

## Book Reviews/Recensions

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### ADULT EDUCATION AND THE WORKING CLASS: EDUCATION FOR THE MISSING MILLIONS

K. Ward and R. Taylor (eds.). 1986. Radical Forum on Adult Education Series. London: Croom Helm.

There is much food for thought in this book. With the development of large scale unemployment in Britain and elsewhere, more and more people are again asking just what help education can give to the adult unemployed. There seems also to have been an intensification of guilt feelings in some quarters about the failure of the traditional forms of adult education to reach large sections of the working class, however defined. With this has come a growing consciousness that more effort should be put into the development of education specifically designed to assist women, ethnic minorities and that growing proportion of the population who are retired. The 'missing millions' of the sub-title to this book reflect these concerns and the authors argue with some force their case for a fresh approach, using their own three year experiment as a basic case study.

Work with the unemployed is the predominant issue in the book and a good number of vital questions are quickly brought to the surface. Can adult education really help the unemployed? Anyone in contact with unemployed people knows very well that what most of them want is first and foremost a job, and that this is the way in which any educational offering will be weighed up. Educational provision for the unemployed is moreover conditioned by assumptions made about the nature of unemployment. One view is that unemployment is just a temporary phenomenon which will go away as soon as conditions have improved, as soon as the world economic (market?) forces have settled down and adjustments made to allow for the use of new methods of production and new types of organization. Once the unemployed have developed the required new skills, it is said, they will be employed again, and the three, four or five million unemployed in Britain (figures depend on methods of counting) have just to live through a period of retraining.

Much of the current strategy and provision for the unemployed in Britain reflects this view. It can be seen especially in the training/retraining provision made by the central government through

the Manpower Services Commission which stresses the technical and organizational explanations for unemployment, and partly in the Department of Education and Science funded scheme known as REPLAN which tries in a variety of ways to improve the educational opportunities available to unemployed adults. This whole approach, however, is open to challenge, as Ward and Taylor clearly argue. Unemployment, thanks to technological change and perhaps particularly the development of micro-processes, may well become a permanent feature in modern society. Any new jobs which are created are more likely to be filled by some of the new generation than by the long-term unemployed who are already with us in increasing numbers. Perhaps we should be thinking more of a society in which the machine will become the workhorse, leaving human beings free to develop the kind of 'leisure society' hitherto available only to some of the rich. This, however, would require a considerable shift in public attitudes and opinions, not least among the unemployed, implying as it does a move away from the well established 'Puritan work ethic' familiar on both sides of the Atlantic. It also raises many questions about the nature of society and about the effects of the present inequalities between people.

If jobs may never become available in the traditional sense and if therefore there seems little point in helping people to acquire new job skills, what can education offer? Based in a university department well grounded in the liberal tradition of adult education, the authors tend to think in terms of providing opportunities through which the unemployed can develop their own abilities as well as a greater sense of purpose, and thus become better able to cope with the new type of society. Coping, and living more satisfactory lives, however, mean different things to different people. There is indeed some danger of over generalization in much of the thinking about education and unemployment. Too often all the unemployed are lumped together and the heterogeneity is ignored; unemployment may occur at all levels of society from the unskilled worker to the high executive and at all ages from the young school leaver to the near retired. And people, of course, have differing responsibilities. The position, too, may be compounded by double or treble disadvantages as when people are working class *and* unemployed, female or black. Different needs suggest a variety of offerings. Perhaps, though, the vital need is for a new approach which challenges many traditional assumptions. How should such provision be organized? Who decides the curriculum? What type of provider is likely to meet with success? What exactly should be the role, if any, of central or local government? Or of the universities? In any case how to you measure 'success'?

The value of this book is that it both raises, and attempts to answer, this kind of question. Up to date we have not had a thorough going macro-study of unemployment and adult education but in recent years there has been an increasing number of case studies and reports of experiments, published in Britain by bodies such as the Educational Centers Association, the Workers' Educational Association, REPLAN and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. In a sense this book, too, is a report of a particular experience, but it attempts also to focus on wide issues. One of its major themes is said to be that 'for education to meet the needs of working-class people, its form and content have to develop and be negotiated in a diversity of ways with the different constituents of the working class' (p. 118).

The 'Pioneer Work' section of the Department of Adult and Continuing Education in the University of Leeds thus went out to clubs, community centers, tenants' associations, neighborhood groups and any relevant voluntary organizations it could find. Rightly it was felt that the provision for the working class in the past has been very limited, "restricted largely to either leisure/recreational areas... or to day release courses for predominantly white male trade unionists." Instead its central concern was to be with 'community based' programs designed to develop adult education for the whole working class through intensive field work, networking and general pooling of resources.

With this central, if not altogether new, approach, most of the book is concerned with descriptions of the work carried out in the cities of Bradford and Leeds in West Yorkshire. Before this, however, there are two chapters which set the scene and raise the wider issues. The first analyzes what is seen as the chronic inequality in all sectors of British society, inequality which is political, economic and educational, and inequality which is felt likely to grow under the present regime. Among other examples, attention is drawn to the growing challenge to comprehensive type schools and to the effect of financial restrictions in shifting the emphasis of British university adult educational provision away from working-class liberal adult education towards professional 'continuing' education.

Few indeed would want to challenge the comment that there has been 'a marked discrepancy between practical vocation (job-centered) education for the mass and the cultural liberal education for the elite.' Chapter 2 is also a critical analysis, this time of the educational responses made to unemployment both in the 1930's and the 1980's. If there is no matching job provision, what indeed is the point of training

programs, or of special funding as at present given for example to basic education and to 'second chance' education?

The next five chapters are concerned with the particular experience of the 'Pioneer Work' activity in the years 1982-85. Chapter 3 examines the overall structure and objectives and raises the question of the rationale for university involvement, while Chapter 4, in a series of case studies, offers a careful analysis of the work undertaken. Both draw attention to the problems to be faced by this kind of work and provide not just an account of successes but also a self-critical examination of failures. Chapter 5 is concerned with the work developed with trade unions, particularly in the TUC 'Unemployed Workers Centers', Chapter 6 describes the courses designed specifically for women, and Chapter 7 those for working-class retired people.

Anyone concerned with the provision of education for the unemployed will find these chapters enlightening. They bring out clearly the fact that there are few immediate solutions to the dilemmas created by even limited success. If enthusiastic expectations are aroused how can one satisfy them? How can one develop a curriculum which goes beyond the limits of an initial short course? And how indeed is the active adult educator working in this way to be distinguished from a community activist? If the provision is cost free to participants—a marked feature of all the 'Pioneer Work' activity—how can you hope to continue this approach under a government which tends to look with disfavor on the provision of state funds for education? Another question which emerges is whether we have given enough thought to the feelings and perceptions which many adults, perhaps particularly those in the working class, have about education.

The book concludes with a brief set of 'Reflections on Research', evaluation being regarded as an essential part of this university experiment, and with Chapter 9 which both reviews the whole of the work undertaken and discusses its significance, not just in the immediate area but in terms of general adult educational provision. The authors consider particularly the way in which this three year experiment departs significantly from earlier university traditions in adult education, arguing that 'Pioneer Work' has had a different interpretation of working-class education, a redefinition of the 'social purpose' dynamic, and many innovative, educational processes. All of which is stimulating as indeed are the recommendations for the future with which the chapter ends. University staff will note with particular interest, the Department's justification for the enterprise as 'action-

research' in contrast to the authors who gave much more value to the effect on the unemployed who took part.

Just as much of 'Pioneer Work' was viewed as a pump-priming exercise which could then be handed over to other agencies, so the account of this relatively small experiment provides an analytical base on which can be built reflections and policies to be considered by all. Of course the book may be challenged as being too detailed and meticulous, and as assuming too great knowledge of the British scene—and of British acronyms—but it is worth following through not only as a good account of a particular way of working but also as a source of fresh ideas. It has, alas, the usual unattractive format of the Croom Helm series, and a too minimal index, but it can be strongly recommended for purchase even at what some may feel to be an exorbitant price.

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