

REAL UTOPIAS IN ADULT EDUCATION*

Abstract: The juxtaposition of real and utopias in the title of the article draws attention to, on the one hand, the limitations and constraints within which radical educational initiatives have to work and, on the other, the systematic attempts to develop learning which goes beyond the limitations of the current context and works towards progressive social change. To illustrate the argument three examples, drawn from Spain, the USA and Scotland, are outlined because they illustrate the need to reassert a critical pedagogy that is a necessary condition for creating an educated and democratic community.

Key words: utopias, pedagogy, transformative experiences.

**Fecha de recepción: 09/03/2009; fecha de aceptación: 08/05/2009; fecha de publicación: 04/12/09*

UTOPIÁS REALES EN EDUCACIÓN DE PERSONAS ADULTAS

Resumen: La yuxtaposición de la realidad y de las utopías en el título del artículo llama la atención, por un lado, a las limitaciones y constreñimientos contra los que tienen que enfrentarse las iniciativas educativas, y, por el otro, los intentos sistemáticos para desarrollar aprendizaje que vaya más allá de las limitaciones del contexto actual, hacia un cambio social progresivo. Para ilustrar este argumento se muestran tres ejemplos, de España, Estados Unidos y Escocia, porque ilustran la necesidad de reafirmar una pedagogía crítica que es una condición necesaria para crear una comunidad educada y democrática.

Palabras clave: utopías, pedagogía, experiencias transformadoras.

REAL UTOPIAS IN ADULT EDUCATION

Jim Crowther

Jim.Crowther@ed.ac.uk

University of Edinburgh.

1.- INTRODUCTION

In English the words real and utopia are usually seen as contradictory rather than complementary terms. The 'real' is grounded in the actual circumstances of everyday life and implies compromise, adjusting or even accepting constraints that limit what is possible. In contrast, utopia refers to circumstances not yet realised and which possibly could never be realised. Defined as unrealisable, then, utopian thinking has undeservedly fallen into disrepute. In arguing for the relevance of utopias, Bauman (1976, 13) makes the point that they play a 'crucial and constructive role in the historical process'. One key quality of utopian thinking is that it 'relativises the present' and thereby introduces a critical perspective on the partial and selective nature of the current reality. Levitas (2001), although writing specifically about social policy, makes a similar point when she draws the distinction between the extrapolatory and utopian method. Extrapolation involves making forward projections from key trends in the present, whereas the utopian method involves looking back critically and evaluatively from a supposed future.

Utopia as used in this article is about positive attempts to open up possibilities for a different type of living. They help us think about the future imaginatively and not specifically about what the immediate future holds. Utopias are about hope and, if education is to be a resource for change, then it too has to be a hopeful activity. The juxtaposition of real and utopia, in the manner deployed in this article, reflects this tension between these contradictory meanings of aspiring to a better world in the context of trends which may make its realisation difficult and partial. In other words, the focus on real utopias in adult education is concerned with radical practicality, with an emphasis on social change that can be progressed from the constraints of the 'here and now'.

Radical practicality has its roots in the tradition of education (the explicit, deliberate and systematic organisation of learning rather than a distinctive professional activity) as a resource for social change and there are examples of this type of popular education in different national contexts (Steele, 2007). In the UK during the nineteenth century for example radicals involved in social and political movements demanded 'really useful knowledge' rather than 'merely useful knowledge' (Johnson, 1988). The latter was essentially knowledge stripped of its social and political interests and was provided by churches, charitable bodies or the state. The critical issue was who controlled and defined knowledge: 'really useful knowledge' referred to critical knowledges which would help exploited and oppressed groups to analyse their circumstances, the causes of their misfortune and how best to act collectively to change them. The content of 'really useful knowledge' for exploited and oppressed groups differed because of different causes. For example, working class exploitation and gender exploitation had different roots and required their own distinctive struggles for change. Radical practicality emphasised the need to address directly the causes of people's misery and the 'test' of the robustness of 'really useful knowledge' was as a guide for meaningful action to challenge and transform them. As Paulo Freire (1972) reminds us 'education is politics' it is never neutral.

Today, more than ever, we need real utopias 'to learn our way out' (Finger and Asun 2001) of the current problems that are faced by the poor and exploited. The Chinese philosopher Confucius is reported to have said 'may you live in interesting times' the meltdown in global financial markets in 2008 and 2009 perhaps captures what he had in mind. Whilst bankers in the rich, developed world, have to make do with relatively smaller fortunes to live off the real and devastating consequences of the current recession is the burden of the poor and least powerful groups in society. At best, government responses to this situation have been to adopt Keynesian measures to counteract declining consumer demand. More usually it is to pay off the banks' debts in the hope of a return to 'business as usual' in the long-term. At worst, the neoliberal alternative to seize the opportunity to further privatise state assets, let ailing firms collapse, undermine trade unions and so on, is economically and politically as bankrupt as the banks themselves. The critical and creative forces required to resolve this situation are potentially to be found in the communities which experience these problems more deeply (see Klein, 2007). Out of necessity there is the potential for creative invention and determined intervention from progressive social forces. Again, as Freire (1972) reminds us, it is only the oppressed who can liberate both themselves and the oppressor. This article will illustrate adult education practices that help stir and educate the need to improve how we live now, and how we might live better in the future.

The text is structured in the following way. First, I will highlight the emergence of dystopian tendencies in adult education through the rise of a narrowly vocational focus legitimated by the dominant policy discourse of lifelong learning, which is evident in various parts of the world. If radical practicality is to be achieved we need therefore to reinvent pedagogy of the oppressed for our times. Second, I will then describe three

examples of such practice in terms of real utopias in adult education: *La Verneda Sant Martí School of Adults* in Catalonia, Spain, Highlander Research and Education Centre in the USA, and the Adult Learning Project in Scotland (UK). Third, I will identify their key comparable features and conclude that they provide inspirational examples for the role of education in asserting the possibility and potential of human agency.

2.- WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ADULT EDUCATION? THE SEEDS OF DYSTOPIA

In his book *The Long Revolution* (1961), Raymond Williams, a former British adult educator and cultural historian, identified that in the nineteenth century three interests (the old humanists, the public educators and the industrial trainers) dominated the debate about educational purpose in the UK. The 'old humanists' saw education as an elite activity from which only very few people would benefit. Education was of value for its own sake and something 'men of leisure' (seldom women) would benefit from. Remnants of this thinking still exist today but those who advocate this position are more limited in number and less influential in policy.

The 'public educators' espoused the revolutionary idea of 'education for all', which was inspired by the social and political interests of the emerging working class and women's movements. Adult education in particular would provide the means for developing the knowledge and skills for the working class to produce their own political leaders. The Workers' Educational Association was a good example of this type of provision (Fieldhouse, 1996). Creating a common culture, which reflected the experience of a wide social spectrum of people, required educational provision to be available to all. However, despite seeming to have won the debate against the old humanists, the argument of the public educators was not decisive. The 'industrial trainers', on the other hand, made the powerful and pragmatic argument that a universal education was needed to ensure economic success in an increasingly competitive global world. This perspective was dominant in the nineteenth century. Broadly speaking, the tensions and compromises between these different interests, with the industrial trainers dominant, led to twentieth century developments in all levels of education.

What is now happening is a fundamental reinforcement of the above compromise, which is setting the trend for developments in the 21st century. The broad field of adult education has been marginalised by the dominant policy discourse of lifelong learning for flexible capitalism (Crowther, 2004). It is a Trojan horse out of which the skills agenda of the industrial trainers has reasserted its primacy with a focus on reducing education to training in 'soft skills' for 'employability' e. g. discipline, flexibility, communication, team-working, etc. The rise of globalisation and the struggle for economic competitiveness underlines the ideological power of a stunted form of human resource development. A simplistic connection between training and the economy is made which unjustifiably claims that more of the former automatically improves the

latter (Coffield, 1999). A consequence is that the interests of the industrial trainers are undermining the need for a truly 'educated community', which is essential to a common culture and participatory democracy (Williams, 1961).

3.- REASSERTING A PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED

Behind the industrial trainers rhetoric of economic competitiveness, the hegemony of individual choice is increasingly replacing the idea of social welfare as a public good and lifelong learning plays a crucial role in preparing citizens for participation in the new 'workfare order'. In this sense, 'the deconstruction of the welfare, as an ideological and policy objective, is predicated upon the reconstruction of citizenship' (Martin, 2003, 566). Increasingly, citizens must learn to take responsibility for their own income, self-manage their education, health and welfare. Implicit in this is a retreat from the public sphere as the arena in which citizens argue about the nature and purpose of politics, and the public business of citizenship is trivialised by being reduced to individual choice and consumption.

The shift in policy from providing education to encouraging learning is an integral part of more fundamental changes taking place in the nature and form of the state. In the transition from the nation state to the market state (Bobbitt, 2002) the idea of a single polity which coheres around a set of shared values is no longer a prime objective of state policy. Ideologically, what policy seeks to construct instead is the sense of a 'level playing field' where the appearance of meritocracy holds sway. In reality, of course, what is created is not a level playing field at all but rather what Ainley (2004) characterises as 'opportunities to be unequal'. The key elision is the reduction of democracy as a political process to the market as an economic process. Politics is thus diminished to the making of market choices facilitated by lifelong learning.

What is actually required to give most people real choices is precisely the kind of critical and reflexive education Freire insisted on as the right of all citizens, and a pedagogy which liberates them to understand the nature of their oppression and act upon their existential reality in order to transform it. As he points out:

"...the oppressed are not marginals living 'outside' society. They have always been inside - inside the structure which made them 'beings for others'. The solution is not to 'integrate' them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves'." (Freire, 1972, 48).

Inequality is a relational phenomenon that produces benefits for dominant groups through the systematic exploitation of others. The poor are with us only because the rich are too. Gender inequality exists because it sustains male privileges. Of course, rather than recognise the relational nature of inequalities, a common response in social policy is to 'blame the victim' –the poor, unemployed, single parents, refugees, asylum seek-

ers, gypsies or whatever group happens to provide a convenient scapegoat in a particular national context at a particular time. In this situation, the solution to the predicament of marginalised and exploited groups –‘beings for others’– is not to ensure their further adaptation but rather to seek to transform the structures which prevent them from becoming ‘beings for themselves’.

In capitalist societies one of the major causes of oppression –although clearly not the only one– is social class division and exploitation. However, contemporary educational discourse is curiously silent about class, i. e. as a relation of power as distinct from a category of identity or status. Freire reminds us that class analysis is about people's relative positions within structures of power and privilege. Class in this sense cannot be reduced to sanitised notions like 'disadvantaged groups', 'vulnerable learners' or 'social exclusion'. Indeed, Freire warns us to be wary of the kind of 'false generosity' that takes into account people's needs without understanding how these needs are caused and distributed.

The new capitalism is also having detrimental social and psychological consequences (Sennett, 1998). The adaptation of capitalism to short-term market priorities is changing the meaning of work and the quality of relations between people. Bonds of trust and mutual support (‘social capital’, according to Putnam, 2000) require nurturing through long-term commitments and relationships that are increasingly difficult to sustain in the era of flexibility and risk. The ‘political economy of uncertainty’, as Bourdieu characterises it, is a new mode of domination “based on the creation of a generalised and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation” (1998, 85).

Despite growing class inequalities and relations of oppression, it seems that these are frequently ignored in educational discourse. For Freire, of course, the opposite was the case: what we now choose to disregard actually constituted the bedrock of his educational work. The title of his most famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is a sharp reminder to us about the politics of our work. Education for liberation means making choices, and choosing to take the side of subordinated and marginalised groups. Political solidarity replaces the false detachment of professional neutrality. Moreover, this political stance must translate into a combination of educational dialogue and social action, or *praxis*, with the oppressed in order to understand and act upon the sources and causes of their oppression. We now turn to briefly look at examples of educational projects which exemplify this through three cameos of real utopias in adult education.

4.- RESOURCES OF HOPE: CAMEOS OF REAL UTOPIAS

4.1.- La Verneda Sant Martí School of Adults in Catalonia

This school for adults in a poor working class, outer city area of Barcelona, emerged in the aftermath of the Fascist era after the death of Franco in 1975 and the restoration of formal democratic processes in Spain. The demand for a local neighbourhood facility to cater for a wide range of social and educational needs was led from the grassroots and a former administrative building of the fascist era was occupied by local people and commandeered for their use. Since this period of gestation, *La Verneda San Martí* School has gone from strength to strength and provides educational opportunities primarily for people with few or no formal qualifications, as well as creating a resource for local and national social movements. Participants can study from a range of course subjects which they want to learn –basic literacy, classical literature, Spanish as a second language, health, sociology, etc. through to issue based studies such as, “What is happening in the world?”.

What is striking about the School is its democratic ethos and participatory structures which enable local people to control its curriculum. Annual ‘dream activities’, which are open to all the School’s participants, create the space for thinking about what people want it to achieve (Sánchez Aroca, 1999). These events generate the School’s aims and priorities which are then put into practice over the year and are progressed through different structures of regular meetings whereby students, teachers and volunteers are able to have their say in what is done and how. Women are also able to participate in their own Association (named *Heura*) to ensure their voice is heard, which then feeds into decision-making within the School. With support from the local authority and European project funds the School employs a small number of professional educators and at the same time involves a much wider number of collaborators including sympathetic university educators, former students and local people.

Democratic participation is fundamental to the School’s organisation and processes of learning. Brookfield (2005) suggests that democracy in adult education can sometimes be a ‘premature ultimate’ in that, once claimed, it involves a suspension of questioning despite the fact that democracy is a contested concept with different meanings. In this example, however, the educational experience is underpinned by explicit principles of dialogic learning which reflects the serious nature of the School’s democratic commitment. These principles at *Le Verneda Sant Martí* include the following:

Egalitarian dialogue: discussion and decisions should be informed by the best argument. The School embodies the notion of deliberative democracy associated with the idea of Habermas, that is, rational processes of decision-making based on the strongest case is legitimate but acting to establish a position through micro-political positioning is not.

Cultural intelligence: this principle recognises that people bring with them a wide variety of knowledge, skills and experience from their different backgrounds. Traditionally, education selects only from a narrow range of cul-

tural values and therefore positions people as deficient in some way if they deviate from the established norms. By asserting the importance of cultural intelligence the recognition of differences and the importance of co-existence amongst diverse norms and values is explicitly recognised.

Instrumental knowledge and skills: this refers to the need to equip people with the types of practical skills for living more fulfilling lives (e. g language competence for migrants). Pedagogically, the process of instrumental learning is achieved as a by-product to people learning collectively and creatively through enriching activities. For example, literacy learning as an outcome of collective engagement with reading classic texts written by distinguished authors like Lorca or Joyce become the motivation and means for acquiring the more functional aspects of literacy skills.

Meaning creation: this refers to the individual and collective process of arriving at an informed understanding of different positions and interests, which emerge from participation in dialogue. In this process the relationship between the 'personal and the political' is heightened as active participants acquire new identities and become agents of change themselves.

Solidarity: formal education often fosters competition between people by grading and ranking them. Solidarity is the opposite of this because it seeks to instil a democratic and egalitarian ethic through people working together to achieve commonly agreed goals. Solidarity is supported by an inclusive and active participatory process which is mindful of the needs and interests of subordinate social groups in the wider community.

Equality of difference: the right to be different underpinned by the fundamental ontological equality of people is recognised and supported by intercultural dialogue which respects different values and belief systems.

Transformation: this principle asserts the role of human agency in the process of change in that oppressive social structures that dominate and constrain people can be challenged and transformed by them.

(Adapted from Flecha, 2000; Puigvert and Valls, 2005).

The above principles have enabled the School to ensure its curriculum is grounded in the expressed needs of local people as well as enabling it to be a resource for local community development projects and wider social movement organisations. The School is a resource for co-ordinating activities relating to urban development, the promotion of health, social and cultural facilities (Merrill, 2003). A social movement of adult learners, democratically organised, has modelled itself on the dialogic and democratic principles of *Verneda* (the Federation of Adults' Cultural and Educational Associations, FACEPA). By making connections with a number of non-governmental organisations the School supports the rights of poor working class people, women, migrants, gypsy people and other socially excluded groups in their struggles for social justice. Also, with

its extensive connections with academics based at the Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities (CREA at the University of Barcelona) the underlying ethos of the school has been strengthened and its significance as a real utopia for adult education has been widened by awareness raising of the School's role in making a difference to lives served least by formal education.

4.2.- Highlander Research and Education Centre

The Highlander Folk School has an iconic status in radical adult education and was founded by Myles Horton, along with others, in 1932 in Tennessee, USA. This development followed from Horton's study visit to Denmark's Folk High Schools, which made a lasting impression on him as important educational resources for communities to address their social and economic problems. Highlander began initially by focussing on subjects like psychology, cultural geography, revolutionary literature and social issues but it was its work with communities in struggle, and its commitment to social change, which it excelled and for which it is renowned (see Roberson, 2002).

The Folk High School movement in Denmark tended to have a vocational orientation, whereas the radical reinterpretation of these institutions in the Highlander case emphasised the commitment to education being a resource for helping groups further democracy, social equality and social justice. Much like its Danish antecedent, Highlander incorporates cultural activity so that music, poetry and dancing are encouraged as part of the process of energising people in the struggle to find their own collective solutions to their problems.

Highlander is a good example of the organic link between social movements and education with the focus of its curriculum changing and developing in relation to social currents of unrest and their respective organisational forms. As Horton (1988, xiv) points out the choice of social groups to work with has to be based on evidence that "(1) the organisation is moving in a radical direction or providing a radicalising experience; (2) is demanding structural reforms; (3) is involved in a continuous learning experience; and (4) has the potential for multiplying leadership for social change". Acquiring this evidence was the product of close involvement of Highlander staff with different communities and their leaders. Writing about the link between University faculty and popular education in the USA, St Clair makes the point that "an important part of the Highlander philosophy is the belief that educators do not know all the answers: 'the best teachers of poor and working people are the people themselves. They are the experts on their own experiences and problems'", (Horton cited in St Clair, 2005, 45). Fundamental to this position is trust in ordinary people to have the capacity and insight to assess their own circumstances. Highlander does not aim to teach people about their problems but is a resource to help them analyse what to do about them and how change can be organised.

In essence, Highlander is a resource in people's struggles for progressive change but not the spearhead for it. Education is not a substitute for the organisations and movements that have to lead the struggle for social improvement. The initial impetus for Highlander's activity was the training of union leaders and organisers as well as racial segregation within the labour movement. During the 1950s and 1960s the growth of an active civil rights movement in the USA led to a greater focus on this aspect of Highlander's work. Literacy education with people from African-American backgrounds was important for exercising their democratic rights. Rosa Parks, whose refusal to move from 'white only' seats on a public bus in Selma Alabama (which subsequently led to the mass bus boycott), was herself a student at Highlander as was Martin Luther King. The success of Highlander's educational work led the state of Tennessee to attempt to repress and undermine its capacity by revoking its charter and seizing its land and buildings. Not to be put down, the school reopened the next day as the Highlander Research and Education Centre, a name which it still operates under today. As well as direct educational involvement with communities, Highlander also provides links and resources to a wider range of socially progressive causes and has more recently established an impressive website for this purpose –see www.highlandercenter.org.

Between 1970 and 1990 local groups in struggles over environmental health and the interests of the emerging anti-globalization movement characterised the main focus of Highlander's educational engagement. Since 2000 the dominant themes expressed in its curriculum has been the development of social justice activists, language skills and rights education for migrants and young people. The credit crisis and material inequalities are also a focus for its more recent activity –reflecting its origins in labour movement organising – with workshops and conferences that aim to establish the 'solidarity economy,' which refers to a concern for solidarity, equity, democratic participation, sustainability and pluralism in social and economic organisation.

4.3.- *Adult Learning Project (ALP) in Scotland*

Founded in 1979 the ALP is an explicit attempt to relate the ideas and methodology of Paulo Freire to an urban industrialised society by focussing on post-literacy adult education. These are described and explained in the book by Kirkwood and Kirkwood (1989 and 2008 for a translated and updated version).

ALP's activity needs to be located in an analysis of the changing Scottish political and cultural context. Today, Scotland has its own devolved Parliament with political control over a number of policy areas including education. The foundation of the Parliament followed the election of New Labour in 1997 and a Scottish based campaign for greater political control over domestic affairs. After a decisive referendum in its favour the Scottish Parliament was opened in 1999. The tension between Scottish and UK politics has deep roots in the social, cultural and political history of Scotland but its significance

will be well understood in the Spanish context where demands for regional autonomy of a similar kind exist. Moreover, the expansion of the European Union and its increasing influence on national policies has heightened the need for greater local control over decision-making in many countries.

Thatcherite politics in the UK, during the 1980s and 1990s, created an ideological chasm between Scotland and England. By the early 1990s Scotland was, in terms of elected representatives, a 'Conservative-free zone' in that it returned no Conservative politicians to the London Parliament. Meanwhile, the Conservative domination of UK politics meant that the aspirations and hopes of the Scottish electorate had little chance of influencing mainstream UK politics. This emasculation of Scottish interests in the formal political processes of the British state led to the migration of political struggle *away* from UK party politics *into* the cultural politics of Scottish civil society. The struggle for democratic renewal in Scottish civil society was crucial to the formation of the devolved political administration today and this is a struggle that ALP has always been actively involved with educationally.

Three distinct phases in ALP's work are identifiable. In the first phase, the emphasis was on interpreting Freire's ideas and testing their application to an urban context in an advanced industrial society. The relevance of the ALP curriculum to the life of Scottish people focussed on the experience of home life, schooling, health and unemployment. Participatory co-investigations were undertaken with local people to discover 'generative themes' which provided the material for photograph codifications. These were subsequently interrogated and decoded in learning groups in order to analyse the wider context, which shapes local experiences, and to identify ways people could act, individually and collectively, to improve circumstances.

The second main phase in the ALP curriculum was resistance to the neo-liberal political agenda from the late 1980s onwards by reasserting the importance of communal and associational life as against market and consumer relationships. The emphasis on cultural activity, the traditional arts, music and song were woven into the curriculum of ALP with remarkable levels of support and popularity. Because the project had expanded in terms of greater participation, particularly in the expressive arts, the problem for ALP was to ensure the applicability of its ideas, practice and methodology across a wide range of curriculum areas. Training of voluntary staff and the graduation of its own students into becoming tutors helped this process and ensured that the project retained continuity but was also open to new influences. The formation of an ALP Association created a structure for participatory democracy in the project, regular cultural events and popular participation in the expressive arts were all manifestations of this period. This was a cultural struggle, informed by a political agenda, but with an educational focus. It paralleled the broader shift, noted above, away from a preoccupation with the formal politics of the British state into an engagement with the politics of Scottish cultural life.

The third and current phase is being shaped by post-devolution politics in Scotland and the wider context of globalisation. The focus of ALP's work has developed to include educational approaches to encourage popular participation in democracy, analysing the ownership of land in Scotland, welcoming refugees and asylum seekers, and other activities which are ongoing at the time of writing. ALP aims to address issues for its local community, but it has also sought to link these with Scottish-wide concerns and an appreciation of Scotland's position in an international and global context (e. g. support work for literacy education in Nicaragua). What is remarkable is the consistent way in which the ideas of Freire have been systematically and explicitly developed in a wide range of educational, political and cultural activities. The creativity of the project is evident in the fact that it has constantly been testing the boundaries of its own practice.

5.- KEY POINTS OF COMPARISON

An obvious point of comparison of the above examples is their endurance and ability to survive in hostile contexts. This is partly due to their capacity to evolve with changing times so that the curriculum is always integrated with the needs and interests of the communities they serve. Joining learning *and* living closely together is what a genuine approach to lifelong learning should be about –but all too often it is only concerned with the ‘industrial trainers’ purpose of learning *for* a living. Endurance is also partly due to their utopian impetus which makes them relevant to people's need for agency. The oppressed dream of and desire a better future, free from exploitation precisely because of their social condition. This is what makes them potential liberators of their own circumstances and that of the oppressor. The real and the utopian, in this sense, are two sides of the same coin.

A further point in common is the commitment to working democratically both in relation to building a curriculum and in terms of organisational structure and ethos. The aims of greater social justice, equality and democracy may not always require a democratic process but democratic learning can undoubtedly reinforce these ends. Fundamental to democratic education is the role of dialogue as an epistemological activity and a pedagogical process. Knowledge is created through critically reflecting and acting on experience in an unfinished, iterative, encounter. ‘Really useful knowledge’ is always contextual and contingent on who needs to know and for what purpose. Pedagogically, this involves creating spaces for people to learn from each other by critically interrogating their own, and other experiences, for a common cause.

Conviviality is an integral element of learning for living. On one level this involves recognising and deploying creative activities for learning: music, song, dance, and the arts are all potential resources for nourishing the spirit as well as educating the mind. The experience of real utopias testifies to the importance of incorporating such activity into education. On another level, conviviality goes much deeper as Illich (1973) recognised,

in that it relates to the public nature of educational institutions that should be resources for the common good. Convivial institutions are marked by their 'use value' for people. Increasingly, however, education is commodified and people are expected to buy into it for its exchange value in the labour market. Conviviality involves a deeper, underlying ethical impulse, which understands that freedom and interdependence are mutually constitutive.

Real utopias in adult education always emerge in particular national and cultural contexts and are shaped by their distinctive histories. It is worth noting, nevertheless, that they have also developed through the rich cross-fertilization of ideas and practices in radical adult education. The Danish Folk High School impact on Highlander is clearly a strong influence on its social, political and educational practice. Above all, the singular importance of Freire is strongly evident in all of these accounts. In turn, these projects have become influential examples to other adult educators and communities both in their national contexts, and internationally, so that the impact of their work ripples outwards well beyond the immediate participants they work with.

6. - CONCLUSION

It is important to emphasise that developing close and democratic relationships with communities of endurance and struggle are central to the task of critical pedagogy. It is by augmenting these types of relationships that learning and living become mutually constitutive of each other and are directed at progressive social change. The curriculum of real utopias is shaped by distinctive contextual influences and is often contingent on limiting factors which educators cannot necessarily control. Nevertheless, real utopias have a clear focus to nourish and nurture both resources of the intellect, and of the spirit, in order to create a common life in which all may participate equally. The main aim of this type of educational intervention is to assert the possibility and potential of human agency. The examples discussed here achieve this by reinventing themselves in ever changing circumstances, by enabling oppressed groups to make their voice heard, by intervening purposefully to help people lever themselves out of 'immersion' in passivity, and by developing dialogical approaches to education. This is what makes the critical pedagogy of real utopias significant, and fundamentally different, from other types of educational activity.

7. - ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the number of people on the international popular education (PEN) mailing list who provided me with references and materials to write this article. My apologies to those who also sent material on similar projects which I was unable to in-

clude. If you want to know more about PEN please contact me at Jim.Crowther@ed.ac.uk

8. - REFERENCES

- AINLEY, P. (2004): The new “market state” and education, *Journal of Educational Policy*, 19 (4), 497-514.
- BAUMAN, Z. (1976): *Socialism: the active utopia*. London, Allen & Unwin.
- BOBBIT, P. (2002): *The shield of Achilles*. London, Allen Lane.
- BOURDIEU, P. (1998): *Acts of resistance*. Bristol, Polity Press.
- BROOKFIELD, S. (2005): *The Power of critical theory for adult learning and teaching*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
- COFFIELD, F. (1999): Breaking the consensus: lifelong learning as social control, *British Educational Research Journal*, 25 (4), 479-499.
- CROWTHER, J. (2004): ‘In and against’ lifelong learning: flexibility and the corrosion of character, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 23 (2), 125-136.
- FINGER, M. and ASUN, J. (2001): *Adult education at the crossroads: learning our way out*. London, Zed Books/NIACE.
- FLECHA, R. (2000): *Sharing words: theory and practice of dialogic learning*. Lanham MD, Rowman & Littlefield.
- FREIRE, P. (1972): *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London, Penguin.
- HORTON, M. (1988): Foreward, in LOVETT, T. (ed.) *Radical approaches to adult education: a reader*. London, Routledge.
- ILLICH, I. (1973): *Tools for conviviality*. New York, Harper & Row publishers.
- JOHNSON, R. (1998): “Really useful knowledge” 1790-1850 in LOVETT, T. (ed.) *Radical approaches to adult education: a reader*. London, Routledge.
- KIRKWOOD, G. and KIRKWOOD, C. (1989): *Living adult education: Freire in Scotland*. Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
- (2007): *Educacio de persones adultes viva. Freire en Escocia*. Seville, CREC.
- KLEIN, N. (2007): *The shock doctrine*. London, Penguin.
- LEVITAS, R. (2001): Against work: a utopian incursion into social policy, *Critical Social Policy*, 21 (4), 449-465.
- MARTIN, I. (2003): Adult education, lifelong learning and citizenship: some ifs and buts, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 22 (6), 566-579.

- MERRILL, B. (2003): Adult education and citizenship: a framework for understanding practice. In COARE, P. and JOHNSTON, R. (eds.) *Adult learning, citizenship and community voices*. Leicester, NIACE.
- PUIGVERT, L. and VALLS, R. (2005): Dialogic learning in popular education movements in Spain, in CROWTHER, J., GALLOWAY, V. and MARTIN, I. (ed) *Popular education: engaging the academy*. Leicester, NIACE.
- PUTNAM, R. D. (2000): *Bowling alone*. New York, Simon & Schuster.
- ROBERSON, D. (2002): *The seeds of social change from Denmark*. US Department of Education. ERIC.
- SÁNCHEZ AROCA, M. (1999): 'La Verneda-SanT Martí: a school where people dare to dream. *Harvard Educational Review*, 69 (3), 90-129.
- ST CLAIR, R. (2005): University faculty and popular education in the United States, in CROWTHER, J; GALLOWAY, V. and MARTIN, I. (ed). *Popular education: engaging the academy*. Leicester, NIACE.
- SENNETT, R. (1998): *The corrosion of character*. London, Norton & Company.
- STEELE, T. (2007): *Knowledge is Power! The rise and fall of European popular educational movements, 1848-1939*. Bern, Peter Lang.
- WILLIAMS, R. (1961): *The long revolution*. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.

Para citar el presente artículo puede utilizar la siguiente referencia:

CROWTHER, J. (2009). Real Utopias in adult education, en FLECHA GARCÍA, R. y STEINBERG, S. (Coords.) *Pedagogía Crítica del S.XXI* [monográfico en línea]. Revista Electrónica Teoría de la Educación: Educación y Cultura en la Sociedad de la Información. Vol. 10, nº 3. Universidad de Salamanca, pp. 74-89. [Fecha de consulta: dd/mm/aaaa].
http://campus.usal.es/~revistas_trabajo/index.php/revistatesi/article/view/3961/3984
ISSN: 1138-9737