession of critical situations. Some degree of stress and anxiety may be occasioned by a working life of continuous drama. Rituals are social processes which fully involve us, but the outcome is known in advance. Family meals, the young person's preparation for the disco, teaching in class, may be examples. We attach value to our participation in rituals; they have a meaning for us. Routines however are repetitive procedures which have no intrinsic interest. We perform required routines only for material ends. Washing up, daily travel, mowing the lawn may be examples. In principle, routines are*

*activities that could be accomplished by a machine. A high proportion of unskilled manual work is of this character.*

*We need some balance in our lives. A great excess of drama or of routine puts us in real danger. The three-fold classification helps us to recognise how fundamental are the differences of work experience for people in different roles. It is clear that in the example of the young man shifting meat hour by hour, there is an excess of routine, leading towards alienation, whereas the unsupported mother who has lived through the break-up of her marriage has experienced, and is still experiencing, altogether too much drama.*

3. *There are those whose working lives, whose families and even whose mental balance have been totally disrupted by political-economic developments which they have not perceived as such. Even the shattering experience of unemployment may be taken as a misfortune, like bad weather, and nothing more. In C. Wright Mill's dictum, they have not made the connection between the private troubles of milieu and the great issues of public policy. So, they had the experience but missed the meaning.*

*Is that meaning what they most need from the educationist? Or do they call for help in a more direct form? Such questions are central to the administrative-political context, as is emphasised in our first chapter.*

4. *There are those whose work experience has been satisfactory - for themselves - but who accept the rewards of a life devoted to one of the 'bad' enterprises, as stigmatised by the churches, ethical trust managers and others: nuclear armaments, South African collaborators, exploiters of third world labour and resources. How is such work experience to be rated?*
5. *There are those who have achieved stable employment at the cost of sacrificing their most sensitive awareness of self and others, their moral discrimination, ultimately their integrity. This will often be the case with those who*

*accept training as prison officers, police, operators in factory farms and slaughterhouses, encyclopaedia salesmen and many other occupations.*

*What instruments are available to the educator for the detection of such a condition? And what remedy?*

6. *There are those who have emerged from a bad working experience in a state of blazing anger, suppressed or open; and with justice, one might think, as one hears their story. What might be an appropriate response from the educationist? This dilemma is in fact quite common.*

#### EXPERIENCING UNEMPLOYMENT

"Those able and willing to work, but who cannot get paid employment, often feel rejected and robbed of their self respect. We see the results in suffering, alienation, anger and violence.

We see all around us unmet needs - children to be taught, the sick to be cared for, houses to be built and repaired - and on the other hand people finding that there is no paid work for them. It is immoral that many suffer prolonged unemployment because we have not resolved this problem. Everyone can help bring about a climate of opinion in which mass unemployment is judged intolerable."

The above statement, of the Quaker Social Responsibility and Education Committee, was adopted in March 1987 by the Meeting for Sufferings, the Friends' central executive body over more than three centuries. It expresses an ethical, political judgement that we would endorse, but with more anger than the Quakers allow themselves.

The scourge of mass unemployment is presented to its victims as if it were a natural disaster; or even as something visited upon them because of their own short-comings, and calling for further sacrifices. Let it be said that there is one appropriate response to mass unemployment, which is mass anger, with an inflexible demand for its abolition.

All socialist principle dismisses out of hand the possibility of mass unemployment in a well-ordered political economy. Even liberal theorists, Keynes and Beveridge, showed how full employment could be achieved within capitalism. The political parties committed themselves to it after 1945. In our time Goran Therborn (1986) has sufficiently demonstrated that some western countries have largely succeeded in maintaining it even during depression, where there was a collective will to do so. Andrew Glyn (1986) has shown how it might be substantially achieved, even in Britain. The Soviet Union, despite two generations of

inept administration, has never abandoned commitment to it, in concert with a relatively free choice of occupation and the uncontrolled movements of millions of their people.

Why then is mass unemployment tolerated in Britain, even by its victims? Clearly this has something to do with the 'engineering of consent' and with 'hegemony' (Gramsci 1971) as with Gramsci's analysis of 'common sense'. These issues touch closely on how we experience what happens to us. What common sense can there be in running a national economy with up to a quarter of its human resources unused?

Yet when a young man finds himself unemployed he tends to blame himself (more often, it appears, than the case of a young woman). He sees most others of his age group working, and feels within himself that his own defects of training, presentability or perseverance must be responsible; and this in communities where the Archangel Gabriel might well find himself out of work, following a change in the interest rates. The unemployed must accept training in a different field where there are skill shortages and job openings. It is unlikely that the demi-semi-training usually available will qualify him, but it is just possible that if he is willing to leave his family he could find work in the South East; where there is no chance of finding an affordable home.

It is equally likely that he will not find work, and will become depressed. The statistical association of unemployment with depression, and with suicide, is beyond doubt. Depression and suicide are the ultimate expressions of self-blame.

In psycho-therapy it is taken to be a good sign when depression, anxiety and conflict are replaced by a greater assertiveness, even a display of anger, all marks of increasing ego-strength. The reality is that the unemployed person has plenty to be angry about, and usually not very much to blame himself for. What 'reality' is the therapist then to help him to accept? It could be that the educationist, offering knowledge and understanding of social, industrial and political history, would leave him more informed, more angry, and thereby healthier. To understand all may well be to forgive nothing. This is indeed a matter of 'perspective transformation'. Such transformation brings with it a rejection, a reversal, of all he may have learned by experience. Tony Parker (1988) has documented the great access of strength and integrity of a striking miner's wife who discovered and declared her outright hatred of the government and its prime minister.

Any training system that is content to work with naive subjects, and to leave them socially naive when the training is finished, negates the basic values of education. It may well represent the practice and even the intentions of employer-led training, but it must not claim to be a form of

*educational* provision. A cardinal principle of education, a primary task, is that it should promote freedom of thought and speech, a critical perspective overall.

### EXPERIENCE IS SOCIAL

All of us have been formed by our experience, largely our experience of interacting with other people. Our basic formation takes place in the family. But later as adults, in order to survive, we have to conform to the social requirements of our place of work. Conformation may then reinforce, or may contradict our original formation. Some on-going relations with significant others are essential; an absolute necessity in fact, because we cannot subsist on self-regard alone. Any such attempt can lead to a variety of mental disorders, though the attempt is often made by young people with no work and inadequate family support. The publications of the Youth Development Trust (42nd Street) or of Centre Point provide evidence of this. They describe how young people, often at odds with their own families, surface in the city centre of Manchester, Stockport or London, having hitched from Scotland, South Wales, or other parts of the kingdom. They seek work, which they cannot find, and lodging, with no money to pay for it. They have no local friends; they cannot buy adequate food. All the latent pathology laid down in childhood by family conflict, neglect or abuse is activated by problems they cannot hope to solve.

The fact that not all experience of employment contributes positively to our formation has already been emphasised. It may sometimes be downright destructive. There is now some recognition of the fact that adjustment to any marriage, any family, any work involves a high personal cost; the 'opportunity cost' - the foregoing of alternatives - is one component of this. Inner contortions may result from almost any inter-action of persons, as will pleasure, enrichment and liberation.

The understanding that we form ourselves out of the elements of our total social experience takes us a long way, but not all the way. We need to add that the meaning we give to new happenings will be drawn from our past. All of us have been partly formed, and partly deformed, by what we have lived through, and some of us will have been badly deformed by it. To the extent to which we have been deformed, the stream of new events, will be perceived, understood and remembered in false terms.

'Experiences' are indeed differently experienced, largely in accordance with the individual's psycho-biography. See Fig 3, p[15]. It is a prime function of education to bring about a positive change in the various modes of experiencing. Group methods, available in great variety, offer the most powerful instrumentation for this purpose, more powerful even than

therapeutic counselling. Participants come to experience themselves, and others more deeply. (The language is banal, but exact). The perception of self and of past events becomes more 'real'.

This mode of experience, with its many-sided potentialities, should be recognised by all who plan for the experiential learning of others. It is widely recognised in social work training, for all involved in 'people work' and in management. Its value extends beyond these fields however. If the Japanese can write (as alleged) for the customers assembly of Japanese motor cycle require great peace of mind', then we may ask, What of the state of mind of the air pilot? In each case the mastery of an exacting technical discipline is transcended by the requirement for a sufficient degree of self-awareness, which group methods aim to foster. The method often generates new insights, of value for the individual and for specific skills learning.

Other kinds of experience may lead in quite different directions. We shall have occasion more than once to stress the collective factor in experience and action. Responses to silence provide a striking example. Everyone knows that the experience of silence in isolation is markedly different from that of silence in a crowd, or an audience. The silence of a heavily charged therapeutic session has a quality different from the silence of a Quaker meeting. It is difficult to say what factors are at work here, but they are certainly social, even when nothing is said or done. How much more then will inner experience vary in different social settings?

#### EXPERIENCE IS OFTEN CONSERVATIVE

There are complex mental processes involved in the conversion of raw events into experience. For the most part, the conversion is achieved within well established on-going mental systems. The event is re-shaped to fit what is already understood. Only that which is not system-disturbing can easily be assimilated and registered as experience. The system within the self reproduces selected aspects of the external system: it must do so in order to survive.

Few would now challenge the view of man as a social product, the product of his own history in Marx's terms; and generations of scholars have sought to elucidate it, - Kardiner, Benedict, Mead, Fromm, Berger, Marcuse, Althusser are only a few of the best-known expositors during the last sixty years. The general conclusion has to be that life events, even those which are potentially system-disturbing, are likely to be interpreted so as not to occasion a need for change, even a change of 'perspective'. Mezirow (1978) has proposed "perspective transformation" as a central objective for adult educators, on the grounds that the adult learner's self-perception, as well as his/her perception of others, of the world and its possibilities, is so often found to be negative and self-inhibiting. This is useful, and by

implication, radical. However, it needs to be positioned within a large socio-political framework, which recognises that the individual perspective has been formed from elements of an oppressive social system. Perspective transformation can only be achieved and sustained at some risk. It may jeopardise personal survival. It will always require a re-structuring of relationships, which is in itself a problematic matter. The adult who commits himself, or even more herself, to a long and arduous course of part-time study - a decision which often results from a perspective change - faces the need to re-build his/her relations with each member of the family. The Open University has recognised this from its earliest days. Intending students are warned, and offered relevant advice.

If events are understood simply in terms of the system as it presents itself, 'experience' is likely to result in self-damage, because the meanings attributed to events will injure the self-esteem that Mezirow and others would propose to advance. The present reality is that the global system has no need of most people - the old, the unemployed, the handicapped, most third-world populations and most children; and will convey the message to them that they are not wanted, even if they are tolerated up to a point.

Radical theorists have been deficient in their treatment of individual motivation. Marxists have been especially deficient in this respect. There is currently some movement in this direction, but no convincing attempt to comprehend the infinity of subjective processes, the contradictions, compulsions, anxieties, dependencies, the kaleidoscopic patterns of vision and sensation in constant flux; the impossibility of prediction, of classification, even of conceptualisation.

Yet the human psyche does have its own regularities, if not universals. One is its pre-disposition to self-blame. Even the literature of social case-work has not given it full recognition, although it is a constant impediment to the achievement of the aims of social workers, and of their clients. The power of this disposition is everywhere manifest. The simplest peoples seem always to have blamed natural disasters on their own failure to satisfy their gods. They have responded with sacrifices of every kind.

#### THE PERENNIAL DILEMMA - EDUCATION VERSUS TRAINING

What we now see in the UK is the marginalisation of what should be central, if we have any regard for the emphasis of educational literature, philosophy and exemplary practice. In our schools swimming, a necessary accomplishment, has been almost eliminated (from the secondary level) during the last four years. P.E., R.E., Art and practical aesthetics, music,

creative writing are marginalised or relegated to the (still existing) lower streams. It is shocking to observe that the great teachers' associations and unions do not even make a major issue of this trend.

A re-animation of these devalued activities is of first importance. We have an abundance of good teachers who are fully capable of this re-animation, both in the school and in the adult world. Such a change would bring great satisfaction and pleasure to learners and parents alike. The best community schools have provided splendid examples which testify to this. But what has happened to these schools in our time? For an account of a calculated dismantling of everything positive and collective in their success, one can recommend a reading of *Schools on Trial* (Colin Fletcher, 1985). It is an unvarnished account: the reader is left to supply his own understanding of it in political terms.

The best of youth and community work has always promoted social education. Drama, music and the plastic arts are fostered in many clubs. Creative writing, local history, recording the early memories of old people can take on a surprising vitality. The assumption that only the 'grammar school types' are capable of these activities has long been disproved.

It is ironic that the current stress on vocational learning is not even the high road to economic success. Observations in Germany, Japan and Scandinavia reveal a larger emphasis on collectivity and mutuality, little recognised in Britain. Furthermore, the success of these countries reflects the quality and design of their products. One finds there a perfectionist drive - often excessive, but nevertheless suggesting that we in Britain would be well advised to re-focus on mutuality and collective responsibility in vocational training; and also on the aesthetic satisfactions of fine work.

We may refer back to O.W. Holmes pronouncement. He asserts that a *moment's* insight may be worth a *life's* experience. A very strong statement, but would anyone contradict it? Insights of supreme value in personal, and in collective life, arise out of the free play of intuition, a faculty that may be exercised and nurtured in the arts and in the best educational and group settings. An instrumental skills training, or the mediation of a body of professional knowledge to those whose experience is thought to render them fit to receive it, are all too likely to deaden these flashes of insight that transcend, even contradict, all experience.

'Profound flashes of insight remain ineffective for centuries, not because they are unknown, but by reason of dominant interests which inhibit reaction to that type of generality.' (A.N. Whitehead, 1933)

## ISSUES FOR EDUCATORS

The most enduring educational system has been apprenticeship. Its history extends from well before the Romans - over two and a half thousand years. In apprenticeship the learner is required to accept what his master imposes on him. He experiences one way of doing things, sanctioned by authority, the traditions of the past. The intention is to reproduce the generations of conservative technicians.

By contrast, with the rise of the factory system with its massed labour, it became clear that the work-place would always be contested territory. The struggles around control and negotiation in industry became basic to the social order, more determinative than debates in parliament. As these struggles gave rise to the frail democratic structures so far achieved, why is the experience of them not proposed for accreditation, indeed for a central place in education for citizenship? In this context, Gelpi has made reference to the,

"... struggle for a different organisation and for better conditions of work, wage negotiations, concrete action for international solidarity, participation in social life, the organisation of strikes."

"The refusal to consider direct action as an important dimension of education limits the impact of union action in the educational field. In fact it is often the effect of these struggles which releases, and sometimes very strongly, the cultural interests, motivations for learning and the specific educational needs of workers."

"Workers themselves are often very competent and effective trainers, because they are acquainted with different realities and because they contribute to collective scientific knowledge, linked to production."

(Extracts from Ireland, T. 1979)

What then of 'Teaching as a Subversive Activity' (Postman and Weingarten 1971)? Clearly if education is to honour its avowed commitment to individual development, taking into account, or attempting to do so, the infinite variety of human potentiality, this must necessarily engender conflict with the uniformity of performance sought by all training systems. Certainly, there must be some degree of accommodation to a required standard of performance. No education system, and there has to be a 'system', has succeeded in promoting 'individuation' - Jung's term for what he posits as the prime aim of life - beyond narrow limits. If there were a commitment to individuation in education and in skill training, it would provide a liberatory experience and would arouse motivation.

It would require recognition of person style - anathema to the trainer of relatively homogeneous groups. It would challenge his sapiential authority, his proclamations of the one best way. Yet in a world of rapid technical advance and smart machinery, his one best way is at all time subject to the threat of obsolescence. The different style, the freshness of approach of one or another of his group, may open the way to better adapted methods. This has been partly recognised ever since the eighteenth century boy tied the valve control on the steam engine to achieve self-regulation, thus demonstrating the principle of negative feed-back before anyone had formulated it.

It is in the wide field of people work that this principle is paramount, and is still not accorded centrality in training. The work of Truax and Carkhuff between 1967 and 1977 went a long way towards demonstrating that the effectiveness of counselling and therapy varies little as between the widely different methods and theoretical models available, but that *the personality of the therapist* is a major determinant of outcome. Yet neither the academic world nor the world of practice and teaching has been able to accommodate the implications of this finding.

These might include relaxing the attempt to establish the universals of mental process, learning, mental ability, teaching method, skills training and so on, and focussing instead upon the particularities of the individual learner and individual teacher, and of their interaction. No one denies that much learning, and much healing, occurs as a result of the learner to some degree identifying with the teacher/therapist; and that this process can only occur if the latter identifies with his student or counsellee. But how many studies do we have of this interaction and the personality variables which determine it? The psycho-analysts denote these processes as 'transference' and 'counter-transference', but even they have been reticent about personality variables in the analyst.

It is predictable perhaps that an academic who has given years of his life to mastering the literature of transactional analysis, the repertory grid or behaviour modification will wish to teach what he has learned. Equally, the teacher of youth work will wish to pass on the 'lessons' that his experience has taught him. It is difficult for him/her to come to terms with the fact that a different worker would have experienced events quite differently.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

The change required does involve fundamental re-considerations. Not, what do I know that I can teach this person? How can I pass on my own expertise?, but rather, What is this person going to make of everything that's happening here? What conclusions will he/she reach about the way we are tackling community problems? Recognising that even the youngest

person has their own life-time of experience and their own way of understanding the world, can *we* perhaps learn something from their views and suggestions? In any case, how will he/she perceive me? And after all, as I have been at the centre of this team's work for several years, are we asking this trainee to learn to understand the situation in the community as if it were the result of 'natural' forces or rather to understand it as a situation that is largely the result of our own actions, and will be described to him/her as I myself perceive it? Not then to work with the assumption that there is one best way of tackling the always inter-related problems of this, or any, community; but rather, to ask how can this new worker, being the kind of person he/she is, with the formal learning the life experience that has constituted the available resources so far, decide on the most promising mode of entry into the on-going processes.

In so doing the trainee will learn more about the community, and more about the self, more about the insufficiency of her own perceptions as well as those of her teachers. Perhaps this will make it possible at the same time for local citizens to learn more about both, and about themselves?

It must be said that insights of this kind have become more available in recent years to the trainers and educators of people workers. This is manifest among field work teachers, although not all of them. The question is whether the formal system in which they are embedded can shed its professional predilections. The worldly-wise scepticism of students, even young ones, will help here. Often they listen, or half listen, to their professional tutors and quietly resolve for themselves to take a different approach.

Perhaps most of what students and adults learn by way of experience embodies incoherent aggregates which their teachers would not have wished them to learn. This material can often become coherent and intelligible, and significant for personal development, though not in a direction an employer might be looking for. The experience is 'restored, in a different form.' Figure 4 in Chapter I (p[20]) offers a conceptual scheme for ordering this observation. The case of the young black woman cited above may illustrate it.

#### INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

There is however a further issue which is central to questions of perspective and experience. This is the individualist/collectivist dichotomy. The destructive self-blame of the unemployed person is largely the outcome of the individualist ethos. This is the aspect of competitive capitalism which grossly over-emphasises personal responsibility - because it suits the interests of the employer at all points - and it is sedulously propagated. The collectivist perspective, by contrast, offers a different understanding of experience. In place of the feeling that the fault lies in the self, the

questions that arise are: Why isn't the system working? Why are we not wanted? What has happened to us? What aren't we all acting together? What should we be doing?

The trainer who offers his skills to unemployed people may think he is engaged in a worthy and humane task in improving the learner's chances of employment. Is he quite unwilling to see that the total number of jobs on offer is strictly limited, and would leave around two million unemployed if all were filled? The social worker who negotiates the allocation of a home to a family in great need is uncomfortably aware that her action has meant that other families in need cannot have it. So it is with preparing people for work. Individualisation does not address the issues of homelessness and mass unemployment. Whose interests does it serve? It serves the needs of employers and the interests of government. Why is there so little debate among practicing educators and trainers about this issue? Are they willing to accept ministerial pronouncements about the purposes of training?

The plaintive cry of the Brazilian Archbishop Camara was, "When I feed the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why they have no food they call me a communist." Is this what teachers and trainers are anxious about? There is certainly a parallel. "When I train people for work I am respected. When I ask why they have no work..." There are board games so structured that when one player gains, another loses the equivalent amount. These are classed as zero-sum games. The term applies.

#### SHARED EXPERIENCES

What of collective experience? For Gelpi, the wage dispute in a factory provides an experience of great value. It generates insights into the dynamics of industrial relations, the interactions of management and the economics of enterprise. But most significant is that it necessarily entails collective action; surprisingly, this is something new for many workers.

Gelpi also sees this experience as a route towards the dissolution of the rigid dualism in education, which he insistently condemns. 'Dualism' refers to the near universal procedures which select most young people for manual work and others for brain work - paper work, the latter being the province of the middle classes in all societies, including post-revolutionary ones, which may have set out with quite different intentions. There must surely be an intentional element underlying the persistence of such dualism. It would seem that the managers of contemporary systems do not wish the broad base of society, the class of manual workers on which everything depends, to become wide-awake, well informed, challenging and participative. In every generation there have been shining examples which show that workers are perfectly capable

of developing these qualities, but will only do so when they are given, or more probably when they assume, a genuine collective responsibility for an enterprise.

During the recent gloomy decades there has been some recursion towards worker cooperatives. More than 2,500 of these have been brought into existence in the U.K. Their survival rates in the intensely competitive field of small industrial/commercial enterprise have been higher than that of private enterprises. Some have grown and are no longer small. Others, based on worker/manager buy-outs of failing firms, never were small. It is not true that worker co-operatives cannot accommodate the problems of growth and scale.

Co-operatives offer a supreme educational experience. It is impossible for a worker to be genuinely involved in his enterprise without coming face to face with the problems of internal organisation, of personnel policy, with market conditions, with competition, innovation, finance, wages policy, negotiations and union membership. They must, for the pressing reasons of survival, demand an input 'from each according to his ability'. This in itself is a powerful solvent of those traditional practices which discriminate against women and black people.

Why have the co-operatives not been recognised as a prime setting for a better informed and more humane variety of vocational and managerial education? Presumably for ideological reasons. The trades unions, and the Labour Party itself, do not know whether to see the development of worker co-operatives as a form of left wing radicalism, or as an induction of the workers into competitive capitalism.

For social/community/youth workers the collective experience is commonly in the struggle for more staff, finance, accommodation and other resources, especially those relating to the needs of clients. A conflict of interests resulting in some kind of confrontation acts like a 'critical incident', in research terms. It illuminates the local scene. It requires employers, agencies, higher authorities, finance officers and above all, individual workers to take up a position. The key issue is usually 'solidarity'. Such events demonstrate the truth of the proposition that in order to understand any part of the social order the most fruitful strategy is to attempt to change it.

#### THE POLITICAL AND THE PERSONAL

Radical writers in applied social studies are often inclined to attack therapists such as Carl Rogers for lacking a socio-political perspective. The criticism is justified, but they themselves are equally lacking in the

tender regard for the individual that is so notable in Rogers. The radical left has been deficient here. To reduce all personal suffering to the historical/political can be very unfeeling and unproductive.

In all people work it is difficult to decide where political expression may be valid, in speech or in action. In community work, radically inspired initiatives towards self-determination may lead to marginalisation, withdrawal of funds and opposition from bureaucrats and professionals (doctors and teachers), who are necessarily committed to a liberal-administrative ideology. If the teacher of community work in third world countries faced with the evidence that ideologies of the right and of the centre do not benefit the peasants or the urban masses, advocates direct collective action he may see the indigenous leaders he has inspired jailed, even killed.

It is difficult for the people worker, feeling his way around the joints of the tightly articulated social system, to discover a promising point of insertion. All large systems - the human body, commercial corporations, ministries - are constituted by sub-systems within sub-systems in ascending hierarchy. There is functional inter-dependence, but each level has its degree of autonomy which has to be conceptualised for analytical understanding. The dilemma of the worker may be set out schematically as follows. The schema is a caricature - caricatures often high-light a salient truth. But the world of action is peopled by workers who have taken one or more of the steps in the model -

- 1 I have an in-depth interest in the human individual. Therefore I have trained in psycho-therapy.
- 2 I have learned that the individual's inner processes are derived from the relation to parents in early life, and compounded by existing family patterns in adult life. Therefore I have become a family therapist.
- 3 I have found that intervention in the closed family has little effect, but that families may respond to others and achieve change in the challenging setting of a group. Therefore I have become a group analyst.
- 4 Most effective is 'total immersion' in a closed world. I now run a residential institution for the therapy of deep-lying social pathology.

- 5 It has become evident that the psychological problems of most individuals arise out of social contexts intolerably constricted by shortages of money, housing and work. Therefore I have re-trained as a community worker.
- 6 Many personal, family and community problems are seen to arise directly from local maladministration. I have therefore become a councillor.
- 7 Experience of local government reveals the impossibility of achieving radical local change unless central government can be persuaded to set up new systems of facilitation and resource. I explore party political processes at national level, become an M.P., am appalled and take early retirement.

#### PROSPECTS FOR (RADICAL) CHANGE

Where then are we to look for hope? The short answer is everywhere. The social world is nowhere as solid as it looks. Most national and transnational economic institutions are built on shaky ground. They conduct their affairs in an earthquake zone. They live in fragile collusion, a shifting agreement to shore up a wobbling skyscraper. The world could change with shattering suddenness if the international credit system collapses.

More and more countries are in turmoil. Television programmes show us graphic pictures of countries and communities in a state of ferment, each high-lighted for a few days, each claiming our sympathetic understanding and more historical knowledge than we can possibly possess.

Military juntas with all the instruments of repression at instant readiness often cannot control their own populations. (Perhaps because generals were never good economists.) Subject peoples are now becoming less willing to fight in their wars. Their public statements, all they have put forward in the name of 'policy' are generally disbelieved. When the loyalty of their own troops can no longer be assumed, they know that their days of power are numbered. The world scene is changing as millions show their anger. Events that no one has predicted will surely confront us in the near future. No golden dawn will arise, but we may hope that less violent and repressive regimes will be replaced by others somewhat less violent. We may see regions that permit, even facilitate, the advancement of their peoples.

Underlying these phenomena is a change in the way things are seen. So far the people's vision has been manipulated, notably in Britain where the mass media, controlled by a few, is allowed to offer only a single vision. Elsewhere, people are quietly ceasing to believe what they are told. Articulate minorities have succeeded in destroying the credibility of governments.

When people cease to believe they come to be more fully alive, choosing between the variety of alternative understandings in religious, political, economic and communitarian terms. If people no longer believe in 'the system' they have little motivation to work within it. That may mean that they become unwilling to defend it against those who would destroy it. Police and the military are no longer seen as heroes even by the middle classes; they complain of lack of public support. This may signal the approach of the moment when "all that is solid melts into air" in Marx's statement. At that time, the commitment of communities, groups and individuals, to the extent that it is truly liberating, will be seen to be valid.

There is a psychological reason why transformations may be surprisingly sudden, in social systems as well as in individuals. It is that the human psyche is Janus-like. Whatever is currently manifested masks an opposite potential, consisting of all that has been rejected and left over in the process of adaptation to the current reality. These left-over elements compose themselves into a latent alternative mode of being. It has long been recognised that groups, crowds, military units may suddenly change direction and leadership when faced with a new contingency. All social formations are labile. That which was latent may become dominant. A genuine education, which recognises the whole person even when there is a focus on specific skills, will promote a wider awareness and a readiness for change and development.

In our time there have been three socio-political developments which significantly expanded our general consciousness. These are:

- i the steady pressure for enlargement of equity in the feminine role, with all the associated issues of gender
- ii the clamant demands of minorities of all kinds - not merely the ethnic ones, but also the handicapped, deviant, etc - for citizenship on equal terms; and
- iii most urgent, the rise of political ecology.

All three can point to modest material gains, yet all are blocked in respect of primary objectives. All have penetrated the thinking of every nation to an extent that is preparing the world for fundamental change.

## THE DIVISION OF LABOUR: A TERMINAL CONSIDERATION

Terminal in either sense. Mme Vinokur, Professor of the Economics of Education at the University of Paris, has written:

"If the role of lifelong education is merely to function as a device for bolstering up the social and economic status quo in the face of pressures for fundamental reform, then it is a principle that is fraught with the danger of becoming an instrument for the subjugation of human beings."

"(...) transformation of the social division of labour (is) (...) the prerequisite for true lifelong education. But then lifelong education is no longer an educational venture but a societal one, since it is not a matter of basing educational activities on experience, but of ensuring that experience consists of 'educational situations'."

Exactly so; and Experiential Education may be substituted for Lifelong Education without further change. Gelpi expresses his view in similar terms.

"The transformation of the nature of work appears as the key to the transformation of education."

"The transformation not only of the material conditions of work but above all of the organisation of labour, can act in either a positive or negative fashion on training; the contribution of training to transcending an organisation of labour which reinforces technical and social division, is in the widest possible preparation of workers for management tasks and not simply those of performer."

Social workers, youth workers, community workers, all involved in people work, have an awareness of these deep truths, but for the most part they have been at a loss when asked to propose a different organisational structure. For this purpose it is necessary to consider the division of labour as they experience it. There are field workers; residential workers; club workers; office-bound advisers (as in the C.A.Bx); administrators; ancillary workers; and clerical workers. There may be specialist consultants - legal, religious, psychiatric or financial. What are the consequences?

It seems to be a universal consensus among field workers that administrators have little knowledge of the complexity of the problems and the constraints they experience every day in the field. Administrators feel that field workers lack appreciation of the essential norms and regularities of the bureaucratic imperatives, and are unco-operative and perfunctory in compliance. Residential workers, with some justice, think

they are seen as the lumpenproletariat of the caring professions, and that neither administrators nor field workers 'have any idea what it's like.' Suspicion and negative responses are the result.

One remedial approach has been by way of structured group experience in a residential setting. Participants meet first with their own colleagues, with the task of formulating their perceptions of the other two classes of workers. These are often harsh. Following this, small groups comprised of participants from all three are brought together, with the task of considering and working upon the recorded mutual inter-perceptions. This is certainly a powerful mode of experiential learning.

A conspicuous division of labour is that between the professionals and the receptionists who serve as a screen and filter for them. Medical practitioners are aware that receptionists have to make clinical decisions: whether a case is urgent, can wait a while, can be given an appointment for next week, is not suitable for treatment at all, should be directed to hospital casualty, or told to ring again 'if it gets worse'. We know of a case where blank ready-signed prescription forms are entrusted to the receptionist, to be filled in and dispensed at her discretion.

A receptionist may have to contain and talk down the agitation of a schizophrenic for whom an instant consultation is not possible. A receptionist in a social work agency may be subjected to a violent assault, or more often, a long story of distress with an appeal for help, events which a social worker is formally qualified to handle - although the receptionist may find that the caller has no wish to be 'referred' or kept waiting. Such contingencies form an important learning experience for the receptionist, reinforced by her observations of the way her qualified employers respond to such clients.

In such agencies a receptionist or a senior clerk may through the years come to be valued as a mine of information. It may be evident that her personal qualities have also developed strongly. When the agency has a vacancy for a trainee professional worker she is encouraged to apply, and is enrolled for a part-time course. Accumulated experience then achieves accreditation.

In a voluntary agency such processes are likely to be informal, especially in the early years. The original workers in the Richmond Fellowship supporting recovering mental patients, in refuges for battered wives or in marital counselling were not professionals, but they were accepting responsibilities of a professional order. At a later stage part-time training for new volunteers was thought to be appropriate. This entails the possibility that a crystallisation of roles sets in, with an embryo hierarchy of administrators, qualified workers, trainees and office staff. Probably the content of training would be borrowed from established professions. The relevance is often assumed. Yet research into the effectiveness of

support systems for mental patients in the community indicates that training has no measurable effect on outcome; in fact the evidence suggests that the untrained volunteer is more effective than the trained. We may speculate that this could be the case because he/she has a more instant emotional response to the distress of another person. The professional has long learned to control her feelings, and in any case she has seen it all many times before.

A factor of this kind appears to be operating in work with alcoholics and other addicted persons. If this is true, we have to conclude that training desensitises and partly incapacitates the professional worker. Furthermore, that experience may have a negative value. We do not need the micro scraps of research to discover that the professional tower of Babel is not fit for human habitation. There has been no rebuttal of Illich (The Disabling Professions 1977).

"I found it was the fresh volunteers whose work was most effective."  
Chad Varah, reporting on BBC radio his experience in founding the Samaritans (11-1-88).

## ALTERNATIVES

We do not need to look far to discover working alternatives. In fact, if we are able to achieve a deconstruction of hierarchy, role prescriptions and the differentiation of professionals in people work so that people are seen for what they are and what they do, the alternative rapidly presents itself. It takes the character of a co-operative where responsibility and resources (including incomes) are shared. All members of the working groups recognise what each can best do.

An infinity of problems may arise, some of them insoluble, because they are rooted in persistent individual idiosyncrasies in the group members, and in their clients. These however are real and necessary problems, not those imposed by formal structures (R. Ruddock, 1989).

The examples cited above of receptionists and clerical workers carrying some 'professional' responsibilities present false problems, deriving from the imposed role prescriptions. If the professionally determined structures, responsibilities and discriminations were relaxed, latent capabilities and unrealised personal qualities could burgeon. A larger measure of mutual recognition, and of motivation, could result.

Three further small instances:

- 1 A residential home for deprived children. The cook is a generous, motherly middle-aged woman. Children flock to her in the kitchen. She likes this, and gives them little bits. They talk freely with her, and at length. The warden however imposes a rule that in future, the children are not allowed in the kitchen. This is partly because the children are expected to become emotionally attached to their house mothers, not to the cook. It seems that the cook cannot possibly be allowed to become a surrogate therapist.

This ruling contradicts all we have learned about the needs of deprived children. Food is of great symbolic significance to them; the one who prepares and provides food even more so. The principle of milieu therapy would require that role prescriptions be set aside and that the natural relation with the maternal giver of food should be allowed to develop and contribute its therapeutic effect.

- 2 A clerical worker of great aptitude is given charge of a small book collection in a university department. Over the years the department becomes very large, and there are several thousand books heavily used by more than two hundred students. Because of her function, and her warm personal qualities, the worker becomes a key fixture in the life of the department and a very busy librarian in the fullest sense - except that circumstances prevented her from completing the final stage of her qualifying course for professional status.

It is common enough to discover unqualified workers carrying professional responsibilities, having equipped themselves to do so by experience, study and personal development. To this observation there are two responses:

- i to propose that the experience be validated and credited; that the person concerned be accorded professional status, upon completion of certain prescribed studies, or even without such a requirement if the portfolio is thought to provide sufficient evidence of attainment.
- ii to propose that professional status be dissolved; that responsibilities, salary scales and recognition of specialist skills be accorded by local collective validation.

The present text argues for the second response. Item vi on p[36] summarises the basic principle in relation to experiential education.

- 3 Every head teacher knows that the school care-taker, for good or bad, significantly influences how children behave towards school accommodation and equipment. A detailed case is to hand describing the disruptive effects of the behaviour of the care-taker of a large community centre who is given to outbursts of intemperate rage against those who use the premises, and even to physical assault upon individuals. Discipline and a change of work is decided on by the employing authority. This decision is however blocked by the care-takers' union, because witnesses might not withstand cross-examination on appeal to the law.

Administrative procedure was unable to resolve the problem of the rogue care-taker. If he had been a member of a participatory group running the centre as a collective responsibility, he could not possibly have overcome the weight of the pressure upon him, as easily as he defeated the power of the administration.

Not all 'care-takers' are destructive. Some community centres find that the full-time professional staff come and go within a year or two whereas the so-called part-time, unqualified, care-taker may become so much a part of the scenery as to constitute *the* resource. S/he is known and respected as the literal hub of events. In such a situation we are reminded, as in Pinter's play 'The Caretaker', that it is not easy to establish who is taking care of what and whom.

These instances illustrate how the division of labour, presented to us as a necessity in any organisation, exerts a major influence (for good and ill) upon individuals and the functioning units.

Such are the implications of the division of labour as we observe it and as we experience it in people work. The hopes for a transformation of the large socio-political structures in either the under-developed or the over-developed countries is at present remote. But as argued above, the international order is more fragile than it appears to be. A range of conflicting forces sufficient to render the future unpredictable may be identified in most countries.

Meanwhile there are positive opportunities for educators to take advantage of the indeterminacy of experiential education. It has been amply demonstrated that even basic literacy and numeracy may be taught from a humanistic liberationist perspective. If that perspective has become central to the thinking of the teacher, it will communicate itself. Experiential education is a good invitation, but for many it becomes a pathway to assimilation, terminal for educational values. It can be so much more than this.

There are undoubted possibilities of positive change in the smaller structures. The recent growth of interest in small or very small schools is a pointer (North 1988). There are residential therapeutic centres, usually in the voluntary sector, which operate collectively. The steady growth of co-operative enterprises and their good record of survival is increasingly recognised. They demonstrate the practicalities of collectivism. We now stand in need of pioneers ready to establish such units in the public sector. There are strategic points where it might be possible for bureaucratic control to be withdrawn in favour of collective enterprise. Co-operative housing associations and some forms of public transport have succeeded sufficiently to prove the point. In terms of cost-effectiveness they may or may not be able to demonstrate a marginal superiority. But that is not the point; it is the principle that matters, the principle of collectivism, which necessarily entails a measure of deconstruction and de-professionalisation. It is no doubt the case that some workers become anxious and disorientated when invited to accept larger measures of responsibility and self-determination. The usual consensus is, however, that it brings about a richer and more humane working experience, which comes to be reflected in the experience of the people for whom the provision is made. It is these experiences we must persistently seek to validate.

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## CONCLUSION

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The new enthusiasm for experiential education has not yet been evaluated.

(1) We are still in a honeymoon period where nearly everything experiential is celebrated uncritically. It is now time to stand back. At least three related sets of questions need to be asked of any example of an experiential kind.

- 1) Can we describe the model of experiential education upon which it is based? Is there a clear relationship between the model and the sponsoring agencies? What are the implications for the structure and content of the education which flow from the model - sponsor relationship? These are primarily questions about the political and economic context.
- 2) What theories and ideologies - implicit and explicit - inform the experiential work? Do the theories place emphasis on psychological or sociological evidence? What are the general and particular purposes which are underpinned by the ideologies?

These are questions about the inevitable interrelation between explanations, justifications and values.

- 3) What are the dominant characteristics of the form and content of the experiential education? Do students find their experience accredited on a 'once for all' or a continuing basis? What is the balance between individual and collective work?

These are questions about the detail of the education, but they are not unrelated to previous ones about context and value.

Critical perspectives seek to disrupt taken for granted assumptions. That is their strength and weakness. They alert us to contemporary tendencies, but they may be more reactive and defensive than sources of an alternative positive vision. We have attempted to describe and explain why it is difficult to construct a full-blown alternative out of the Indigenous model. It is not just about the unequal distribution of ideological and material resources. It is also because 'alternatives' cannot be free from or separated from the dominant models. They are bound to be caught up in a struggle to assert a different, often conflicting, perspective which is partially constrained and shaped by dominant forces. There is no neutral

parade-ground on which to review models for our use. Some hints are beginning to emerge from the work of P.A.V.E.T., the Community Education Department of the Open University, the Community Educational Development Centre, the Federation of Community Work Training Groups, as well as a range of more local projects such as Turning Point and the examples cited by Cowburn and Armstrong. (2). The fragile link between the latter is their insistence that experiential education is not just a cute device to open up individual route-ways into courses. It is, more crucially, a way of helping individuals connect with others both intellectually and practically, so that their experiences can be given worth, and be a means of changing the education structures within which this takes place.

As if all of the above did not present enough problems, we have in our second chapter dared to open up issues of even greater complexity. Many of these do not in the nature of things, and in the nature of people, admit of definitive resolution. They concern the variability of individual formation, perception and need; the impact of prevailing ideological imperatives; the fact that experience may be null, or damaging; that only a comprehensive critical understanding of experience allows it to be truly articulated, assimilated and brought to bear in the fields of action.

In 'people work', a term that must include teaching, we see some need to de-mythologise professional knowledge, and to place the experience of the learner, (and thereby the learning experience), at the centre. We see the necessary, and perhaps sufficient condition of this in the relaxation at all levels of the present oppressive divisions of function (between teacher and student), a move towards 'flexibilisacion', as Latin Americans happily call it. This is certainly feasible, though at present we all live in the shadow of an authoritarian government - 'blocking the sun'.

## NOTES

- 1 e.g. The confident assertion that the first account of the assessment of prior learning in Britain was only published in January 1988 (i.e. J. Storan, 1988.)
- 2 e.g. i 'Building Portfolios : The Trainees' View' - the first of two video-led training packages produced by Andy Wiggins of the Community Education Department of the Open University and by Miriam Jackson and Steve Bolger of P.A.V.E.T. This uses the experiences of three women to demonstrate how these can be learning and training devices.
- ii D. Braun and G. Combes work with parents and teachers, which concluded that,  
 "... the trainer must regard those in a training group as equal partners and must see themselves as facilitator rather than holder of expert knowledge..." (Braun and Combes, 1987, 27). This is part of the work of the C.E.D.C.
- iii Sinclair, Cowburn, Armstrong, op cit: There is also the work of Holman (e.g. R. Holman, 1983) on non-professional skills, and Bainbridge, op cit, 7-8).

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