

PERSPECTIVES

COMING TO GRIPS WITH COMPLEXITY IN THE FORMATION OF REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS¹

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Abstract

This article discusses an approach to the professional education of adult educators, developed in a number of undergraduate and post-graduate courses,² at the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia. The approach aims to help adult educators both to analyze the complexities of their work and to devise ways of acting that are both effective and congruent with their values. The article begins by describing this teaching approach. Through an examination of student writing and course evaluations an attempt is then made to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching approach. It is then argued that particular literatures in adult education and associated fields of study contribute to the emergence of the sort of critical thinking about their work that the courses aim to elicit in students. The article concludes by noting that changes in the political economy make it increasingly difficult to teach in the way described here.

Résumé

Dans cet article, l'auteur examine une approche à la formation des éducateurs d'adultes élaborée dans le cadre de cours³ de premier et deuxième cycles à la University of Technology de Sydney, en Australie. Suivant cette approche, les andragogues sont conviés à se pencher sur la nature complexe de leur métier, ainsi qu'à explorer des moyens d'action qui soient à la fois efficaces et congruents avec leurs valeurs personnelles. L'approche d'enseignement est d'abord décrite. Puis, les travaux des étudiants, de même que leurs évaluations de la qualité de l'enseignement, sont analysés dans le but de déterminer le bien-fondé de l'approche. Il semble que certains écrits en éducation des adultes et dans des domaines connexes favorisent chez les étudiants l'émergence d'une réflexion critique du type visé par le programme. On conclut cependant qu'en raison de changements récents dans l'économie politique, ce type d'enseignement devient de plus en plus difficile à mettre en pratique.

¹ A version of this article was presented at the International Conference on the Role of Universities in Adult Education, Canmore, AB, May 14-17, 1995.

² I will use the terms *courses* and *programs* here. In Australian universities the common terms are *subjects* and *courses*.

³ Les termes *cours* et *programme* sont utilisés dans le texte. Or, dans les universités australiennes, on emploie généralement les termes *matière (subject)* et *cours*.

The Teaching Approach⁴

The approach is based on a particular view of professional education, which is put to students at the beginning of each course, in something like the following terms:

For many years professional education in most fields, including education, was based on a *front end loading* model. In this approach, professionals were taught the knowledge, skills and attitudes they were thought to need before they began to practice. The competent among these new professionals, it was argued, would then apply the theory they had been taught in practical situations. Experienced practitioners know that the actual world of practice does not work in this way. Real work situations are complex and fluid: they do not sit and wait for theories to be applied to them. As Donald Schön (1983) pointed out we need a different model of professional education, one that focuses on the ways in which practitioners think and act in actual work situations.

This *practitioner-centered* model puts the practitioner and the complex contexts in which she works at the center of analysis. It is this view of professional education which has been adopted in this course. The course will introduce learners to a lot of new knowledge about adult education and training. Learners will be invited to test this new knowledge against their existing understanding. For each learner, some of the new knowledge will be illuminating, while other aspects will be less helpful. Overall, however, the course is intended to help adult educators working in a diversity of settings to develop their understanding of their work. This practitioner-centered model of professional education assumes that adult educators and other practitioners are active thinkers who are continually trying to make sense of their work. The model also assumes that adult educators are active readers, that they will read critically, taking in what is of interest to them, and discarding what is not. Underpinning these assumptions about how practitioners think and read is a particular view of practice and its relationship with theory.

There then follows an exposition of Usher and Bryant's (1989) distinction between formal and informal theory, Polanyi's notion of tacit knowledge, and Schön's (1983, 1987) and Boud and his colleagues' work on reflection (Boud & Walker, 1991; Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). Students are told that the course aims to help them to surface their work-related tacit knowledge and informal theories, and to enrich and extend their thinking through encounter with formal theory. The student is then given a taste of what is to come in the course by being introduced to a *table setting* out schools of thought in adult education and training, and two figures representing the relationship of adult education practice to various disciplines and theoretical perspectives.

The point is then made that behind different schools of thought in education there are radically different views of how knowledge is discovered and used. There then follows an exposition of the concepts of paradigm and knowledge-interest as

⁴ For elaboration of the points made in this section, see Foley (1995), Chapters 1 & 3.

they apply to adult education and training. These concepts are then elaborated through an examination of the core literatures of adult education and training: teaching, program development and program evaluation. The literatures of teaching often occupy us for some weeks: they are large and diverse, and most adult educators have a fascination with teaching. We then consider aspects of the social context of adult education. In recent years the focus has been on economic and workplace restructuring and their relationship to adult education and learning.

Verbal presentations by the lecturer are always followed by discussion of the issues raised, and by reading. Five or six thick volumes of readings, covering a range of topics and theoretical positions are distributed to students. Some of these readings are central, and students are expected to read them. Focus questions are provided for this material, which is read between classes and discussed in a subsequent session. Students are encouraged to choose among the remaining readings according to their own interests. Some time is also spent in discussing reading purposes and strategies.

The course only has 26 hours of class time, arranged either in thirteen 2 hour seminars or two 2 day sessions. Students are expected to spend considerable additional time in independent study comprising the focused reading referred to in the preceding paragraph, and written assignments. The form of assessment adopted in the course is integral to the learning process. Students (all of whom are practicing adult educators) work on assignments which arise from their work and interests. These assignments comprise *either* an experiential essay on an aspect of adult education or learning, followed by a literature review which explores issues raised in the experiential essay; *or* a case study of an adult education/learning issue. Particular attention is paid to helping students to become more conscious and proficient writers. Connections are made between writing and learning. Writing, students are told, is a learned skill; and writing *is* learning. The importance of drafting and redrafting is stressed. Detailed written feedback is given on all assignments. The first feedback, on the experiential essay or the first draft of a case study, comes about half-way through the course. The second lot of feedback, on the literature review, or the second draft of the case study, comes towards the end of the course. At the beginning of the course students receive a compilation of feedback on previous students' writing, couched in the form of tips on reading, expression, structure and argument. The booklet in which these tips appear also contains the assignment outline, ideas about reading, note-taking and giving and receiving feedback, as well as titles and Dewey numbers of relevant library indexes and journals.

Student Writing

The diversity of subject matter in students' writing is striking. In one group, students wrote about the following issues (the titles of papers are the students' own): (a) retraining and empowerment, (b) organizational learning in hard times, (c) action method and experiential learning, (d) assessment of learner needs, (e) the facilitator in the organization, (f) perspective transformation and conscientization, (g) learner

motivation, (h) the paradox of empowerment, (i) adult learning and self-managed teams, (j) emancipatory education and learning, (k) critical thinking and workplace learning, (l) the learning organization, (m) popular education, (n) gender and learning, (o) cross-cultural education, (p) education in workplace restructuring, and (q) ameliorating management patriarchy.

The following detailed discussion of two students' work gives a sense of what students learn through their writing, and how the students' writing connects with the course aims and content.

Susan is a communications teacher in a city technical and further education college (TAFE). In her experiential essay she wrote about the social and educational dynamic of Group 39, a class of adolescent clerical trainees. On the first day of the course:

As I approached the classroom it was already evident that an "in-group" had formed. There was one chair in the corridor, and sitting on it was Lisa, talking animatedly to the five or six students just standing without any interaction, waiting. Their eyes and body language showed their lack of interest and enthusiasm for the experience ahead.

Lisa soon emerged as the leader of the seven "beautiful people" in the group, while another four students constituted an "out-group." Already, it seemed, the students had classified themselves and others into the "ins" and the "outs"—those who would succeed and be popular, and those who would struggle both with the course content and with relationships. In her brief paper, Susan traces the development of the group over 2½ months. During this time the group of seven flourished both socially and educationally. The group of four soon fell behind the pace of learning set by the seven and became progressively more withdrawn. By the end of the 10 weeks one of the four had withdrawn from the course, another was skipping classes, a third was expressing distress about the dynamics of the class and the fourth was having difficulties at work.

Susan painted a vivid and disturbing picture of the marginalization of the group of four. Her paper was reminiscent of the ethnographic classroom study included in the course reader.⁵ At the end of her paper, under the heading *Thin Analysis*,⁶ Susan listed questions raised by her mini-ethnography. As she recognized, the questions raised many more issues than she would be able to deal with in a single literature review. She opted to examine the group dynamics literature, posing the question: "Is there something in group dynamics theory that would enable teachers and students to understand group roles, and would that understanding empower students to break the pattern?"

⁵ A detailed summary of Willis (1978). In class, students were also given a detailed verbal account of Rist (1970).

⁶ A play on Geertz's *thick description, close analysis* distinction, referred to below. Susan was being unnecessarily diffident; her analysis, in the form of questions requiring further investigation, was perspicacious and in no way *thin*.

I responded to Susan in the following way:

The questions you pose are all useful. Perhaps underlying them all are two basic questions: Why are the four the way they are? and: How to break their withdrawn pattern of classroom behavior? To answer the first question in any meaningful way I think you would need to know more about the life and educational experiences of the four students. I suspect that, without this knowledge, you would search the group dynamics literature in vain for the "something that would enable teachers and students to understand group roles." I might be wrong, and if you want to try, go ahead.

Another tack you could take is as follows. Get the video *Stand and Deliver* and watch it. What is the pattern there, and how is it broken? Are there any lessons for your situation? Now look for other examples of teachers breaking through difficult situations. Look again at Head (1977) and Lovett (1975, Chapter 5) in Volume 2 of the readings. But you may well find more in teachers' accounts of working with difficult adolescents—see the works by Dennison, Herndon, Kohl, Kozol, Mackenzie, and Searle in the bibliography of the enclosed book (Wright, 1989). Chapters 8 and 9 of Wright may also be worth reading.

Within a month, much sooner than she needed to meet the course requirements, Susan submitted a second paper. This began with a summary of the dynamics of Group 39. She then posed what she saw as the central problem: the group had "wounded hearts and minds."

How they became damaged, what experiences in homes and schools had caused this wounding, and what could be done to prevent such damage to other students were all issues beyond the scope of this paper. Of importance to me was what could be done now, at TAFE, to help heal the wounds, so these students could participate with confidence and enjoyment in their off-the-job learning.

Susan had delimited the issue to be investigated. She would examine "the problem of some students seeming destined for failure," and look at "ways this pattern could be broken in the classroom." She would do this by "reviewing some relevant literature and searching for parallels" in other similar courses. "This method is appropriate, because...practitioners do not apply principles, they try to think their way through complex and ambiguous situations."

In her literature review Susan focuses on motivation of learners, seeing it as (and here she quotes Wright, 1989, p. 125) "the most powerful determinant of learning." Teachers, Susan argues, must find ways of motivating students, even in seemingly impossible situations. She then looks at how some teachers have done this: (a) Jaime Escalante teaching mathematics to Hispanic adolescents in Los Angeles, (b) Mackenzie's experiential education in a Scottish mining town, and (c) Herbert Kohl's open classroom in New York. Susan also draws lessons from the negative experiences of teachers: (a) a failed experiment in progressive education in Boston (Kozol, 1968), and (b) an aborted attempt at experiential education in England (Head, 1974). Susan draws a rich set of ideas for action (note: ideas for action, not strategies, and certainly not formulas) from her

reading, including: (a) the difference a determined teacher can make, (b) the importance of teachers recognizing and using their expertise, (c) the need for teachers to expect much from students and to make those expectations clear, (d) the space that a supportive supervisor can make for an innovative teacher, (e) the necessity of structure and clarity in teaching, (f) the role of students in facilitating each others' learning, and (g) the vital role of love in teaching.

Experiential essays are often deeply felt. Students are encouraged to express their feelings. But analysis is also expected in both the experiential essay and the literature review. Kevin, a head teacher of mechanical engineering in a large suburban TAFE college, wrote in his experiential essay about his desire to encourage more critical approaches to teaching among his staff. Kevin identified numerous factors that inhibited the emergence of critical pedagogies in his college: (a) a tradition of instrumental and teacher-oriented pedagogy in the subject; (b) a behaviorist and technicist curriculum, exacerbated by a recent national push towards competency-based training; (c) resource limitations; and (d) a diverse student body. Embedded in the paper there were also ideas for action, drawn from Kevin's experience and reading. These included: (a) the need to redistribute teaching functions so that students could assume more autonomy in and responsibility for their learning, (b) the potential of process-oriented curriculum, and (c) the need to lobby regional and local administrators for resources.

Also embedded in the paper were interesting reflections by Kevin on how his working class background had shaped his own educational history:

I attended public school in the outer west of Sydney, left school at fifteen because my father, a subcontracting carpenter, had fallen from the roof the previous year and had no insurance and my performance at school was falling, even though I was always in the top technical classes. I was judged "good with my hands;" I now take this to be a euphemism for "doesn't read well, or very much," or "has no reading role model."

Kevin became an apprentice, completed his trade certificate and started another certificate in mechanical engineering "because most other apprentices at Hoover had done so but I had also begun to fight working as a toolmaker, three nights and Saturdays (for decent money) under hot uninsulated factory roofs, starting before dawn and finishing after sunlight." The Labour government of Gough Whitlam came to power, abolished university fees and Kevin "was able to start a degree in 1974, as a twenty-seven year old with a wife and two kids. We survived with a bit of work and a tertiary allowance." Now Kevin looks back on the "many redundancies" in his engineering education:

For example, fourth year of Fitting and Machining was largely gear cutting. I may have cut one small plastic gear in my entire career since that time. I am left with the feeling that much engineering education that we engineering teachers offer is offered (a) because that is what was taught to us, and (b) because we don't know what else to teach. Any critical thought that I may have had was

introspective, for example: "Why am I not inspired by the intrinsic elegance of machining tool steel into shape?"

Two things struck me about Kevin's paper. First, there was the clarity of his educational goals and values (Kevin's desire to move from an instrumental approach to engineering education to an interpretive and critical approach; his clear sense of who is he is working for—other working class people). Second, his paper conveyed a sense of complexity, of multiple factors which needed to be thought through and connected in some way before they could be acted on. In responding to Kevin's paper I pointed to some aspects which required clarification or development and suggested further reading (on problem-based learning, and on the political economy and sociology of the suburban region where Kevin grew up and now works). I also suggested that he devise a one page *mind map* drawing together the disparate issues canvassed in his paper.

A week later I received a fax of five mind maps, four summarizing issues and possible strategies relating to students, teachers, curriculum and administration, and a fifth representing the links between these four variables and Kevin's teaching unit. Soon afterwards we discussed the diagrams. A month later Kevin submitted a second paper which linked the issues raised in his writing in this course to the major action research project he was also doing as part of his degree. This second paper made a connection between the theme of his action research project—the development of a holistic approach to engineering curriculum—and his desire to promote more critical approaches to teaching engineering. The body of the paper was brief, raising issues for further thought and action rather than developing an argument. The real substance of the paper was in its four appendices, comprising: (a) a refined version of the mind maps, (b) a discussion of the western suburbs social milieu and its implications for education, (c) notes towards a critical engineering pedagogy, and (d) a discussion of problem-based learning.

Assessment

Compared with Susan's papers, Kevin's were more open and less conventionally academic. It is important for me that students be able to write in a variety of ways. Here the form of student assessment becomes important. I would have found it difficult to award a mark to Kevin's work if I had been required to do so. But with the criterion referenced form of assessment that we use in our courses I could unequivocally pass Kevin, for his work clearly fulfilled all the set assessment criteria, namely:

1. Rigor and inventiveness of analysis (In other words, you need to do more than describe what happened. You also need to explain what happened, in a way that makes sense and is based on evidence.)
2. Relevance of your analysis to further action (Your analysis should indicate if there are ways of overcoming problems you have identified. Where it makes sense to do so, you should suggest changes, and ways of putting them into practice.)

3. Organization of paper. (Is your paper well organized? Does it have an introduction, a developing argument, and a conclusion?)
4. Clarity of expression.
5. Integration of your own research with reading. (Have you shown that you have done some reading which throws light on the issues raised by the data you have collected?)
6. Use of accepted referencing procedures.

More importantly, this form of assessment allows teachers to address students' ongoing learning. So in Kevin's case I could tell him that I thought his papers had laid a useful foundation for a continuing analysis of the complexities of his work. I also said that I would be interested to hear about the outcomes of his efforts to shift his colleagues to a more critical teaching stance. A few weeks later I received a progress report from Kevin which indicated that he is reaching an accommodation with his more instrumentalist colleagues. He has conceded the need to teach students basic engineering skills in the first year of the course. In return Kevin's colleagues are becoming more amenable to his arguments for critical teaching in later stages of the course.

Learning

Evaluations of university courses tend to measure student satisfaction, rather than make judgments about what students have learned, how they apply that learning, or the social impact of the learning. In this section I hope to paint a broader than usual picture of the nature of student learning in the courses under consideration.

Responses to surveys show that for students the most satisfying aspects of the courses are:

1. The opportunity to think issues through.
2. The opportunity to write from one's own experience, and then to deepen understanding of that experience through further reflection, reading and writing.
3. The provision of a framework for analyzing the relationship of practice and theory.
4. Recognition of the contextual nature of adult education.
5. Exposure to critical frameworks.
6. The pluralist approach.
7. The breadth of content.
8. The amount and quality of reading provided and recommended.
9. Learning about reading, writing and thinking.
10. Balance of lecturer input, small group discussion and individual reading and writing.
11. Clear course structure and expectations.
12. Congruence of subject matter and teaching styles.

Evaluations over four years using various forms of survey instrument, have been strongly positive. In the past year, to try to get more information about what students

learn in the courses, I have provided a blank page and asked students to respond to the following question:

Please describe what you think this subject is about. One way of doing this would be to imagine you are telling a friend or colleague the sorts of things the lecturer was trying to teach and wanted you to learn in the subject.

Student answers indicate they have grasped the conceptual framework and the intention of the course: (a) the dialectical relationship of practice and theory, and of practical and formal theory; (b) the complex, contextual and contested nature of adult education practice; and (c) the distinctions between educational paradigms; and (d) the desire to introduce students to the literature of adult education and to encourage them to become more aware of, and to self-consciously develop, their own theoretical frameworks. These data, of course, say nothing about the extent to which students have internalized and might apply these concepts and intentions. However, some sample responses show that students can certainly *articulate* what they think they have learned:

The scope of adult education is big. I mean really big. The writings on this subject are extensive and encompass much more than you would imagine. Teaching, learning, styles of both, politics, who's in charge (of learning), places to learn, what to learn, [illegible], liberal education, curriculum, workplace learning, informal learning, gender bias, emancipatory practice, techniques, interventions, assessment, empowerment, facilitation, experiential learning, restructuring....

[The course is about] the relationship between theory and practice in adult education—what *theory* says that relationship is—what *our experience* says that relationship is—the complexity of the relationship—how the relationship has been seen historically—emphasizing that the relationship exists in a much larger social/political/economic context which cannot be divorced from the theory or the practice.

This subject is about presenting different perspectives on education practice and theory in order to promote discussion, wider thinking about theoretical and practical issues facing adult educators and what we might choose to do about them. It also about searching for meaning in what we do, whether by reflecting about our own learning theories or practice, or by researching the field which interests us to discover what other educators and researchers have valued, pondered, devised and embraced, in order to critique their views and findings and to search for relations to our own theories in action.

This subject...provides a framework from which to view theories in our work without prescribing any one approach.... It includes the opportunity to reflect on our own practice and do this in the company of others whose reflections may differ from our own thus expanding our view.

Formulaic strategies that advocate several steps to success rarely work because they are espoused without any connection to the concrete reality of a local situation.

Emphasis on reality, concrete examples rather than abstract theory. Testing theory against experience—does it help explain our view of reality?

In the area of concepts the idea of *contestation* theory allowed a few pennies to drop into place. The concept of using *spaces* within the system is also terrific, as well as the critical reflection of Freire, etc.

Highlighting the value of informal learning.

What I learned is that I take a technical view in many instances but I work in an area where there is a great need for an interpretive approach. Thus I am slowly challenging and changing my work practices to move away from objective truth and look more at subjective reality, dealing with messiness and complexity.

Involving workers in participatory processes are best for adults learning, changing, restructuring.

Learning as liberation (emancipation from hierarchical models of education and thinking) was a particular emphasis.

Liberation and domination. Domination occurs in many aspects of education and workplace and society. Liberation cannot occur at the expense of someone else's domination.

Evaluations also show students becoming engaged by and excited about reading, thinking and writing:

The richness—I've really enjoyed the way you draw on an incredibly wide range of stuff across a heap of fields and throw it at us to make what we want of if we're interested. And the political context of everything. And the constant touching with reality. This subject is what I really wanted from this program—opportunity to stand back and think, rather than writing meaningless essays.

In particular, my eyes were opened to the power of experiential essay writing—i.e., talks about real experiences, concrete things.

An opportunity to learn how to write in such a way that you position yourself at the fore of any piece, not as a passive reviewer/recipient of the literature.

I particularly enjoyed the writing assignment—the freedom to write then read, then write again about something that really interested me was incredible. It took me a while to grasp that the freedom really existed!

There were two things that the subject was about. Firstly, it was about writing, and I think this is Griff's secret passion—probably more than the educational theory stuff—to help us to think about our writing, and to become more critical about it and better at it. Secondly, there was the theoretical stuff. I guess, in a nutshell, the message is that our work as educators is not something to be seen

in isolation—there is always a context and a range of tensions and pressures. The challenge was for us to develop a sense of our theoretical framework, and to place our practice (informal theory) inside a framework that works for us (formal theory). Griff gave us a smorgasbord of material in the reading to dip into at our leisure and as our interest dictated. The first block [of classes] was about exploring three theoretical paradigms—the technical (transmission), interpretive (interpersonal) and critical (collective). The second block used the topic of workplace restructuring as a tool for unpacking the paradigms and exploring our own theoretical frameworks.

One of the best parts of this course is the congruence between the subject matter and the teaching styles—I really feel treated like an adult and respected, yet have been challenged by the content and assignment work.

In these evaluations and in students' writing, one can see that students are coming to grips intellectually with the complexities of adult education practice. What is more, most of them appear not to be depressed or paralyzed by their insights. Rather, they show signs of being excited by their emerging understanding of the complexities of their work, and developing more determined and realistic ways of thinking about and acting on their situations. They also seem to become clearer about their educational goals and values. This in turn I suspect, but have not yet established, frees them to act.

Evaluations also reveal one set of problems around course content and another set of difficulties around the course process. Individual student responses illustrate the nature of these problems and make useful suggestions for dealing with them.

Scope of curriculum. (Give the reading out earlier.)

All the reading. (Advice on specializing.)

The readings were very good however they would be more helpful to me if they were organized more closely to lectures.

Initially, placing myself in a theoretical framework was difficult. It became easier as the course progressed. (Revision of first 2 weeks work in about week 4).

Linking critical theory to practice. (Provision of more and recent practice examples in Australia).

Identifying the depth to which written material is to be developed. (Smaller projects more often).

Developing my arguments and aims more clearly. (By writing more, rather than trying to read wide volumes and skirting around what I wanted to write about).

Personally I felt overwhelmed by the breadth of issues and found it difficult to focus in on one—I tended to become too theoretical as a consequence. An opportunity to be initially guided may have enabled a focused interest early on in the subject.

A more detailed precis of the course could be offered at the time of application or enrolment in the course to allow some preparation; i.e., pre-reading or suggested reflection in one's own practice. I found it almost impossible to do the amount of reading and reflection necessary and therefore participate in the group discussions to the degree I wished. Rather than having group discussions centered around issues only chosen or suggested by Griff, how about the students nominate their own issues?

I feel that the one area requiring improvement is small group work. Perhaps some discussion should take place early in the course about the ideals, etc. of this activity.

Improve the group learning process, the learning results from the group discussion were very patchy depending on my preparation and preparation of others. Suggestion, some form of group assessment of what they gained from discussion, how they performed. In essence get each to see the contribution they needed to make. Develop some continuity in the groups-form syndicates for a few weeks.

In the Masters degree, I teach two subjects, *Theory and Practice in Adult Education*, and *Context and Strategy in Adult Education*. Most of the students who do the second course have done the first one. I find their evaluations of the second course very useful because they give a fuller picture of the teaching-learning dynamic, and because they identify some problems students might not recognize in the first course.

Overload of topics. I felt we skipped and skimmed. Whilst useful, I could hardly get a toehold on much of it—still, there's the rest of my life to do so. At least I'll recognize these aspects of contexts when I bump into them in the future. Overall, I feel the topic is too broad for one semester.

Semester is too short to do the practical necessities of a case study. Not enough time to look at issues in detail. Disconnection between readings and discussion; i.e., read in one week, discuss two weeks later. Readings not referenced properly so cannot be used in other work. Sometimes said pick which readings and we did and then we focused on one article line by line. Group divided between those who are esoteric and those who are practical. The frameworks for analysis needed to be drawn out a bit more. Discussion process didn't work well—partly group responsibility, partly facilitator responsibility. First draft should be due later in semester particularly in light of first comment above. Readings and discussions are very theoretical and case study is very practical. We need to have the two connected more; for example, by discussing our case studies in light of the theories.

At times I have been made silent by the direction the discussions have taken. This has not always been negative as it was interesting to hear these students' opinions, but it could have been summarized to make connections with educational practice.

Not enough debate or dialogue around issues put on the table. One person after another would say something without any real engagement. I feel sometimes this was because we avoided arguments openly disagreeing with each other. I think this is a problem.

Empower the quiet. Even though the expectation is that individuals/students will participate to the fullest, I feel that there was an element of reticence which wasn't broached. Dealt with early in the course, this wouldn't I suppose/suggest, have been as limiting.

Ask the participants to research each topic and to facilitate the groups learning, have a variety of styles and more room for differing ideas. Lecturer can then cap off discussion of fill in gaps.

In sum, the evaluations indicate that the following improvements need to be made to the subjects: (a) readings need to be better organized and more focused; (b) a better balance between content and process needs to be achieved in class sessions, and in particular more attention needs to be paid to group process in discussion; and (c) the intention and focus of one course need to be sharpened. I am currently taking action in these three areas. For example, this semester I am team-teaching a doctoral class with a colleague who has a deep understanding of learning group process.

Literature

And what are these complexities that I hope my students will grasp? Or, rather, what are the *representations* of these complexities that are put in front of students, to inform and challenge them? There are, in adult education and associated literature, two kinds of work to which I direct students. First, there is the diverse literature related to the core practitioner skills of teaching and group work and program development and evaluation, and to the social context of adult learning and education. To date I have introduced students to this literature through class sessions supplemented by booklets of readings. Some of these readers have introductions surveying issues and literature; in the 1996 academic year a text will be available (Foley, 1995) which includes more systematic surveys.

The second kind of work to which students are exposed are case studies, *although case study* is too bare a term to capture the richness and conceptual strength of the sort of writing I am thinking of. The quality of this writing is encapsulated in Clifford Geertz's (1988, 1993) memorable pairing of *thick description* and *close analysis*, and his notion that such writing gives the reader the sense of "being there." In the adult education literature I always think first of two long papers by David Head (1977, 1978); the one on doing adult education with London street people, the other an evaluation of learning in a London community center. The first of these papers is a model of detailed description and rigorous and courageous analysis, from its unforgettable opening challenge, "Education is invasion...", to its seventh footnote directing the reader to Raymond Williams' (1961, pp. 312-320) profound distinction between *service* and *solidarity*. Head's second paper is an apparently discursive ramble through the Learning Workshop of the Allfarthing Community Center. This paper frequently loses people on the

first reading. But re-read, the powerful argument and careful construction of the paper emerge.

There is, of course, much else of this ilk in adult education, school education, sociology, anthropology, and history. In adult education there are, for example, (a) Tom Lovett's and his colleagues' (Lovett, 1975; Lovett, Clarke, & Kilmurray, 1983) participant-observation studies of community adult education in Liverpool and Ulster; (b) the Kirkwoods' 1989 book on applying Freirean principles in adult education work in Edinburgh; (c) the growing body of work on Highlander (for example, Adams, 1975; Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1990; Horton & Freire, 1990; and Zacharakis-Jutz, 1993); (d) Jane Thompson's (1983) account of her work with women in Southhampton; (e) Gowen's (1991) study of literacy teaching and worker learning in a US hospital; and (f) Mike Newman's (1979, 1993) reflections on community adult education in London and trade union education in Australia. In school education there is a much larger body of work, much of which can be found either appearing or reviewed in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. Four studies to which I keep returning are: (a) Paul Willis's (1978) and (b) Jean Anyon's (1983) accounts of adolescent resistance in school; (c) Connell's and his colleagues study of the relationship of class, gender, and education (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982); and (d) Ray Rist's (1970) account of the interaction of class and race in a Harlem kindergarten. In sociology and anthropology there is work like Westwood's (1984) study of gender, power, and learning in a factory in the English midlands; Sennett and Cobbs' (1973) argument about the psychological injury sustained by working class men in the US, and Andrew Metcalfe's (1988) study of miners' struggle for dignity in the coalfields of the Hunter Valley in Australia. Metcalfe's book is as much a social history as an ethnography, and this directs our attention to the insights that can be gained into adult education and learning from the historical literatures, and from associated fields like cultural studies and media studies.

This, of course is a personal list, as any individual's must be. The point to take from it is that there is all sorts of work, in the social and even the natural sciences,⁷ which can illuminate adult education and learning. I have found it very rewarding to point this out to students and to witness their excitement as they discover their own treasures, the books and articles that move their thinking beyond where it was before. In doing this I am always careful to point out to students that it is important that they search out work that speaks to *them*.

Our White Teeth, or Real Teaching?

Complexity determines my teaching, too. As I have developed the approach to teaching discussed in this article, other activities—research, writing, administration—have made it harder for me to find time for teaching. While this is a perennial problem for university teachers, in our time it has taken on a

⁷ Speaking recently to a colleague about the complexity of adult education practice, I learned that there is a body of literature on complexity in biology and related fields.

sharper edge. The attempt of countries like Australia to find a place in a restructuring world economy has caught all workers in a productivity squeeze. In this new order, more is now demanded of all workers, and university teachers have a particular set of difficulties, generated by a mixture of factors: (a) the career structure of universities, which rewards individual effort, encourages competition and discourages real collaborative work; (b) the hierarchical authority structure and authoritarian ethos of universities, which work against effective critique of dominant practices; (c) the middle class background and experience of most university teachers, which leaves them psychologically vulnerable to management pressure and industrially ignorant and weak;⁸ and (d) university teachers' deep interest in, and measure of control over, their work, which paradoxically makes them liable to exploitation and self-exploitation. This combination of factors makes it increasingly difficult to teach in the very labor intensive way described here.

We teachers need to make the sort of demand that the American actor William Hurt makes of his employers:

Hurt's contracts stipulate that, above everything, he be given adequate rehearsal time and a ten-hour limit to the working day. "A carpenter needs a little bit of time to build a house, and I need a little bit of time to build a character," said Hurt. "All you want to do is your work. And all they want is for you to jump out of the box with your white teeth! On *The Plague* they promised six weeks rehearsal time and they lied!" (Sydney Morning Herald, 1995)

The Plague was never released, no doubt because Hurt would not tolerate the erosion of his working conditions. Few academics have this degree of personal power. Our resistance has to be collective. Unless we together stand up for our rights as workers we will not be a position to teach effectively.

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⁸ A reviewer of this article has requested that this point be developed. I recognize the generality of this statement, and the complexity of the relationship of the four sets of variables (class background, psychological vulnerability, management pressure, and industrial weakness) to which it refers. Because of its very complexity it is not possible to elaborate upon it satisfactorily here. However, in twenty years of university teaching I have witnessed this combination of factors being played out time and time again.

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