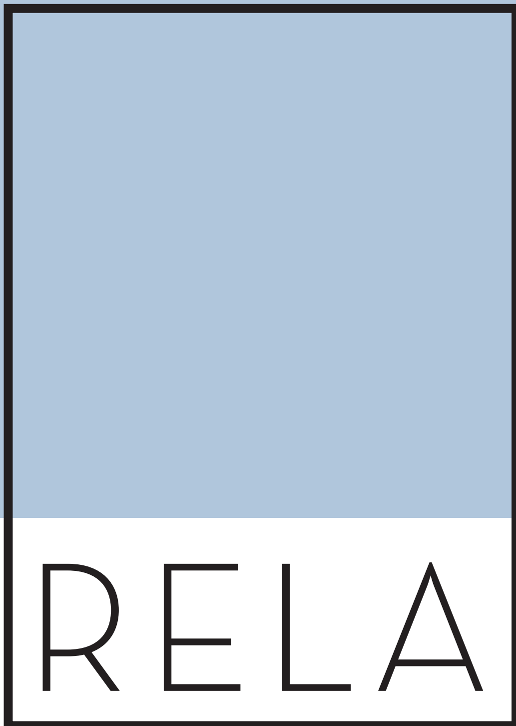
This issue: Approaches to research in the education and learning of adults



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Editorial: Approaches to research in the education and learning of adults

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The field of adult education and learning has encompassed research and scholarship from diverse perspectives and these have changed over time. Approaches and trends across this domain of activity perhaps resonate with that of a wider field of education and the social sciences; the intellectual resources picked up at any one time wash through and across these domains of activity. At the same time 'the field' has never been a homogenous or easily identifiable entity. It is therefore difficult to make valid generalizations of the status of approaches within a defined field at any particular time or location. The visibility of what goes on is also significantly limited and obscured. This is partially in that what goes on as research may not be published in identifiably adult education literature, partially in the separation of the field into various foci of interest (adult, vocational, community, higher education, workplace learning etc.) with specialist journals for publication, and partially as a result of the dominance of the English language used for publication; thus a lack of dissemination of research and scholarly writing across language barriers. It is then only tentatively and with caution that any partial picture regarding change in the approaches to research and scholarship in a field of the education and learning of adults over time can be painted.

One might perhaps think it quite safe to follow the language of policy as a framework for analysis of change in approaches to research at the most general level. For example, lifelong learning now appears an accepted and central concept in adult education policy over the last decades in many countries and a major focus of policy in the European Union (EU) and many of its member states. Emerging during the 1960s as 'lifelong education' it was linked to humanist values and ideas of personal growth. In the 1990s, now as 'lifelong learning', it became associated with a shift of policy emphasising competitiveness and economic growth. Lifelong learning became commonly argued within national and wider policies as a necessary feature for individual and collective well-being and a requirement if Europeans are to remain competitive in a global environment (cf. Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2012). However, policy promotion of lifelong learning at this level and its 'insertion' into discourses of adult education over time, never did indicate any direct translation as change in research approach in the field. Rather, over the period from the 1960s, discourses of lifelong learning have been bound up in quite complex ways with policies promoting lifelong education and learning and wider socio-political change and changes in the practices of

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institutions for adult education and teachers and learners in many locations. The targeting of specific groups and objectives for learning through new government funding streams and projects has had no doubt localized effects on research and wider changes in the funding mechanisms for institutions have in some ways perhaps supported a refocusing of research towards workplace learning and informal and non-formal learning. Perhaps partially as a consequence of such wider socio-political change there has been articulated in some quarters within the research community, significant, new and distinctive challenges arising from the internationalisation and intra-institutionalisation of policy and practices and the wider influence of what might be called globalizing processes. However, there is danger in placing too much emphasis on the role of the EU in directing, refocusing or defining research approaches to adult learning, or bringing forth the turn to emphasise learning which has been identified in various scholarly analyses of contemporary change in Western societies. The problem of any temporal narration of approaches to research which starts by considering policy or wider socio-political change is that the point of departure for analysis *is* policy or such wider analysis of change; tending to make them seem more important that they perhaps are.

With distinctively different traditions of and influences to the academic study of the education and learning of adults in the field over the years, generalizations in narrations of approaches to research or change across Europe are bound to be reductive and flawed. The direction of approaches to research and scholarly activity in Europe have emerged in distinctive ways in different geographical locations. Events and trajectories could perhaps best be traced and characterized for the field through a focus on local histories; pursing the question of the intellectual resources emerging and drawn on at different times and places. Questions for 'the field' are then perhaps those over the approaches to research and scholarship that emerge to dominate in differing locations; approaches marginalized in this, the local histories and contestations and struggles for recognition entailed, the limitations and productivities in relation to specific purposes, agendas and concerns and the affordances that emerge with new local developments. This also raises questions about the ability of any 'field' to inquire into its direction or engage critically in this.

In this issue we have wanted to create space for those in the field to highlight their own trajectories and agendas in research and scholarship and scholarly reflections and deliberation with regard to these sorts of questions. In this Editorial we will introduce five articles that draw on theory and traditions from distinct locations.

We are concerned then to attempt to step back from the research and intellectual resources that we perhaps commonly take for granted in the study of the education and learning of adults. We sketch the field, in a fragmentary way, in our own fashion; first, through a short, narration of its history of traditions and epistemology, and, second, in a turn to consider the current appearance of theory in research and scholarship in the field – reviewing and characterizing theoretical orientations drawn on today within four dominant international journals in an attempt to provide a 'thought piece' for discussion. We have no conclusions here, but feel that debate about the direction of the field and its capacity to ask questions is without doubt important. Without better understanding of this dynamic, discursive, political, powerful and historical fashioning of research and intellectual resources in the field, it is not for us clear how current or future directions might be informed or understood. Leaving this discussion to those who would direct research to an effective relationship between commerce and education does not seem to us to be necessarily fruitful. What appears necessary is the

construction of histories of discourse, whereby alternative understandings of what has been might be necessary for the future can be engaged. We can only begin here.

A wide and diverse range of perspectives - field, history and epistemology

Research in the education and learning of adults is then diverse, drawing inspiration from quite different traditions and conceptual domains across Europe. Where it has emerged as a named field, this separation has sometimes been attributed to a conceptual separation of the adult learner from the child that appeared from the 1960s in many European countries[1].

'Andragogy' as the science of the teaching and learning of adults was distinguished from pedagogy in the work of Alexander Kapp (1833) in Germany in 1833. In the 1920s this idea was taken up in the United States by Lindeman and Anderson (Lindeman, 1926) and became known in some quarters through the work of Malcolm Knowles in the 1970s and 80s. However, there are at least two different meanings of andragogy. In the US, through Knowles (1973, 1980), andragogy signified the practice of adult education resting on normative grounds; while in some parts of Europe it came to signify theoretical and empirical research on adult education. In the first decade of this century, the concept is reported as used in Bosnia, Croatia, Poland, Slovenia, and to some extent in Germany and the US (Bron, 2006; Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000).

During the later part of the 20th century, researchers into adult education and learning are often represented quite generally as having taken up concepts and approaches from psychology and the humanities. Where this is seen to have occurred, humanist ideals, with universal notions of human development, progression, democracy, equality and emancipation, are narrated as having shaped a distinct trajectory. More recently other disciplines and domains of research have emerged to contribute theoretical and methodological inspiration; cultural and gender studies, policy studies, and working life research as some examples (cf. Fejes & Salling Olesen, 2010). Research on the education and learning of adults is arguably interdisciplinary, and although perhaps closely related to research in the wider field of education it is perhaps distinctive in its agendas and concerns.

It is through such distinctive agendas and concerns and the historical traditions from which these emerge in different locations that emphasis on particular theoretical and methodological approaches to research have emerged quite distinctively, but perhaps with some common threads of narrative based on what has been observed. Emphasis in approach has been distinctive in relation to geographical location, means of emergence, subsequent trajectory and conceptualisation, but perhaps there has been a propensity for specific approaches to become mobile. The emancipatory work of Paulo Freire, emerging as it did in South America, appears to have had a huge impact on research and policy practice in that location and to become mobilized and taken up in many parts of Europe and elsewhere. A transformative learning theory developed by Jack Mezirow in the US is represented as having significantly shaped research on the education and learning of adults, especially in the US. Biographical research also, prominent now in adult education and learning research in parts of Europe, has spawned the largest research network in the European society for research on the education and learning of adults (ESREA) and numerous publications on the topic. Critical social theory is yet another rich and influential theoretical terrain from which researchers have drawn inspiration for transformative possibilities. During the last decades post-

structuralist theorizations have emerged within the English speaking literature with alternative forms of critical aim.

Research on the education and learning of adults was argued early on not to be a separate discipline, but rather a practical field of knowledge (cf. Hirst, 1974). This raised a question about the relation between theory as knowledge of the field and the status of adult education and learning. How best might it be conceived? If a discipline, adult education would define its own research objects and develop its own theories (cf. Bron, 2006). A debate on this was especially intense during the 1970s and the 1980s, the answers found partially depending on history and location. Empirically it appears that adult education was not confirmed as a university-based subject until professorships in adult education were installed across universities (Bron, 2006). The first professorship in adult education was created at the University of Nottingham, England in 1923 (Bron, 2006), later followed by the instalment of professors in several European countries. The instalment of professors in adult education could be seen as important in consolidating and acknowledging adult education as a separate area of study.

In the epistemological debate about adult education research there have been some who have argued for adult education as a separate discipline. Boyd and Apps (1980) from a North American position, suggested that researchers in adult education needed to stop borrowing theories and concepts from other disciplines and start developing their own. However, they appear to have been quite isolated with this view. Several scholars instead have argued for adult education as a field of study producing inter-disciplinary knowledge (Rubenson, 2000; Bright, 1989b) useful for practice (Usher, 1989).

Hirst's early (1974) discussion of forms and fields of knowledge was used as a starting point for discussion within literature debating adult education (see Bright, 1989a). Hirst distinguished between '[d]istinct disciplines or forms of knowledge' such as physical sciences, human sciences etc, and '[f]ields of knowledge: theoretical and practical'(Hirst, 1974, p. 46). Fields of knowledge were proposed as made up of composites of forms of knowledge, with the field both theoretical and practical. Geography could be seen as a theoretical field of knowledge (the study of man in relation to his/her surroundings), while education or engineering could be seen as practical fields. Elements of moral knowledge – how things should be done in practical affairs – might be included in some fields of knowledge, e.g. education. Drawing on Hirst's (1974) distinction, Bright (1989b, p. 34) argued that adult education research represents an 'epistemological vandalism' which ignores 'the nature of its own activity and content' in that adult education had traditionally seen itself as a theoretical field of knowledge. This Bright (1989b) argued was a mistake as adult education researchers are not true to the source disciplines. Adult education should, he argued, rather be seen as a practical field of knowledge based on and with reflexive engagement with source disciplines.

Usher (1989) was not a proponent of adult education either as separate discipline or field of theoretical knowledge. He proposed adult education as a branch of education, where both were to be considered as socio-practical fields rather than as based on the logic of source disciplines. There was a place for the disciplines, not as foundational but as pragmatic. 'Knowledge in the "socio-practical" is <u>practical</u> knowledge and therefore not the same as the knowledge accumulated and organized in disciplines' (Usher, 1989, p. 67). The starting point for adult education as a socio-practical field is then a '"necessary concern" with purposeful action' (p. 67). The implication being that there could be no restrictions to theory, as theory should help solve problems within a pragmatic view, and with the use of knowledge aimed at solving problems and always related to a context.

This debate concerning the epistemological status of adult education largely took place in the 70s and 80s. However, as Rubenson (2000) notes, there has since been a major shift in what has been going on since then. In the early 1980s, he argues, the question about borrowing from other disciplines and field of studies was a debated issue, as there were strong proponents for defining adult education as a separate theoretical field of knowledge. In the early 2000 this debate has almost disappeared. Instead, attempts are being made, he argues, to include the theoretical work of scholars from other fields into the field of adult education research. This at least can be seen in the aim and scope of RELA which states that 'RELA invites original, scholarly articles that discuss the education and learning of adults from different academic disciplines, perspectives and traditions', or in the activities taking place within the research networks of ESREA.

Based on the above arguments, it is possible to conclude that the epistemological debate is no longer as big an issue as previously was the case. At the same time, when focusing on adult education and learning research today we can see how it is diverse and draws inspiration from quite different disciplines (forms of knowledge) and fields of knowledge.

Approaches to research and scholarship

As contribution to a discussion of the state of the field we have looked at the articles published in four international adult education journals publishing in the English language; identifying the theoretical traditions or theorizations drawn on in 2011 for research and scholarship within these publications. Looking at what is published in these four journals does, we suggest, offer a starting point for discussion of the far wider and more complex profusion of research and scholarship going on and published or otherwise elsewhere; lying within the covers of research reports or scholarly texts. Looking at these articles might be said then to be illuminating in that they provide a flavor of what goes on in these specific sites. What these journal publications illuminate must though be taken with caution, as through the English language approaches perhaps achieve a peculiar prominence and propensity for mobilization, as if representational of what is going on, and in this achieve a higher profile than they might otherwise have.

The four journals selected for analysis of the approaches taken to research and scholarship have been *Adult Education Quarterly* (AEQ - USA), the *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* (RELA - Europe), *Studies in Continuing Education* (SCE - Australia) and *Studies in the Education of Adults* (SEA - UK). All articles published in the 2011 volume of these journals were analysed and characterized in terms of the theory/approaches mobilised and what these 'did' (a total of 67 articles were reviewed with the following distribution: AEQ: 19; RELA: 12; SCE: 21; SEA: 15). Qualitative studies dominate these 2011 publications, and there are three theoretical approaches used in a more substantial way than others (altogether half of the articles): critical pedagogy, post-structuralist theorisations and socio-cultural and situated perspectives on learning.

Critical pedagogy appears an important theoretical terrain for researchers engaged in adult education and learning research in these journals. The uptake of poststructuralist perspectives is strong. This latter seems to be in concordance with the argument by Fejes (2008) where 9% of the articles in these four journals over a seven year period referred to Foucault. The strength in the number of socio-cultural and

situated perspectives within these publications could maybe partly be explained by a trend towards such perspectives in education more generally.

One could probably argue that the above three theoretical traditions are also quite common in educational research more widely if we would analyse other journals from the same geographical locations and with the same language (although this is an empirical question). However, among the other articles published in the 2011 issue, there is also a representation of two theoretical traditions with a specific relation to the field of adult education research. Transformative learning theory grew out of the field in North America, while biographical research have become important to adult education researchers' in having developed this approach in the field as their own; drawing on strong traditions from sociology (since the 1930s and revived in the late 1960s in the work of Bertaux), history and literature. Both transformative learning and biographical research are represented in the 2011 volume of the journals, but not as extensively as one might expect, given that they are argued in many places to be commonly adopted in research (cf. Taylor & Cranton, 2013; West, Alheit, Siig Andersen & Merrill, 2007).

Analysis

In the analysis of the four journals, critical pedagogy is the most common theoretical terrain referred to (15 articles). Here authors draw on critical feminism, community learning, social movement learning and post-colonial perspectives. The problem with identifying approaches through numbers (not even statistical indicators, for the numbers are not sufficiently large), is they appear to say something about a research community even though they cannot be taken to imply this in any straight forward way. What inference is possible from this emphasis? Perhaps it is suffice to say that from this data critical pedagogy approaches continue to be strongly used, and supported by peer reviewers as 'within the true' of the work of the field; implicating continuing support in the addressing of specific social claims and issues of social injustice and inequity. This where critical pedagogy

> regards specific claims… as parts of systems of belief and action that have aggregate effects within power structures of society. It asks about these systems of belief and action, who *benefits*? The primary preoccupation of critical pedagogy is with social injustice and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations. (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 47)

Among the articles categorised there are a wide range of objectives; such as a focus on 'how well organizations are able to make use of this [ICT] technology to further their goals of promoting social movement learning and activism' (Irving & English, 2011, p. 262), or for Holst (2011, p. 117) one of the aims is to 'elaborate what I consider to be the major challenges which new forms of social movement organising pose for adult education research interested in advancing social justice'. Grayson (2011, p. 197) 'sheds light on the interrelationships between organising and educating, and the importance of re-historicising and politicising social movement theories' and Zielinska, Kowzan and Prusinowska (2011, p. 251) focus on describing a social movement that started at a university in Poland aiming at 'democratising the university and implementing various changes concerning space management and decision-making processes both within the academia and in terms of future education in general'. The dominance of varied approaches that take up such themes, implicates the continuing support for such aims and motivations by English language speaking authors and reviewers.

In this issue of RELA, one article is positioned in this critical pedagogy domain. Liam Kane from Scotland compares popular education in Europe and Latin America.

He argues that both have something to learn from each other in terms of the relationships between popular education and the state. On the one hand, popular education as it emerged in Latin America could fill a gap that the educational system did not cover, i.e. basic education, while in Europe education has most often been understood as equivalent to state education. Europe could, Kane argues, learn from the independent popular education initiatives from Latin America. In Europe the relationship to the state and state funding might limit the possibilities for social action. On the other hand, 'familiarity with the European experience of widespread state-run education may help alert Latin Americans to both the pitfalls and opportunities in trying to engage in popular education within state structures.' (Kane, 2013, p. 92).

Poststructuralist theorisations were the second most common approach in the journals analysed (12 articles). Although it is also possible to speak about these as critical theorisations, they differ from others in that they are anti-essentialist and non-dualist, avoiding any search for essence and causality. Among the articles identified, there were authors drawing on the work of Foucault and Ranciére and those working with actor-network theory. The focus was on how subjectivity is discursively shaped, for example, in how students within a basic adult education program in social and health care, 'are positioned and position themselves in relation to the discourses mobilised in the programme' (Winther Jensen, 2011, p. 107), or in a focus on how workers in elderly care are mobilised through a technology of activation and technique of invitation (Fejes & Nicoll, 2011). Yet others focus otherwise, directing post-structuralist critique towards autobiographical writing used in adult education (Michelson, 2011), or, through actor-network theory, to critique fixed ideas about relationships between learning and work (Mulcahy, 2011). What these analyses do, is to disrupt the taken-for-granted-ness of the present, disrupting our notions of progress, development and enlightenment, and allow different knowledge constellations, discourses and practices to emerge.

In this issue of RELA socio-material conceptualizations for research in adult education and learning - complexity and actor-network - are put forward by Tara Fenwick and Richard Edwards, also from Scotland. They distinguish these approaches from others through their performative ontology. They argue that these help in tracing relationships between the social and material in teaching and learning: 'Thus teaching is not simply about the relationships between humans but is about the networks of humans and things through which teaching and learning are translated and enacted as such. They do not exist and cannot be identified as separate from the networks through which they are themselves enacted.' (Fenwick & Edwards, 2013, p. 54). The authors explore notions of agency and empowerment in adult education, and argue that such theoretical work develops understanding of how specific such accounts become stabilized and what they do.

Three out of the nineteen articles in the 2011 issue of AEQ draw on transformative learning theory, while there are none with this approach in the other three journals. Developed in the North American context, this theory is directed towards interest in how individuals transform their worldview. There are argued (see Mezirow and Associates, 2000) three possible dimensions to such transformation: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioural (changes in lifestyle). Important in support of such transformation, is that people change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs. Transformative learning theory emerged in the USA through the writing of Jack Mezirow (see e.g. Mezirow and Associates, 2000) in the 70s, and it has had a huge impact in the northern American community of adult education researchers and an institutional emphasis in the annual international transformative learning conference.

The focus of those articles published in 2011 were on understanding 'older adults' (elders) transformative learning through bereavement in late life' (Moon, 2011, p. 22), to discuss how Mezirow's theory would be more useful if it was applied in a more cultural sensitive way (Ntseane, 2011) and deepen the understanding of transformative learning for researchers by analysing their own collaborative research (Swartz & Triscari, 2011). These articles in the main North American journal in the field offer examples of the approach, and indicate perhaps a strong presence in the field in that geographical location.

In this issue of RELA, Edward Taylor and Patricia Cranton from the USA critically discuss the development of transformative learning theory and argue that there is a need for more in-depth thought to avoid redundant and deterministic analyses. The problem, they argue, is that despite that the number of published articles using transformative learning theory has increased substantially over the last 15 years, it is repetitive, and with little theoretical progress. Further, they note a strong North American dominance of its use. They identify five issues in need of further debate to develop theory in this domain: the role of experience, empathy, the theory's inherently positive orientation, the desire to change, and the need for research involving positivist and critical approaches.

Biographical research appears important in the field of adult education research. Although including a wide range of different branches, generally speaking the focus of biographical research is on the individual learner and the 'importance of engaging with the everyday and small scale in building understanding of how the world works, based on social interactionism perspectives' (West et al., 2007, p. 46). If transformative learning has been popular in North America, biographical research has especially become so in Europe; there is a research network on life history and biographical research within ESREA that attracts many participants to its meetings. In the analysis of the 2011 issue of the four journals there are two articles using biographical perspectives for their analysis, both published in RELA. One way of interpreting the dominance of specific approaches might be in their subjective or discursive function within the field in particular discursive locations. Although these two approaches (transformative learning theory and biographical research) may appear distinctively different, and refer to the American and European contexts respectively, it may be that they adopt somewhat similar such functions.

However, the orientations are diverse. In one of these articles, Maier-Gutheil and Hof (2011, p. 75) 'compare individuals' [adult educators] narratives of their professional work at different times in their biographies' in order to understand 'the differences in professional learning through the life course and the influence of institutional and social context in the development of professionalism'. In the second article the focus is on analysing how identity is built in a cross-border area drawing on group interviews and biographical interviews (Gualda et al., 2011). Biographical learning thus provides a way to identify social as well as institutional contexts and interaction, which influence individuals' learning trajectories and identity processes.

In this issue of RELA, Rob Evans from Germany introduces the research interview as a site of learning and knowledge sharing. By employing a detailed discursive-linguistic analysis of a life-story, the author provides a picture of local construction of social action. As Evans argues

> a research interview, embedded in interaction and participant reflexivity, and addressing the learning transitions told in talk, can "tap into" the construction of new knowledge adults acquire (Alheit, 2007) as they break with routines of everyday experience and move on to new biographical spaces in which they can position themselves anew (Evans, 2013, p. 29).

Again with a focus on knowledge, but this time the knowledge of professional adult educators, the last thematic article in this issue is from Armando Loureiro, Artur Cristóvão and Telmo Caria from Portugal. These authors draw on the work of Bernstein to explore how specific adult educators make use of 'official' pedagogical knowledge. The study draws on Bernstein's model of official pedagogical discourse and ethnographic field methods, to focus on the work of a team of specialist educators in a local development association in the north of Portugal where pedagogical work is heavily prescribed by external agents. The study explores the reproduction and recontextualisation of knowledge – exploring the 'room for manoeuvre' (Loureiro, Cristóvão & Caria, 2013, p. 72). of these professionals in reworking the official knowledge of educational programmes, so as to better align with their understanding of the needs and expectations of students.

End note

In this editorial we indicated our thoughts on the need for histories of approaches to research in the field, and in our own partial and fragmentary fashion, began to explore ways in which the field has been conceived and something of past and current approaches. Our hope has been that through this and the contributions of the issue a space might be opened for further discussion and debate.

Note

[1] France, Holland and Yugoslavia are specifically mentioned by Davenport (1987), in Holmes and Abington-Cooper (2000).

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Learning and knowing

Narratives, memory and biographical knowledge in interview interaction[1]

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Abstract

The qualitative research interview engages with experience of social reality in sites of social interaction. Research interview respondents provide insight in biographical interviews into the significance of critical change processes for their individual and collective learning. Auto/biographical narratives of learning, are emergent, evolving accounts produced in a learning space hedged in by the demands of the "reflexive project of the self" which throw the individual more than ever before in processes of lifelong or life-wide learning onto their biographical resources. These resources can be understood as representing individual learning processes which are capable of furthering the creation of new cultural and social structures of experience, new forms of biographical knowledge which emerge out of the precarious balancing-act between routines and learning transitions. Research interviews embedded in interaction and participant reflexivity, addressing the learning transitions told in talk, access the construction of knowledge as adults move on to new biographical spaces and position themselves anew.

Keywords: biographicity; knowledge; learning transitions; grammar of meaning

Introduction

The qualitative research interview engages with individual and group experience of social reality and observes, questions and records the testimony of the actors themselves in sites of social interaction chosen for the collection of data and its subsequent analysis. The relationship between social actors who are involved in processes of change and transformation in very different social, professional, personal contexts and the researcher has been central to the discussion of research methods and research aims throughout the various methodological *turns* of the last decades (see Merrill & West, 2009). That relationship can be both reflexive and participatory, and can spur change itself as well as demanding that we think about the nature of transformation in learning.

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This is particularly true, as many of us have experienced, of interview-based research, particularly when the interview serves as a catalyst for narratives of change.

Research interview respondents participating in diverse life worlds provide insight in unstructured discursive interviews into the significance of critical change processes for their individual and collective learning. In so doing they can be heard building their own discourses of learning, shaped in the interdiscursive layering of interaction with (a) their own told narrative, (b) with the researcher agenda and (c) in the all-important dialogue with those significant Others whose voices and narratives give expression to the complexity and transacted meanings of individual and group learning contexts.

Incidents of recollection and knowledge sharing drawn from a research site involving an adult teaching professional will be examined here. With the help of a detailed example of linguistic analysis of interview data in the form of a micro-narrative related by the Egyptian university teacher Sherifa, the paper will discuss an instance of shared learning and knowledge constitution which takes place at the very limits of talk heard in the research interview. In this way, the theoretical and methodological potential of the interview as a space in which learning and knowledge-sharing can be questioned, chronicled and theorised, will be aired.

Life-wide biographical resources as subjective knowledge

Auto/biographical narratives of learning, unfolding in the interaction examined in qualitative interviews, are emergent, evolving accounts of motives, motivations, of choices, renunciations, blockages and liberation, even. They are stories of the self, and they chart the difficult process of the reflexive construction of a (potentially) more secure, cohesive self. In these auto/biographical stories which we "collect", the context of the research interview is a learning space – West prefers to call it a 'transitional space' (Merrill & West, 2009, pp. 121-122) – in which the many stories of experience can be tried out, and new attempts at coherence and security can be made. Yet, this learning space is simultaneously hedged in by the demands of the "reflexive project of the self", which dictate a constant attention to the wholeness and social "suitability" of the professional/personal/emotional biography. The peremptory nature of the demands on the individual to be able to recount a rich (interesting) *and* a *suitable* life story can be experienced as oppressive, resulting in a sense of inadequacy, in silence, or in a *blocked*, undeveloping biography. Indeed, Formenti has likened the demand to produce a story to the experience of giving birth (Formenti, 2006).

It has been convincingly argued (Alheit & Dausien, 2002) that the growing relevance of concepts of lifelong or life-wide learning and the redefinition of institutional and informal learning, throw the individual more than ever before onto their accumulated, layered and multifarious biographical resources. These resources can be understood as representing, put simply, the individual distillation of learning processes, the individual "twist" given to experience which brings forth subjective forms of knowledge, social, tacit, common-sense. These in their turn are capable of furthering the creation of new cultural and social structures of experience. This social practice of accessing (and constructing) life-wide biographical resources in order to meet the everyday requirements of a more individually steered life-course Alheit and Dausien call 'biographicity' (Alheit & Dausien, 2002, p. 574).

The role of learning and knowledge acquisition for the so-called knowledge society has been transformed. The changing status of traditional institutions of learning (see Field, Merrill & West, 2012), the trend to "individualisation", the transformation of the

meaning of work and the re-definition in the post-industrial age of the role of knowledge, are some of the most important signs of the transformation which Western society is currently in the grips of (Alheit & Dausien, 2002; Field, 2001; Jarvis, 2000).

In this new situation, the layers of experience of accreted and consciously accessed biographical resources can – indeed, where institutions, communities or polities shift or fail, they *must* be looked upon – as a new form of knowledge. This biographical knowledge emerges out of the precarious balancing act between the life-being-lived, on the one hand, and unlived or potentially-liveable life, on the other. For, following Alheit, the everyday-common sense impression shared by all is that we have our lives in our own hands, that we are the subjects – steering the plan – of our biographies (Alheit, 2006). This impression of control, of direction, is furnished us by the biographical knowledge we have stored up. This stock of experience is potentially accessible to us, yet no-one can make use of all the possibilities it contains. It represents more alternatives for filling out the social field we live our lives in than we can realistically grasp or take control of. Our biography, Alheit argues, 'contains therefore a significant potential of "unlived life"' (Alheit, 2006, p. 5). This is the "overspill" of potential lives we accumulate that feeds our knowledge of ourselves, our life stories and their meaning in relation to others.

Biographical narrative and shared grammars of meaning

Central to this understanding of biographical knowledge construction is the *relational* nature of biographical narratives and biographical *work*. Learning and knowledge acquisition, predicated as they are on biographical experience, are embedded in social learning environments. Such learning environments, *learning landscapes* or *ecologies of knowledge*, are characterised by shared, situation-specific meaning-making (Evans, 2009b; Evans & Kurantowicz, 2009; Miller, 1994). In these interactive environments, biographies, their narrative forms, and their subjects are often conspicuously constructed in relation to *others* (Mason, 2004). Memory, too, as Halbwachs (1997) has argued arises in the relationship to others, becoming collective memory, shared memory, in the physical and emotional company of others. Experience mediated by memory is voiced and constructed in narratives held together, too, by language which draws on *grammars* of telling. These *grammars* can be thought of as shared language-worlds for telling life-stories and co–constructing biographical knowledge. The narrative, as a vehicle of 'shared knowledge' (Tomasello, 2011, p. 235), created and employed for the purpose of speaking of events and things and people over and through time(s), and capable of producing 'filigree time accounting'[2] (Tomasello, 2011, p. 304), performs this task with the aid of shared conventions of understanding and what Tomasello calls a truly 'extravagant syntax' (Tomasello, 2011, p. 302). Shared understanding of narrative practice (how to begin, how to finish, how to express judgement, emotion, reluctance, and so on) is used to build the theories and standpoints that emerge in narratives as pieces of such ongoing effective biographic knowledge (Capps & Ochs, 1995). The life (lived, unlived, to be lived, re-called) told in the interview is essentially embodied experiential memory and as such 'individual, un-reproducible – it dies with each person' (Susan Sontag 2003, as cited in Assmann, 2008, p. 49; see also Steiner, 1998)[3]. While they cannot be *embodied* by another, Assmann adds, they can be shared, for as soon as 'they are verbalized in the form of a narrative or represented by a visual image … they can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed, and even appropriated' (Assmann, 2008, p. 50).

Interaction and the construction of the social

Negotiating identities in interaction with others is the most basic communicative practice in our routine and non-routine existence, it is an 'ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life' the accomplishment of which is 'ordinary, artful' and known and used by members of society (Garfinkel, 1967, p. vii). A prerequisite to successful interaction, clearly, is having access to learning spaces within which biographical resources can be acquired and deployed, and which, in turn, determine how experience and common sense are interpreted. Experience of oneself, as Luckmann has noted, is constructed in the intersubjective experience of others' experience (Luckmann, 1981).

The overarching model of social experience I am advancing, then, means that orderly social interaction is accomplished in artful, common-sense fashion, involving accounts which combine particulars of the social and cultural practices of individuals as well as their conversational or more diffusely interactional practices (Silverman, 1997). The orderly accomplishment of everyday practices takes place in settings managed and *done* with an acknowledgement of conscious shaping and choice, with a recognition of the *becoming*, i.e. the contingency of settings as they unfold, and with a recognition of social context and culture as parts of those settings.

Interactions of all kinds, then, family or work situations, social relations, social or cultural practice(s) must all be seen as sites in which *doing biography* is practiced, that is, working on the construction of, and deployment and use of, biographical resources. The discourse practices involved in the biographical co-work done in the auto/biographical research interview context range across past, present and future in the talk and connect up with the broader, larger materiality of social life, but their production – in the interview – is local. Engaging with the localness of biographic narratives is, however, as Schiffrin rightly remarks, fraught with difficulties. 'Many aspects of discourse', she writes, 'are locally negotiated and co-constructed: identifying them and understanding why they appear, and how they do so, requires close attention to minute details of emergent properties and sequential contingencies of multi-functional units in discourse that are notoriously difficult to identify...' (Schiffrin, 2006, p. 10).

The detail at the micro level serves to document openly how this meaning making takes place, how this is affected by group belonging, ethnic or cultural discourses, gender, age, professional and educational positioning, and so on. The detail gained through close analysis is generalizable over the length of a complete biographical narrative, and potentially to other narratives and the talk of that same person(s). The analysis, documented and directly linked to the interview transcript artefact, is falsifiable, as is the interview transcript and the theoretical and practical criteria drawn upon in its making (Ochs, 1979; Wengraf, 2001).

Detailed linguistic-discursive analysis of the life-story allows the focus to be directed to the culturally-known parameters of meaning-making in spoken interaction. The strong argument, for example, of the *objective* approach in life-history and biography research (e.g. Bertaux, 2005; Bourdieu, 1993; Wengraf, 2001) that the *told life* attains generalizability only through comparison and contrast with the *lived life*, validated through recourse to historical-social *fact*, runs the risk of reducing the string of narrative parts of a biographical-narrative interview to an informational mask against which the content of a life course is compared. Similarly, while another influential branch of biography research, the documentary method (Nohl, 2005) embraces the notion of interaction as 'shared knowledge' (or 'conjunctive experience') (Nohl, 2005,

paragraphs 4, 5), it leaves the told biography behind, I would argue, in its concern to 'identify the essential framework of orientation' of the life history and search for means of interpretation beyond the action of the interview interaction (Nohl, 2005, paragraphs 4, 5)[4].

Memory and discursive identity

In fact, ambiguity and incompleteness characterise the autobiographical narrative. Linde points out how other peoples' stories (related in reported speech, embedded and *layered* in the telling) become the speaker's *own* stories through a process of appropriation or conversion (Linde, 1993). The discontinuous and unfinished state of the biographical narrative is embodied therefore in the discourse employed by the autobiographical narrator. Here Goffman's concept of *embedding* can be used to describe this aspect of the speaker's self. The words we speak, he points out, 'are often not our own, at least our current "own"' for 'although who speaks is situationally circumscribed, in whose name words are spoken is certainly not' (Goffman, 1981, p. 3). Thus embedding makes it possible to *enact* numerous voices over space and time within the interactive frame of the oral narrative and narrative interview (Goffman, 1981). This is a central feature of interactive talk in the research interview. Indeed, for the development of the speaker's *own* discourses within an emergent learning biography, the *converted* and *enacted* words of others or a non-current *self* – what I have called elsewhere *embedded speech* (Evans, 2004) – are an important device for the contextualization of talk and serve as a powerful means of validating knowledge claims.

The tension between memory and recollection (i.e. the act of re-*calling* experiences, visions, images, sounds, etc., from among the accumulated *lived* stock of a person's life) is developed in the embodied interaction of narrative practices. We have, as Ricoeur points out, only memory to help us make sense of our past: 'Pour le dire brutalement, nous n'avons pas mieux que la mémoire pour signifier que quelque chose a eu lieu, est arrivé, s'est passé avant que nous déclarions nous en souvenir'[5] (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 26). Before a memory can be understood as acquired, established, the act of recall must be brought to bear, and the *lived thing* must be salvaged, selected, and re-proposed in the new context of a coherent biographical account. Looking back, viewing where s/he has come from, pondering on where this is all leading, the biographical subject recreates past, present and future with the palette of the immediate now, whereby the *now* contains both temporal as well as spatial elements and current/non-current other perspectives.

The language in which pieces of our life-stories and events which we have experienced directly (or vicariously through the narratives of others) are welded together is 'multivocal' (Schiffrin, 2006, p. 204) and multilayered. Alheit compares the spatial complexity of narratable biographical resources with a 'landscape made up of different strata and regions of different levels of nearness and distance' (Alheit & Dausien, 2002, p. 578)[6]. The temporal organization of discourse, too, involves multiple time-planes, and non-linear trajectories through lives. True, embodied experiential memory, as we saw above is 'individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person' (Susan Sontag 2003, as cited in Assmann, 2008, p. 49), and the ineluctable progress of lives through time from the past to the future dominates our narratives, and forces form onto them. But narratives possess another singular characteristic: recollection, Ricoeur affirms, by its very selective, determined nature, inverses the so-called order of time. 'En lisant la fin dans la commencement et le commencement dans la fin, nous

apprenons aussi à lire le temps à rebours, comme la récapitulation des conditions initiales d'un cours d'action dans ses conséquences terminales' (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 131). The *end*, in which knowledge claims and understanding are proposed, re-shapes retrospectively the *beginning*. Mishler similarly points out that if we wish to understand how individuals learn, change, and develop, then we 'must have an alternative to the linear temporal-order causal model, one that allows for their acting in the present toward a desirable or away from an undesirable future state of affairs' (Mishler, 2006, p. 36). And, he continues: 'it must also allow for their ways of reinterpreting the meaning of past events in terms of later consequences, through which they redefine who they are and revise the plots of their life stories' (Mishler, 2006, p. 36). In the following, the workings of multivocality and recollection in a biographical narrative will suggest how shared knowledge is shaped out of the ambiguities of past experience.

Sharing knowledge at the limit of talk

We shall look closely at an extract from a biographical narrative collected in Egypt with an Egyptian university teacher who had an Anglophone education. The content of her story is quickly told: Sherifa, 40-year-old, describes her development from, in her words, naive and inexperienced to more experience through contact with serious illness, as a witness of the suffering of two close women friends.

The following markup is used in the interview transcript extracts produced here:

Table 1. Interview markup

xx:: =	Word-lengthening
(.)	Pauses (audible breaks in flow of speech)
(1.0)	Pause timed in seconds (to nearest second)
hh	Out-breaths/laughter
.hh	In-breaths
°xxx°°	Quiet speech
+xxx++	Rapid speech
xxx:::	Drawn-out utterance, drawl

Source: Author

Sherifa speaks

> when I now look back:: I I see that I was SO stu::pid (2) specially the first two years when I I knew NOTHING/ you know/ like (.) being SO naïve and judgeMENTal and (.) I I had for example no grey colouring between I just BLACK and WHITE/ and this is the effect or the influence of the nuns that I was uhh brought up .hh ahh:: amONG and:: uhm no I'm different (1) I'm more understanding now (2) the more you know the more (.) the better you become (4.0) well this is not like a clichéd thing but it is a fact the more I/ know the °more Sherifa develops°° the more experiences I go through/ like the first time when my my friend wa- died from cancer I mean had to go through that experience with all the pAIN/ And all the MEDicine and (.) the FEELINGS/ that she was going through and she was telling me about and I sometimes used in the writings the pieces that I wrote (.) ahhm the FEELINGS I had at that time not the same (xxx) like the ones I'm having now (1.0) a close friend of mine is suffering from cancer (2.0) °she's dying I think of (.) of it°° (2.0) so that's DIFFERENT/ (.) I'm now able to help her more and to support her more and now I understand the feelings they go through and I can (.) HELP her with these things (.) and I think that (.) strengthened me because I was so fragILE? at the beginning I was always scared of the smallest things I would PANic at the smallest event (.) now I'm differENT/ and the and the more I read about cancer and how people go through? and

stuff like that I'm helping her this is one aspect of it (.) so BASED on that I think I'm (.) you know this applies to all (.) the other things (2.0) the more you know the more:: developed you become characterwise of course (1.0) I'm not necessarily (xxx) or better sometimes

The narrative has been divided into preamble, episode 1, episode 2, and coda. Each segment is analysed according to language structure (for more detail on this analytical approach see Capps & Ochs, 1995; Evans, 2009a) and an intertextual interpretation is provided.

Preamble

1. When I now look back::

2. I I see that I was SO stu::pid (2)

3. specially the first two years when I I knew NOTHING!

4. you know like (.) being SO naïve and judgeMENTal and (.)

5. I I had no grey colouring between

6. I just (.) BLACK and WHITE/

7. and this is the effect or the influence of the nuns that I was uhh brought up .hh ahh:: amONG

8. and:: uhm no I'm different (1)

9. I'm more understanding now (2)

Adverbs of routine time with present tense epistemic verbs of looking back and seeing (understanding) are expressed with the aid of agentic first person. The epistemic verbs suggest confidence and knowledge. While L.4 repeats the intensified structure of L.2, the avoidance of first person, using "being", generalizes beyond Sherifa herself. Her prosody is interesting: through the parallelism of 2 adjectives in LL.4 and 6, balance is achieved. Careful semantic choices here (the play between "effect" or "influence") can be seen as an example of intellectual hedging, tailored perhaps for the researcher. Sherifa also avoids completing the idea in a non-agentic fashion: "brought up" suggests perhaps, "by", which would heighten the sense of disempowerment, and would intensify the conclusion that her lack of balance and judgement was the result of the nuns' teaching. By hesitating and prolonging the search for a "correct" term, the resulting "among" arouses some surprise; the overall image of the learning environment is however refocused and given, if possible, an even more all-encroaching habitus.

In L.8 the drawn-out pronunciation and the hesitation serve to mark the separation from the previous statement, preparing the delivery of contrasting information and signal, too, a precautionary hedge before Sherifa makes an evaluation of her character; the pause frames the statement and may be to allow the listener to take in her evaluation as well as to prepare for the following detail in L.9. Sherifa makes it clear that there has been a change and she defines that change. The verb changes, too, are interesting: Sherifa moves across a stretch of talk, and succeeds in modulating her account from past (*I was*) to the immediate and affirmed present (*I'm now*), via a generalizing state

(*being*). As already remarked, Sherifa's generalization can be heard as seeking to lend her evaluation of herself greater "macro" level justification, which she backs up skilfully and surprisingly by the locution "brought up among" the nuns at the convent school she attended in Cairo.

The following segment introduces an interesting play with a figure of speech which will be employed several times. In fact, Sherifa here introduces the ordering and the composition of this micro-narrative. With the help of the fixed expression (*the more - the more*) she is able to construct a discrete narrative comprising evaluation, development, (complicating) detail, critical events, dénouement and a generalising coda (Labov, 1999). Let us recall Tannen's remark: for her repetition represents 'ways that meaning is created by the recurrence and re-contextualization of words and phrases in discourse' (Tannen, 2007, p. 9). The intertextuality practiced by Sherifa on her own words through the repetition of pieces of language has the effect, following Tannen, of creating 'layers of meaning' (Tannen, 2007, p. 13). The repetition of sounds, the reiterations, and the phonetic and rhythmic similarities of her talk are pervasive phenomena in all forms of interaction, and attending to 'the sound level of discourse', Tannen writes, 'gets us closer to the way people use and perceive language in conversation' (Tannen, 2007, p. 16).

10. the more you know the more (.) the better you become (4.0)

11. well this is not like a clichéd thing but it is a fact

Evidently under a certain feeling of pressure to explain or justify her remarks, Sherifa adopts a cautious hedging approach and fends off the judgement that what she has just said is in fact a cliché of the worst sort. She rebuts categorically:

12. the more I/ know the °more Sherifa develops°°

13. the more experiences I go through/

This reprise of the figure of speech referred to already is a curious example of redundancy. For, after having used in L.10 the universalizing and impersonal form (*you*), Sherifa effectuates a complete turn-around by taking up the figure of speech, but this time in the first person. As if that were not enough, she personalizes the utterance still more: the "I" becomes "Sherifa". The phrase is whispered (see the symbols ° and °° at the start and finish of her words to denote the quiet articulation of the words). So light, almost inaudible is her voice at this point. This way of personalizing her words may represent here a mark of confidence towards the researcher. We may see or rather hear it as alignment to the "Other" as a way of disarming the potential criticism coming from the researcher that Sherifa may have sensed or anticipated when she felt obliged to deny the clichés in L.11 above. Here Sherifa sets out evidently to continue and complete her rhetorical aside. The figure of speech remains only half-finished, however, to be taken up again and completed after the following two inserted micro-narratives.

Episode 1: The first time

14. like the first time when my my friend wa- died from cancer

Connecting up with the experiences she has had, Sherifa introduces here a *first time* experience of cancer, signalling that this is the initial of a series of comparable experiences. Such signals are an important signpost for a coming structuring of events and are crucial for the contextualisation of the interaction, and uphold the sequential coherence of the narrative flow (see Schiffrin, 1993). Harvey Sachs, too, highlights this phenomenon, drawing our attention to the *work* prefacing does in preparing the co-speaker for the outcome yet to be unrolled. First stories implicate the telling of second stories and 'second stories are different than first stories' (Sacks, 1992, pp. II 19-21). Here Sherifa is demonstrating the force of the restructuring of time within the narrative she is in the process of constructing. Ricoeur has called this type of narrative temporality 'configurational' (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 130) time: the end of the narrative is read in the beginning and the beginning in the end, i.e. we learn to read time backward, recapitulating the beginnings of action in the ultimate consequences, which are here Sherifa's learning experience and her state of greater maturity in the present (Mishler, 2006). Sherifa seems to hesitate as to how she will name or describe her friend. Sherifa opted for "died", thereby revealing the end of the micro-narrative she is in the process of telling.

15. and they had to go through that experience

16. with all the pAIN/ and all the MED/icine and (.) the FEELINGS/

17. that she was going through

18. and she was telling me about

The switch to an unspecified "they" in L.15 seems to generalise and widen the tragedy, extending the scope of the event to others also involved. The modal verb of necessity (*they had to*) hammers home the inescapability of the situation. It is a process that had to be gone through. The illness, interestingly, is not named. This is not simply a question of economy of language. The euphemism of the event – it becomes "that experience" – is unnamed, but there for all to see or feel. L.16 demonstrates the power of repetition. The repetition of the same structure (*all the*) together with the regularly rising intonation on three significant nouns aids the scansion of the utterance. There is a rhythm of events here: we can perhaps hear this as a series of blows. Those involved, we may feel, are struck by the waves of troubles – pain, medicines, feelings. In L.17 Sherifa then shifts the view directly to her suffering friend. No longer is it those involved who are suffering, but the sick friend in 3rd person. The same verb is employed as in L.15 (*going through*) and the shift of verb tense to the continuous form *prolongs* the suffering as well as foregrounding it more. In L.18, the immediacy of the continuous tense from L.17 is continued here, and Sherifa places herself in the picture she is creating. Sherifa is validating her right to possible knowledge of the illness via the communications of her dying friend. The interactive frame Sherifa is thus actively constructing here is based on her direct experience of cancer, fatal illness and the feelings of the dying.

19. I sometimes used in the writings the pieces that I wrote (.)

20. ahhm the FEELINGS I had at that time

21. not the same (xxx) like the ones I'm having now (1.0)

In L.19 Sherifa relates that she (her agency is foregrounded) has used the experiences shared with her dying friend in pieces of writing she has done. The process of writing is placed in a past relative to the narrative present, is presented as discontinued (*used, wrote*). Her writing is further qualified as occasional and what she wrote down is subject to a semantic uncertainty. Were they "writings" or "pieces"? What does Sherifa intend to convey? What seems plausible is that though downplaying the significance of her writing practices as a hedge against possible questioning or criticism, she nevertheless includes this detail in order to develop the interactive frame she is involved in constructing: she wishes to underline her knowledge claims, warranting them through the example of writing as a product of experiential learning, and as a cultural marker of the catharsis she has gone through. In LL.20-21, Sherifa moves from "that time" to the immediate present along the axis of her changed feelings.

Episode 2: A close friend

22. a close friend of mine is suffering from cancer (2.0)

23. °she's dying I think of (.) of it°° (2.0)

Here in LL.22-23 we hear the paired verbs *suffering/dying*, both of them in the present continuous, accompanied by a drop of voice pitch and volume in L.23 with the hedging "I think". Again we hear how Sherifa's voice almost disappears (again the symbols ° and °°). This is a passage that steps out of the dominant frame of this narrative. It is an example of *out of frame* discourse (Schiffrin, 1993). Sherifa passes for a moment outside the narrative and changes voice, and in doing this, she transfers the attention of the interactants away from her narrative towards themselves in order to cement the coherence of this moment of shared knowledge and awareness (Tannen, 2007).

24. so that's DIFFERENT! (.)

25. I'm now able to help her more

26. and to support her more

27. and now I understand the feelings they go through

28. and I can (.) HELP her with these things (.)

29. and I think that (.) strengthened me

The very strong repetition of the 1st person in this evaluation is evident. Sherifa stresses her agency and orchestrates it with the aid of differentiated modal verbs: "I'm able" (L.25), implicit in (L.26), "I can" (L.28). We hear also the rhythmic repetition of *help – support – HELP*. Other language is re-introduced from above and re-deployed discursively: *DIFFERENT* (from L.8 above); the experience verb "go through", now in conjunction with feelings (LL.16 and 17 above), but also connecting with "go through experiences" (L.13 and L.15 above). The epistemic verbs "understand" (L.27) and "think" (L.29) further assert her knowledge and identity claim as a knowing, more mature person.

30. because I was so fragILE? at the beginning

31. I was always scared of the smallest things

32. I would PANic at the smallest event (.)

We have the striking directness of a semantic trio: “fragile”, “scared”, “PANic”, underscored twice by raised pitch. There is emphasis, too, of her previous state of *weakness* through prosodic repetition of the adjective “smallest”. This is a clear example of that use of prosodic speech referred to by Günthner as ‘hyperbolic use of adverbs and quantifiers’ (Günthner, 1997, p. 187) as a ‘rhetoric device to communicate emotional stances.’ (Günthner, 1997, p. 187), sharing knowledge acquired and making knowledge claims in situ.

33. now I’m differENT?

34. and the and the more I read about cancer and how people go through?

35. and stuff like that

36. I’m helping her this is one aspect of it (.)

The repetition of “different” (see L.8) in conjunction with the adverb of time “now” and present and present continuous verbs return us to the broader contemporary frame of her 1st person narrative. In L.34 Sherifa picks up the “the more – the more” figure of speech last heard at L.13 jointly with the experience verb phrase used already five times above (*go through*). The hesitation element here is pervasive, however. Sherifa’s mitigation of her narrative through a false start (L.34), a hedging generic (L.35) and a mitigating expression (*this is one aspect of it*) suggest uncertainty about the effect of her example.

Coda

37. so BASED on that I think I’m (.)

38. you know this applies to all (.) the other things (2.0)

39. the more you know the more:: developed you become

The logical consequential “so” and the strong epistemic verb “think” and 1st person agency in L.37 gives way to a generalising 2nd person “you” in LL.38 and 39. We have a final reprise of the figure of speech begun in L.10 with evolution from “better” (L.10) via “develops” (L.12) to “developed” here.

Regarding the coda, Labov says that this final segment of the narrative is *one* of the options the narrator has for signalling the end of the story. In addition, the coda ‘may also contain general observations or show the effects of the events on the narrator’ (Labov, 1999, p. 229). Sherifa succeeds in her coda in creating a bridge between the memories and emotions of her account and the present. By framing her words with the determining “so BASED on that”, she brings the researcher and herself back to the start of this narrative. She signals the overall gain that has been made by the telling. She signals, too, that recollection of diverse own lived experiences, bedded with each other and with others’ lives, creates a space for tentative knowledge, for cautious understanding. Something has been developed in talk, in a dialogue with, on one level,

the researcher, but perhaps more importantly, in a dialogue with herself in the narrative of her experience. Something of the experience has been developed and passed on.

Verbalization of knowledge in the everyday

The life stories in which self and identity are produced in a *story-world* are ‘a pervasive form of text through which we construct, interpret, and share experience’ (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 167). Schiffrin argues that what she terms ‘verbalization’ (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 168), represents: ‘the way we symbolize, transform, and displace a stretch of experience from our past ... into linguistically represented episodes, events, processes, and states’ (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 168). This process of verbalization of stretches of experience into a linguistic representation recognisable as an oral history or oral autobiography, is a process of creation of coherence in an individual’s life story, according to Charlotte Linde (Linde, 1993). ‘In order to exist in the social world’ (Linde, 1993, p. 219) she maintains, ‘an individual needs to have a coherent, acceptable, and constantly revised life story’ (Linde, 1993, p. 219).

Life stories are essentially occupied with the necessity to synchronise two disparate levels of experienced time: firstly, the dimension of events and experiences which usually have a routine, daily, everyday frame, and secondly, those which operate on the life-time scale/horizon, which ‘links long past events with past experiences, past with present experience and ultimately present with conceivable future events’[7] (Alheit, 1983, p. 189). The cyclical, routine, repeated character of the everyday offers security and provides sets of “frames” for communication and interpretation (Tannen, 1993). Stepping out of the everyday frame to *tell* a story of the past, to recall something, to reminisce, is a trigger to retrospective (self-) analysis, no matter how casual it may be. It may be seen as a need to re-establish *order* or *balance* each time the secure frame of the everyday is departed from, for however brief a moment.

Self-knowledge, others’ knowledge, biographical knowledge

Biographical narratives, then, are to a large extent reliant both on the cluttering details of the everyday and the ambiguous and re-cyclable words and frames of layered accounts offered in interaction by others. An important aspect of this joint biography work is that the discourses involved are not merely ambiguous and in need of validation but that the interaction is played out in a potentially threatening environment where the biographical self, - however difficult it is to formulate sufficiently clearly the theoretical demarcations here between the discourses of self and the construction of emergent identity - is in a state of becoming/changing.

The analysis in extenso of a piece of talk embedded within a biographical interview around Sherifa’s learning processes in general, in the family, in her profession, etc., demonstrated the workings of the following: we hear moves across *time* axes, involving plausibly historical and created, interdiscursive time frames. These are knowable and controllable via control of real life data, and unknowable unaccounted-for connections which are the product of this telling and are tailored for the understanding of the co-respondent – or for what the teller takes to be understanding. The “success” of the knowledge-sharing taking place can be measured by the sequential flow and direction of the further talk.

Here, with detailed linguistic-discursive analysis of the life-story, the focus is directed to the culturally-known parameters of meaning-making in spoken interaction. The detailed linguistic analysis of parts of a biographical narrative provides evidence of the local construction of social action. Further, the comparison of specific language phenomena across the whole told life (i.e. the whole current narrative) with phenomena observed in other narratives (same or other narrators), i.e. a corpus–based approach (Bauer & Aarts, 2000; Evans, 2004), is able to provide a certain degree of insight into lives and the communicated, *languaged*, form their telling takes.

As each narrated life is filled or inundated with the dialogue(s) of and with others, of the near and distant contexts in which they are embedded - discursively, temporally, near/far - knowing remains a contingent experience. This knowledge is more suspected, grasped at by intuition and feeling, sifted and guessed at in language, than sorted by certainty. Ex post facto recollection of biographical experience – the inclusion of the absent past in the communicated present – provides, Schiffrin points out, 'gradual understanding of what happened' (Schiffrin, 2006, p. 205) and leads to reconstruction of the meanings of past experiences. A research interview, embedded in interaction and participant reflexivity, and addressing the learning transitions told in talk, can "tap into" the construction of new knowledge adults acquire (Alheit, 2007) as they break with routines of everyday experience and move on to new biographical spaces in which they can position themselves anew. A limited vision of knowledge construction, perhaps, but one of the small things, nevertheless, of great importance in narrated lives.

Notes

[1] A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the ESREA Life History and Biographical Research Network Conference *Wisdom and knowledge in researching and learning lives: diversity, difference and commonalities*, Milano, Italy, March 12-15, 2009.

[2] ["filigrane zeitliche Buchhaltung"]

[3] George Steiner has expressed this in a similar fashion: 'No two human beings share an identical associative context. Because such a context is made up of the totality of an individual existence, because it comprehends not only the sum of personal memory and experience but also the reservoir of the particular subconscious, it will differ from person to person' (Steiner, 1998, p. 178).

[4] Nohl puts it thus: 'Denn es ist nicht die Aufgabe des Forschenden, einen Fall besonders gut zu kennen, sondern seine wesentlichen Orientierungsrahmen zu identifizieren, die sich zugleich vom Fall abheben und auch in anderen Fällen finden lassen. Typen lassen sich herausbilden, wenn man herausarbeitet, mit welchen spezifischen Erfahrungshintergründen bestimmte Orientierungsrahmen systematisch – und das heißt nicht nur im einem Einzelfall – zusammenhängen' (Nohl, 2005, paragraph 4) [For it is not the job of the researcher to be familiar with one particular case. Rather it is to identify the essential frames of reference which are independent of the one case and which can be found in other cases. Types can be built up by working out which experiences certain frames of reference are connected to in a systematic fashion – and that means not only in one individual case. – My translation]

[5] ['To put it brutally, we have nothing other than memory to signify that something took place, occurred, happened *before* we declare that we can remember it' (My translation)]

[6] ['Landschaft aus verschiedenen Schichten und Regionen abgestufter Nähe und Ferne' (Alheit & Dausien, 2002, p. 578)]

[7] ['…der vorvergangene mit vergangenen Ereignissen, vergangene mit gegenwärtigen und schließlich gegenwärtige mit zukünftig denkbaren verbindet' (Alheit, 1983, p. 189)]

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A theory in progress?

Issues in transformative learning theory

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Abstract

The scholarship about transformative learning theory has continued to grow exponentially, although much of the research is redundant with a deterministic emphasis while overlooking the need for more in-depth theoretical analysis. Explanations for this oversight are numerous, including a failure to ground research in primary sources, an over-reliance on literature reviews of transformative learning, lack of critique of original research; marginal engagement in positivist and critical research paradigms, and a lack of involvement in transformative learning by European adult education scholars. In order to stimulate theoretical development, this paper discusses five specific issues that will hopefully provoke further discussion and research. They include the role of experience, empathy, the desire to change, the theory's inherently positive orientation, and the need for research involving positivist and critical approaches.

Keywords: transformative learning; empathy; experience; research designs; methodology

Transformative learning theory first emerged on the academic landscape over 35 years ago. Early influences included the work of Kuhn's (1962) on paradigms, Freire's (1970) conscientization and Habermas's (1971, 1984) domains of learning (Kitchenham, 2008) followed by much theoretical critique (e.g., Clark & Wilson, 1991; Collard & Law, 1989; Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006; Hart, 1990; Merriam, 2004; Newman, 1994, 2012; Tennant, 1993). In addition, research about the theory has continued to grow exponentially. A recent search of the term on the ProQuest Database (a leading educational database in North America) for publications that included transformative learning have doubled every five years over the last fifteen years. In fact, over the last

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five years 119 articles used the term in the title and over 1300 referred to the theory in the text of the article. Based on this cursory search it would seem logical that the level of theoretical analysis would be correspondingly significant and many of the most fundamental questions concerning transformative learning would have been addressed or be presently under investigation. Although transformative learning was optimistically called a "theory in progress" in 2000 (Mezirow & Associates, 2000), recent discussions note that 'much of the research is redundant, with a strong deterministic emphasis of capturing transformative learning experiences and replicating transformative learning in various settings, while overlooking the need for more in-depth theoretical analysis' (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 12). The optimism for this theory appears to be growing thin and researchers seem to be stuck on a treadmill, repeating the same research over and over again, and making less than satisfactory theoretical progress (Taylor & Snyder, 2012). New approaches to the theory are not adequately integrated with previous approaches (as would be implied by a "theory in progress") (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). We have come to the point where scholars are questioning whether transformative learning is a useful concept at all (Newman, 2012). This is not to say there hasn't been some effort to analyze transformative learning theory in greater depth (e.g., Newman, 2012; van Woerkom, 2010) but it has been on the margins and has not led to an opportunity to enhance the theory.

Explanations for this oversight are numerous, including a failure to ground research in primary sources (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 2000) and paying attention to critiques of transformative learning theory (as previously mentioned). This is particularly problematic for research outside the field of adult education involving transformative learning that has overlooked or is not aware of these foundational sources. In addition, there has been an over-reliance on literature reviews of transformative learning by scholars with little effort to critique original research both in establishing a rationale for a study and analyzing it in relationship to new findings. Methodological concerns can be raised as well and are discussed later in this article, such that most research about transformative learning is framed in interpretive research designs, overlooking the advances that could be made through the engagement of positivist and critical research paradigms.

Furthermore, most research on transformative learning has taken place among North American scholars despite its significant theoretical grounding in Habermas's work on critical theory and more specifically the theory's close connection to his three domains of learning (instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory). This also might explain the over emphasis of research about individual transformation and the lack of significant attention concerning the relationship of positionality and non-western ways of learning and transformative learning (e.g., English & Irving, 2012; Johnson-Bailey, 2012; Ntseane, 2012; Mejiuni, 2012).

Recently Kokkos (2012) conducted a review exploring the degree to which European adult educators incorporate transformative learning as a framework in the development of their research. He concluded:

> that the theory of transformative learning does not have concrete roots in the conceptual formation of the European adult educators … most [work] … mainly build on European theoretical paradigms and the authors do not see the need to place their work within the relatively new theory of transformative learning theory. (Kokkos, 2012, p. 297)

This is unfortunate; particularly considering that European adult educators' rich scholarship focuses on the social and critical dimensions of adult learning (Bourdieu,

Foucault, Illeris, Mayo), and would have much to offer the study of transformative learning theory.

In response to some of these concerns, stagnation and lack of theoretical development in transformative learning theory we examine five specific issues that will hopefully provoke further discussion and research. Each of these issues emerges out of conference discussions, research studies, and earlier critiques that have not been well addressed in the literature so far. Rather than focusing on familiar themes such as the importance of critical reflection or the issue of social change in relation to transformative learning we chose issues that we felt were provocative—issues that have the potential to renew the energy that the field currently needs.

Three of the issues we selected focus on central constructs within transformative learning—constructs that are ever present but rarely deconstructed or explored in depth. These are experience, empathy, and desire to change. We all write about "making meaning out of experience", and use the concept of experience as the foundation for understanding transformative learning, but rarely do we explore what it is that we mean by experience. Similarly, empathy seems to be a necessary component of fostering transformative learning, but again, it has not been examined in depth. Desire to change refers to that step that individuals must take to move from reflection to transformation.

The fourth issue focuses on a question that is often raised about transformation concerning its inherently positive orientation and outcome. Why is that the case and how is it significant to transformative learning theory? The fifth issue we chose to address is methodological and we call into question the over reliance on an interpretive research approach to transformative learning and the need for research involving positivist and critical approaches. We hope that by publishing this article in an international adult education journal that it is read predominantly by our European colleagues, we might encourage them to bring their expertise to the table around a topic that we believe is significant to the study of adult learning.

Experience

A concept that is most central to transformative learning and adult learning in general is experience. It is experience, particularly prior experience (that happened in one's past), that is the primary medium of a transformation, and it is the revision of the meaning of experience that is the essence of learning. 'Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action' (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). It is also experience that forms the basis for habitual expectations (ideologies, beliefs, values), creating the lens from which learners perceive, interpret and make meaning of their world (Mezirow, 1991). As the core substance of a transformation, in concert with dialogue (self and with others) and self-reflection, experience, 'constitutes a starting point for discourse leading to critical examination of normative assumptions underpinning the learner's … value judgments or normative expectations' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 31). Despite the centrality of experience to transformative learning theory, as a construct it is rarely defined or critically examined in research about transformative learning. Questions are raised, such as: What constitutes an experience (which should lend insight into what is not an experience)? What gives meaning to an experience? What distinguishes a transformative experience from other types of experiences?

Turning to scholars who have grappled with this construct, Dewey (1981), for example, used experience 'to designate, in a summary fashion, all that is distinctly

human' (p. 331). Similarly, Lindeman (1961, p. 7) referred to 'experience as adult learner's living textbook.' Essentially experience is everything that has happened to a learner between birth and death. Jarvis (2005) more specifically defines experience as 'the process of creating an understanding of or perception of a situation, which often appears to be a direct participation in an event,' and 'the accumulation of previous experiences, both conscious and unconscious, and stored in the mind' (p. 72). However, MacKeracher (2012) sees a need to distinguish experiences 'that our minds have made sense of and given meaning to from those that languish unattended and senseless in our unconscious mind …. waiting for my further attention' (p. 343). She further identifies two types of experiences: those that individuals experience directly (for example, an automobile accident) and those imposed through cultural and social heritage (for example, hearing about the Depression from our parents). Fenwick offers a more encompassing perspective where 'experience embraces the reflective as well as kinesthetic activity, conscious and unconscious dynamic, and all manner of interactions among subjects, texts, and contexts' (Fenwick, 2000, p. 244-245). These definitions as well as Mezirow's conception of experience seem to imply that what is an experience, and what gives meaning to an experience, resides in the individual, similar to Dewey's (1981) lament when he wrote: 'in the sense of the psychological … which is intrinsically psychical, mental, [and] private' (p. 362).

This psychological orientation is also the basis of much of the research about transformative learning theory (Taylor, 1997, 2007). It is reflected in the exploration of significant prior experiences, the impact of more immediate experiences (individual and group) created in the classroom designed to foster transformative learning, and the degree of experience and its relationship to transformative learning. This approach of analyzing experience as an individual endeavor raises a number of concerns about understanding experience as a construct. One, it assumes that experience can be interpreted by an individual unproblematically, overlooking the non-unitary and fragmented nature of the self and that individuals can hold both multiple and contradictory perspectives of an experience simultaneously (Kilgore & Bloom, 2002; Merriam & Kim, 2012). Second, through an over-reliance on retrospective interviews, research on transformative learning has attempted to lift "experience" from the individual in totality, frozen in time and space stripped of context (both the original context where the experience was generated and the context where the experience is being recalled) which as argued by some includes the very mediating structures (cultural, historical, social) that give meaning to that experience (Clark & Wilson, 1991). A good example of the impact of context, past and present, is found in a series of longitudinal studies of how HIV-positive adults make meaning of their lives (Courtenay, Merriam & Reeves, 1998; Courtenay, Merriam, Reeves & Baumgartner, 2000; Baumgartner, 2002). The challenge facing these studies involving HIV positive participants, who over time, transformed their view of themselves (e.g. coming to terms with the illness, developing confidence, helping the others), is how to account for the change in society over the same period (greater tolerance towards HIV positive individuals, improvement in medical treatment) and how this contributed the interpretation of experience—transformation (Taylor, 2007).

Not only is the interpretation of an experience mediated by context, but also the personal and historical context is significant to the evolution and outcome of a transformative experience. For example, in a recent study, Nohl (2009) identified the importance of "social recognition"—the recognition of acknowledgement and appreciation as critical for transformative learning to take place. This study raises the question and helps better define what is a "transformative experience", such that: Can

any experience be a transformative experience unless it is recognized by others, both by acknowledgement and/or change in behavior in response to the individual's transformation? In other words, can a transformative experience occur without the recognition of others?

For future research on transformative experiences, it is imperative that researchers recognize the dialectical nature of experience and context—it is a reciprocal process of the sociocultural and historical setting, others (social recognition, relationships) and the personal interpretation of change. This means that when exploring transformative experiences, it needs to be understood in the context (exploring mediating factors) in which it unfolded originally, and how context in which the experience is being recalled shapes the telling of the experience. In summary, experience is described in some interesting ways that can help us focus research and theory development:

- Past experience that shapes who we are and our meaning perspectives and habits of mind
- Cultural experience and/or social/historical experience that may be unarticulated but still shapes the meaning of perspectives
- Contextual experience, related to organizations, workplace, and the nature of a job
- Discrepant experiences that contradict our past and cultural experiences that lead to reflection

Empathy

Historically, three constructs have been seen as central to transformative learning theory, critical reflection, dialogue, and experience (Mezirow, 1991). Learners' experience, as previously discussed, is seen as socially constructed, as constituting the starting point for dialogue, as the essential medium through which a transformation is promoted and developed, and as leading to critical reflection where learners question 'the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience' (Taylor, 2009, p. 7). Missing in this tripartite of core components of transformative learning theory is "empathy" which typically is seen as the ability to 'subjectively experience and share in another psychological state or intrinsic feelings' (Morse, Anderson, Bottoroff, Yonge, O'Brien, Solberg & McIlveen, 1992, p. 274). As a construct, empathy has been mentioned in the literature as significant to transformative learning, although it is rarely defined or discussed in much depth, particularly in its relationship to the central constructs of transformative learning (Gum, Greenhill & Dix, 2011; Stevens-Long, Schapiro & McClintock, 2012; Taylor, 2007, 1997; Willis, 2012). An example of how empathy is generally referred to is seen in an article by Mezirow where he embeds the term in a list of other facets important to transformative learning. Here he discusses its significance when participating in critical-dialectical discourse of 'having an open mind, learning to listen empathetically, "bracketing" prejudgment, and seeking common ground' (Mezirow, 2003, p. 60).

Helping raise the import of empathy has been the recognition of the significance of emotions to transformative learning (Stevens-Long, Schapiro & McClintock, 2012; van Woerkom, 2008, 2010), particularly in relationship to critical reflection. However, despite this foregrounding of emotions, scholars have overlooked the role empathy plays in engaging the emotive nature of transformative learning. It is empathy that: provides the learner with the ability to identify with the perspectives of others; lessens

the likelihood of prejudgment; increases the opportunity for identifying shared understanding; and facilitates critical reflection through the emotive valence of assumptions. It is likely that a major outcome of a perspective transformation involves an increase in empathy towards others (Gravett, 2004; MacLeod, Parkin, Pullon & Robertson, 2003). To better understand the significance of empathy in relationships requires exploring empathy in more depth and recognizing its relationship to the growing research and theoretical discussion on the role of emotions and its relationships to fostering transformative learning.

Empathy has its origin in the German term 'Einflung' which means 'feeling within' and is associated with two Greek roots *em* and *pathos* (feeling into) (Mercer & Reynolds, 2002, p. S9). However, the term has evolved beyond its narrow and particularistic nature of experiencing the feelings of others, to a much more complex construct. A discipline that has given considerable attention to empathy is the field of nursing, where some scholars see it as an inherent human quality encompassing additional components, beyond just the emotive, including, moral, cognitive, and behavioral aspects (Kunyk & Olson, 2001; Morse et al., 1992). Building on the humanistic work of Rogers (1962) and others, empathy is seen as motivated by an "internal altruistic force" based on an unconditional acceptance of others, 'a belief in the universality of the humans needs and sense of obligation to assist others' (Rogers, 1962, p. 274). Cognitively, empathy is an intellectual ability used to comprehend another's perspective, mental state (Bailey, Henry & von Hippel, 2008), inclusive of 'reasoning, analyzing, and critical thinking about another individual's behavior' (Morse et al., 1992, p. 275). Behaviorally, empathy is seen as the ability to communicate with others, both verbally and nonverbally, demonstrating concern and understanding. This more comprehensive understanding of empathy provides the basis for demonstrating its inherent relationship to emotions and transformative learning theory. As previously discussed, emotions are significant to learning; they focus attention and provide guidance and motivation for action. Emotions also are inherently linked to critical reflection, because 'purely objective reasoning cannot determine what to notice, what to attend to, and what to inquire about' (van Woerkom, 2010, p. 248). However, despite the significance of emotions, they require self-awareness and management by the learner, to make the most of them in the process of learning. It is in the context of dialogue, critical reflection, and experience that the role of empathy comes to life. It is empathy that provides the motivation (altruistic interest) to "listen" to others; the means to better understand the perspective of another, an awareness of their feelings and understanding of their mental state, and the ability to accurately demonstrate that understanding.

Research is needed to better understand how empathy fosters transformative learning, such as by teachers who engage in the practice of transformative learning in their classroom. It means asking: Are emphatic teachers more effective at fostering transformative learning and if so how? What is the relationship between critical reflection and empathy in transformative learning? Does transformation lead to greater empathy?

Inherently good transformation

Surprisingly, little is written in the transformative learning literature about either the inherent goodness of the outcomes of transformative learning or the often-painful process of moving toward those outcomes. In analyzing Freire's (1970) writing,

Baptiste (2008) questions Freire's notion that sharing is always ethically superior to coercion, and the idea that freedom is an 'unqualified good' (Baptiste, 2008, p. 10). Baptiste goes on to say that this concept of the unqualified goodness of freedom is based on two assumptions: 'that voluntarily chosen paths are never harmful, and that the benefits derived from voluntarily chosen paths always outweigh the injuries inflicted by more coercive alternatives' (Baptiste, 2008, p. 10) and that neither assumption is valid. In other words, Baptiste is critically questioning what he calls the "romantic notion" of freedom from constraints, a notion which is a premise of transformative learning theory.

Naughton and Schied (2010, 2012) also call into question the inherently good nature of transformative learning. They are interested in 'learning trajectories which frequently lie outside of what is right, good and beautiful but are nonetheless animated by new insights and negotiation of one's own purposes, values, beliefs, feelings, dispositions and judgments' (Naughton & Shied, 2010, p. 338). They challenge the discourse on transformative learning theory—whether as a process or an outcome—that delimits transformation to a direction of positive growth.

Critical questioning is a central component in transformative learning theory, but this process is not usually turned onto the theory itself. There are negative components to the theory (for example, emotional upheaval, shame, and guilt), but the outcome is always "good"—more open, more permeable, better justified (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). A closer look at the foundations of transformative learning theory sheds some light on this.

Transformative learning theory is founded on both humanist and constructivist assumptions. From a psychological perspective, humanism presupposes that human nature is intrinsically good and that humans are free and autonomous beings. The emphasis is on the self; the self has the potential for growth, development, and self-actualization, which, in turn contributes to the good of humanity in general (Merriam & Brocket, 1997). Constructivism comes from the work of Piaget (1952), Dewey (1938) and others. In adult education, Candy's (1991) landmark work on self-directed learning is written from a constructivist perspective. Generally, constructivism describes learning as a process of creating meaning from experience; however, there are a variety of strands that make up this broad perspective, including a distinction between individual construction of meaning and social construction of meaning. The former focuses on learners developing perspectives that help them adapt to and understand experience; the latter is based on dialogue from which people learn the culturally shared ways of understanding the world (Vygotsky, 1978). Both humanism and constructivism reflect Western and particularly North American values and beliefs—anyone can achieve anything, anyone can and should have the opportunity for freedom and happiness, if only they work hard enough to overcome all obstacles.

In transformative learning theory, we can see how the humanist and constructivist perspectives have led to the perpetuation of the "inherently good" notion. Mezirow writes:

> Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. Such frames of reference are better than others because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (Mezirow, 2003, pp. 58-59)

By definition, then, transformative learning is seen to be good. Although this definition may be culturally bound, most agree that being "open" and "better justified" (for

example) are good things to be. In some cultures, this is not the case; but even so, people from "closed" cultures seem to work toward openness in some way. It raises the question—is openness a universal "good"?

Before we go on, we need to differentiate between the outcomes of transformative learning and the process of transformative learning (Cranton, Stuckey & Taylor, 2012). The outcomes of transformative learning are listed in Mezirow's definition; most theorists do not argue with these outcomes, though they do see that there are different ways of getting to them. In the first comprehensive description of transformative learning theory the central process of transformative learning was the uncovering of distorted assumptions—assumptions about the reasoning process, about the nature and use of knowledge, about social norms and the way we use language, about psychological premises that cause us pain (Mezirow, 1991). The phases of transformation involve pain, discontent, guilt and shame. The event or events that precipitate transformative learning are often traumatic. Cranton, Stuckey and Taylor (2012) found that among the most common life-changing events were: death of a loved one or loved ones, life threatening illness (self or loved one), divorce or separation, loss of a job, and living outside one's country or culture. So, the outcomes of transformative learning are described in positive terms, and the path for getting there can be painful.

Theorists working with transformative learning often critically question the strategies used to foster transformative learning and the ethics of asking learners to examine their assumptions (e.g., Ettling, 2012). In his initial presentation of the theory, Mezirow (1991) also raises this ethical dilemma. Some theorists (e.g., Brookfield, 2000; Newman, 2012) question the validity of transformative learning itself. Brookfield argues that the phrase is overused to the point of having no meaning, and Newman says that fostering transformative learning is no more than "good teaching". But none of these points of view examine the premise that transformative learning is inherently good. Since transformative learning is about examining the premises that underlie our thinking and behavior, it seems paradoxical that transformative learning theorists do not turn that critical eye onto their own work. Perhaps it is time that we engage in a discussion of that nature.

Desire to change

The assumption is generally made that individuals cannot be forced to transform, but rather that people need to be willing and able to engage in activities that have the potential to lead them to shifts in perspectives. Mezirow (2012) is careful to distinguish between indoctrination, for example, and transformative learning. Those who write about ethical issues in transformative learning nearly always mention the care that a practitioner must take in helping learners question their values and beliefs (Ettling, 2006). Cultural suicide (Brookfield, 1995) can result from people moving away from their communities and cultures through transformative learning. We see examples of this in the film, *Educating Rita* and the novel, *Ella Price's Journal* (Byrant, 1972), along with the conceptual literature on transformative learning.

The idea that there needs to be a desire to learn or a willingness to learn raises several interesting issues for theory, practice, and research related to transformative learning. Although the assumption is generally made that transformative learning is voluntary and individuals need to be open and willing to engage in the process, this is not clearly addressed in the theoretical descriptions of transformative learning. Mezirow (2012) says that the goal of adult education is to 'help adults realize their potential for

becoming more liberated, socially responsible and autonomous learners' (p. 92) and that adult educators 'actively strive to extend and equalize the opportunities for them to do so' (p. 92). Adult educators are not neutral or value-free; they are activists who work toward freer participation in discourse and democracy. Yet, they can only set up situations in which the potential for transformative learning exists and, it seems, hope for the best. This is an issue to which theorists should pay attention.

Surprisingly, this is an area that has been rarely included in the empirical research on transformative learning. Although some researchers concern themselves with "readiness to learn" and the stages of readiness literature, especially in the research coming from health professional education, this is a more mechanical, staged, and linear process than is the concept of "desire to change". In a recent study, Hoggan and Cranton (in press) studied the role of fiction in promoting transformative learning in higher education settings. Participants were 131 undergraduate and graduate students from two universities in the United States. Participants' written reflections were collected following a learning activity in which they read a short story that exposed them to alternative perspectives and discussed their reactions. Fifty-five of the participants experienced a "desire to change" following this activity (this was one of five major themes in the results). Considerable research has examined the process of engaging in transformative learning, but little is known about what brings learners to the "edge" of the learning, or if they need to be already at that edge before learning will occur.

Those writing about teaching for transformation, or the practice of engaging learners in transformative experiences also tend to neglect this beginning stage of the process. In Mezirow and Taylor's (2009) edited handbook on transformative learning in practice, there is an admirable collection of practices in a variety of contexts (for example, higher education, the workplace, online courses, adult basic education) using a variety of strategies (for example, arts-based activities, mentoring, dialogic teaching, storytelling, and collaborative inquiry), but again, there is little mention about what comes just before the engagement begins. Weimer (2012) asks some important questions about transformative learning in practice, for example: 'Can learning experiences be designed so that transformative learning happens more regularly? What sequence of activities best transforms dependent learners into independent learners?' (p. 439). These are the kinds of things that all practitioners would like to know, along with the more fundamental question of what brings learners to a position where they are open to engagement in such learning experiences and activities.

Motivation is a construct that appears to have the potential to contribute to an understanding of these issues. It is a broad hypothetical concept – invented to explain a wide variety of behaviors including persistence, retention, and a readiness or desire for learning (Wlodkowski, 2005). It can be extrinsic (when people engage in an activity for an external reward such as a grade or a salary increase) or intrinsic (when the behavior itself is satisfying). However, it is the latter we are interested in here, and the explanation is not only not very convincing, but it does not seem to address the question of what leads people to the desire to change. Perhaps it is Habermas's (1971) concept of emancipatory human interests (one of three basic human interests) that is more relevant. Early on, Mezirow (1981) emphasized that emancipatory interests are those that lead people to want to become free from forces that limit their options and their control over their lives, or, in other words, gaining freedom from self-imposed constraints through ideology critique. That is, if we follow Habermas's (1971) thinking, perhaps it is a fundamental human characteristic to want to be free from constraints.

Methodology

A final issue of transformative learning theory concerns its stagnation and lack of theoretical progression. As previously discussed in the introduction, the theory hascurled into itself—not evolving due to a lack of ongoing theoretical analysis. This stagnation is the result of several phenomenon: a confusion about research paradigms, an overreliance on a research methodology in which participants are interviewed retrospectively and a thematic inductive analysis is conducted, the misinterpretation of kinds of data as research paradigms, the reliance on secondary sources and the subsequent narrowing of the field, and, at the same time, the expansion of theory into a number of directions with little attention being paid to how the expansion contributes to previous works.

The typical methodology in research on transformative learning falls into the basic interpretive methodology; that is, the researcher interviews a small number of individuals in a specific context or related to a specific issue (retrospectively), does a thematic analysis of the interview data, and reports on four or five themes that appear in the data. This is fine, of course, and it has contributed to our understanding of the process of transformative learning, but it has come to a point where we are no longer learning anything new. Yet, study after study follows this model. There are no (or few) longitudinal studies, studies done in the time when the transformative learning occurs, studies that are in the positivistic paradigm, or, perhaps most importantly, studies that are in the critical paradigm (for example, participatory action research).

Looking at the nature of research paradigms is helpful in understanding what has happened here. Empiricism is based on observations and experimentation; with the assumption being made that human behavior can be viewed and described objectively (Glesne, 2011). When theorists began to realize that the application of objective scientific methods was not leading to the correction of social ills, transformative learning was in its formative years. In the interpretive paradigm, the purpose of research is to understand human behavior from the perspective of individuals. Reality is not objective, but rather it is subjective; reality is socially constructed (Glesne, 2011). As is now the case in transformative learning research, data is usually qualitative—based on interviews, observations, or stories.

The critical paradigm in educational research is more recent. As is the case with the interpretive paradigm, the critical paradigm was a reaction to positivism. In the interpretive paradigm, researchers ask, “what is”, but in the critical paradigm, researchers ask, “what could or should be”. Critical researchers challenge the status quo, question social norms, and look for ways to improve practice through action and the involvement of those people who are affected by the situation being investigated (Merriam & Simpson, 2000).

As can be seen in the discussion of these three paradigms, subjectivity and objectivity are central in understanding different approaches to research. The positivist paradigm assumes that objectivity is possible and uses methods based on that assumption. The interpretive paradigm assumes that knowledge is socially constructed and, therefore, subjective. The critical paradigm also assumes subjective knowledge, but it takes this one step further to assume that participants are co-researchers. That is, they not only construct knowledge but they engage in the understanding of others’ knowledge construction.

There is an unfortunate tendency in transformative learning research (and adult education research in general) to confuse kinds of data with research paradigms. Qualitative and quantitative data do not describe a paradigm; they describe a kind of

data. Paradigms are worldviews, or least broad perspectives on the meaning of research, including the assumptions underlying the research, as outlined above. Generally, quantitative data is associated with the positivistic research paradigm, but not always, and generally qualitative research is associated with the interpretive paradigm, but not always. The critical paradigm often includes a variety of kinds of data.

Transformative learning research no longer transforms itself. A few scholars in the field have conducted reviews of the literature on transformative learning theory (e.g., Taylor & Snyder, 2012) or have written about transformative learning in the context of a general review of learning in adult education (e.g., Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Other researchers then utilize these reviews as a way of setting up their own research, rather than consulting the primary sources. One example of this is the way that Mezirow has been consistently critiqued for not paying any attention to social context in the development of his theory. It takes only a quick reading of Mezirow's (1975, 1978) original report to see that he pays close attention to the social context, including the feminist movement at the time. Mezirow also clearly states that he is an educator, not a politician or a social change agent.

The problem with this is that an elite few scholars have the power of determining the future of the field, if it is only secondary sources that new researchers consult. This sets boundaries around the study of transformative learning that are not only unhelpful, but are strangling the progress of the theory.

Summary

We selected five somewhat neglected but provocative issues related to transformative learning theory development and research to discuss. In order to rejuvenate the field of transformative learning, rather than simply observe its demise, we encourage scholars to think in new ways about the directions we can move in. We asked: What is the nature of experience? How does experience unfold in the context of transformative learning? How can we describe people's experiences? How can we foster new experiences that have the potential to lead to transformative learning?

Similarly, empathy, the ability to subjectively experience and share in another person's psychological state or intrinsic feelings, surely is a key to fostering transformative learning that has been neglected. It means asking: How do educators establish empathic relationships with learners? How do learners see the role of empathy (from educators, but perhaps more importantly from others) in their transformative learning experience?

In the various descriptions of how people engage in transformative learning, there is also an ignored gap between a disorienting event and revising a perspective, or perhaps between engaging in critical reflection and revising a perspective. We have labeled this as a "desire to change", but we need to explore this in much more detail. Why do some people revise their perspectives and others not? Is it a characteristic of the person? A characteristic of the event? Or where the person is in his or her life?

In almost all of the literature, transformative learning is assumed to be inherently good. This is an assumption that needs to be examined. Transformative learning theorists need to turn a critical eye to their own assumptions. How do we explain the experiences that otherwise resemble transformative learning but have negative consequences? If transformative learning can be negative, how can we deal with the ethical issues of fostering it?

Research methodologies in the field of transformative learning have settled into a routine where people conduct retrospective interviews in an interpretive paradigm and do thematic analyses of those interviews. There are many innovative and interesting methodologies that could be applied to research in our field: arts-based research, narrative inquiry, action research, and participatory action research. How can we expand the way we do research on transformative learning? Can positivistic paradigms provide us with another perspective?

We encourage readers to consider these questions and any other questions that fall outside of what has become the traditional approaches to understanding transformative learning. We need to go back to a "theory in progress".

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Performative ontologies

Sociomaterial approaches to researching adult education and lifelong learning

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Abstract

Sociomaterial approaches to researching education, such as those generated by actor-network theory and complexity theory, have been growing in significance in recent years, both theoretically and methodologically. Such approaches are based upon a performative ontology rather than the more characteristic representational epistemology that informs much research. In this article, we outline certain aspects of sociomaterial sensibilities in researching education, and some of the uptakes on issues related to the education of adults. We further suggest some possibilities emerging for adult education and lifelong learning researchers from taking up such theories and methodologies.

Keywords: sociomaterial; actor-network theory; complexity theory; adult education; lifelong learning

Introduction

While in some parts of the adult education literature sociomaterial analyses have only recently begun to appear, these approaches have become reasonably familiar in related fields, such as higher education, organizational learning and practice, workplace learning, and e-learning/mobile learning. Researchers have developed sociomaterial approaches in order to reclaim materials and materiality in social life, and rethink their relations within education. Environment, other animals, objects and artefacts are treated as integral to the enactment of human existence and social life rather than as simply background context or tools. This theoretical work has entailed engagement with research in the physical sciences and related areas, where the nature of matter is a central question, as to examine the social without the material is argued to work with a

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limited concept of society. The rethinking is linked to wider efforts in the social sciences to develop non-foundationalist and non-representational ways of researching the social: treating the "social" as less a bounded category and more itself an effect of sociomaterial practices. Here research is enacted from a performative ontology rather than the more characteristic representational epistemology that informs much research.

In this article, and drawing upon previous work (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011), we argue that such approaches open promising avenues for research in the broader terrain of adult education and lifelong learning. We also believe that this is normatively and politically important given the relative impotence of many existing forms of research critique, which as Latour (2004) has argued, have "run out of steam". Our contention is that sociomaterial approaches to research offer opportunities for more engaged performative and practice-focussed forms of educational practices, even if such engagements become less certain, based upon what one of us has argued to be forms of conditionality, fallibility and responsibility (Edwards, 2012). We offer these as alternatives to trends in adult education research that have focused on notions of, for instance, transformative learning, emancipatory education, communities of practice and biographical research. While such work represents honourable traditions within adult education research, we would argue that most such work places human practices *within* a material context rather than exploring the material and human as mutual constituent enactments of the social.

There is a long established tradition of researching the material aspects of education, from the design of desks to the built environment of institutions (Lawn & Grosvenor, 2005). Indeed, Dewey's (1938) influential conception of learning emerging through transactions between an inquiring learner and objects of the environment could be argued to have inaugurated a sociomaterial view of education. Other influential researchers of learning, such as Piaget and Vygotsky, could be said to have theorized humans learning as active agents in the material world. Here practice – that is, *doing* – is not ontologically separable from learning and human development but is the very substance of it. Forms of materialism are central also to many educators concerned to address issues of inequality and power in education, drawing upon Marxist, feminist and critical theory traditions of theorizing.

However, what is material is often taken to be the background context against which human educational practice takes place or within which it sits, and material artefacts are often taken to be simply tools that humans use or objects they investigate. In other words, even where the material is a matter of concern, it is not necessarily well theorized and humans are separated from the material rather than the material being integral to being human. While giving a focus to the materiality of education therefore, many such approaches still tend to privilege the intentional human subject, which is assumed to be different or separate from the material; the material is the non-human, the thing waiting to be used and animated by human intention and agency. Sørensen (2009, p. 2) argues therefore that there is a 'blindness toward the question of how educational practice is affected by materials'. She suggests that its consequence is to treat materials as mere instruments to advance educational performance. In her study of the materiality of learning, she shows how everyday educational activity and knowing are critically shaped through and not simply by the material. She argues that materiality is not consolidated within artefacts, but is distributed, such that social as well as physical processes can be understood as material. For her, it is this *relational materiality* that is often overlooked in educational research where the learning human subject is often taken as the foundational object of study.

For this discussion, we have chosen to focus on two different arenas within which sociomaterial studies have been situated: complexity theory, and actor-network theory (ANT). Before we do however, it is important to draw attention to the many other research approaches that may be called sociomaterial that also have traction in fields related to adult education and lifelong learning, particularly work and learning: such as aspects of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) and certain spatiality theories (see Fenwick et al., 2011), and practice-based theories advancing concepts of knowing-in-practice (see Hager, Lee & Reich, 2012). A small but active field of research in education calling itself materialist feminism also has been working with concepts from Deleuze to explore what emerges in engagements with matter and learning (e.g. see Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). Space precludes an elaboration of these in this article. Our concern is what seems to be a tendency to position each of these broad approaches as bounded and discrete. We prefer to discuss them as "arenas" because these can be considered sites of contestation and the performance of overlapping ideas. Each arena represents a heterogeneous multiplicity of theories, or at least widely divergent uptakes of similar theoretical resources, so referring to each as a singular theory is problematic. Although each has been called a "theory", most have featured debates criticizing this representation. Also problematic is the ocularcentric term of "perspective", "lens" or "view", to represent these explorations. Researchers in these arenas tend to emphasize knowing as enactment and experimentation rather than as "seeing" or as representation (Edwards, 2012). In fact, they often work to reveal the practices through which things become visible, conceptualizing knowledge, capabilities and subjectivities as emerging simultaneously in webs of interconnections among heterogeneous entities: human and non-human, social discourses, activities and meanings, as well as material forces, assemblages and transformations. There is also debate about the extent to which these arenas are theoretical alone and/or methodological. For example, Latour (1999) has argued that ANT is more a methodology than a theory and one which he locates within the tradition of ethnomethodology. However, not all theoretically informed ANT studies are ethnomethodologies. To write of the sociomaterial is not to be able to offer a bounded definition, as it is itself enacted through a range of relational practices. Our selection is illustrative rather than exhaustive.

In the hands of educational analysts, a rich body of literature has arisen that suggests useful interventions related to education. Working within these arenas, researchers have shown possibilities for alternative enactments of researching policy, curriculum, identity, learning, and knowledge, and different ways to approach pedagogic interventions. This article examines the educational understandings offered by certain sociomaterial approaches. The article is in three sections. First, we discuss some of the important contributions of these approaches in existing research on aspects of adult education and lifelong learning. Second, we offer a brief introduction to the two arenas of actor-network theory and complexity theory in terms of their central principles and approaches. Third, we draw out general themes for consideration and the ways in which educational research can add to sociomaterial theorizing as well as draw upon it.

Researching adult education and lifelong learning sociomaterially

The uptakes of sociomaterial approaches have been many but divergent in adult education and lifelong learning. For instance, Mulcahy (2006, 2007, 2011, 2012) has long used ANT to query the stabilized categories that govern practices of vocational education and workplace learning. For instance, she (Mulcahy, 2011) challenges the

counter-positioning of work, education and learning through empirical analysis of pre-service teachers in their practice placements, showing show how work and education are mutually constituted material practices. Similarly, Thompson (2012) examines the informal learning of self-employed adults, also using ANT to challenge notions of online community and show the array of distributed materials and material networks that produce learning and participation. Some have used sociomaterial approaches in professional adult education: Bleakley (2012) experiments with its implications for rethinking the nature of evidence, illness and medical learning in practice. Sociomaterial analyses have been used to better understand complex changes in practice and work conditions, from inter-professional work to contradictory knowledge sources and standards (Fenwick, Jensen & Nerland, 2012). Others have focused on assessment in adult education. Fenwick (2010, p. 170) examines the materialities of assessment in various contexts of adult education to understand the 'complexities of calculation as it is enacted through heterogeneous networks, but also the spaces of non-calculation that can be found or torn open to allow more freedom of play'. In the arena of adult literacy Hamilton (2009) and Clarke (2002) have both adopted ANT questions to examine the powerful sociomaterial assembling processes that order learners' identities and knowledge, and the cracks that open possibilities for transgressive and subversive action within these assemblings. In relation to social movements, analysts have theorized the problem of agency when starting with an assumption that these movements are effects produced through material and social assemblages (Passoth, Peuker & Schillmeier, 2012).

Perhaps one of the earliest examples of, in particular, early ANT being drawn upon to study higher education is the work of Nespor (1994). In his exploration of teaching, learning and curriculum in undergraduate studies in Physics and Management in an American university, he examines the ways in which students and materials are organized in space and time and the implications of this both for knowledge and knowledge-building practices, and also for subjectivity. He illustrates that the different practices associated with the two subject areas result in different subjectivities, networks and representational practices. In other words, learning entails ways of being, ways of acting, ways of feeling, ways of interacting, ways of representing, as well as ways of knowing. For Nespor, these emerge through the materializing networks and networking practices in which people enrol and the translations to which they are subject. These are network effects, which he traces in great detail. The uptakes and the foci of research therefore are diverse within the broad terrain of adult education and lifelong learning, but they share the concern to theorize educational issues sociomaterially as arising within performative ontologies.

They provide conceptual resources to trace both the patterns as well as the unpredictability that makes educational activities possible. They promote methods by which to recognize and trace the multifarious struggles, negotiations and accommodations whose effects constitute the "things" in adult education: "learners", "facilitators", "learning activities and spaces", "knowledge representations" such as texts, pedagogy, content, and so forth. Rather than take such concepts as foundational categories, taken for granted and naturalized, they trace these as themselves effects of heterogeneous sociomaterial relations (Latour, 2004). This challenges assumptions that a subject is separable from an object, or a knower from the thing that is known, and in some instances that a learner is necessarily human. Matter and meaning are taken to be interwoven and representation, based on a fundamental separation of subject and object, a problem (Barad, 2007). Yet education precisely tends to be often representational in its assumptions and practices, focussed on the development of the human subject and

their cognitive acquisition of ideas. In other words, education is assumed to enact primarily learning as representation, representing objects to subjects. Without the separation of matter and meaning, there is no rationale for much of educational practice as we know it. In a subject such as education where the human is centred as an object of study and knowledge a representation through which one learns about something, this can be unsettling.

A sociomaterial sensibility decentres the subject. Drawing on these arenas can interrupt understandings of knowledge, learning and education as solely social or personal processes, and insist upon attending to the material that is enmeshed with the social, technical and human. In the most radical expression of this approach, things are performed into existence in webs of relations. The central premise is, as Orlikowski (2007, p. 1435) puts it, 'the constitutive entanglement of the social and material in everyday life'. All things – human, and non-human, hybrids and parts, knowledge and systems – emerge as *effects* of connections and activity. There are no received categories. The shift here is what Jensen (2010, p. 7) characterizes as 'from epistemology and representation to practical ontology and performativity'. The question of producing knowledge and learning shifts from a representational idiom, mapping and understanding a world that is "out there" onto the "in there" of the human subject, to a view that the world, of which humans are a part, that is doing things, full of agency. This is the view that Latour and Callon proposed when they suggested that researchers need to be symmetrical in considering who *acts* on the world. Not only humans act, because non-humans act on and with humans. Human action requires the non-human, the material. Human agency is the effect of particular distributions and accumulations enacted through such assemblages. This view

> multiplies the potentially relevant actors and force attention on their differences and relations. The aspiration is to thereby facilitate more nuanced analyses of how humans and things (broadly construed) together create, stabilize and change worlds. Analyses, in other words, that are sensitive to human and nonhuman activities as *practical ontology*: efforts to concretely shape and interrelate the components that make up the worlds they inhabit. (Jensen, 2010, p. 5)

In education, writers like Sørensen (2009) are increasingly arguing not just for greater attention to materiality, but for this more symmetrical approach, where materiality co-constitutes the practices that emerge. Waltz (2006) claims that in educational analyses, material things too often are denied their vitality. Materiality is subsumed by human intention, design, and drive, and treated merely as things representative of human ends. This hides the qualities and contributions of material entities themselves, including the materialities of human beings, particularly the ways they act within educational processes. Texts, for example, exert force. Depending on their form, they can enact certain pedagogical activities and sequences, align curricula across space and time, limit the teacher's academic freedom, and affect student funds. They generally function as 'co-conspirators, law-enforcement officers, administrators, racists, quality control agents, seducers, and investment advisors' (Waltz, 2006, p. 57).

The point is that material things are performative and not inert; they are matter and they matter. They act together with other types of things and forces to exclude, invite, and order particular forms of participation in enactments, some of which we term "adult education" and/or "lifelong learning". What then is produced can appear to be policy, or gender identity, or expertise, or a social structure such as racism. A focus on the sociomaterial therefore helps us to trace the heterogeneous relationships holding together these larger categories, tracing their durability as well as their ephemerality.

From this approach, no anterior distinctions, such as human beings or social structures, are presupposed.

Consider the concept of learning, central in educational discussions and extremely slippery in meaning and enactment. It is by now a commonplace in research to understand learning as more than the purely individual, cognitive and acquisitive process that has driven some approaches. Conceptions of learning have long acknowledged the importance of transactions among concepts, language, cultural mediation, and experimentation with environmental objects. Notions of learning as socio-cultural participation, embedded in particular joint activity, tools and routines have become ubiquitous in educational writings that suggest less instruction and more scaffolding of active processes as a pedagogic approach. However, such conceptions still tend to focus on individual learning subjects, and on their particular development through the processes of mediation and/or participation. What is placed in the background is how the entities, knowledge, other actors, and relations of mediation and activity – all the forces directly engaged in learning activities – are also being brought forth in practices precisely *as* learning. Learning here is a materializing assemblage and not simply a cognitive achievement or way of interacting. It is through the being-together of things that actions identified *as* learning, become possible. Thus teaching is not simply about the relationships between humans but is about the networks of humans and things through which teaching and learning are translated and enacted as such. They do not exist and cannot be identified as separate from the networks through which they are themselves enacted. They are not pre-existing transcendental entities or processes but immanent assemblages. We therefore begin to identify different research questions emerging from these arenas as well as particular theories and methodologies, questions which focus on how phenomena emerge, but which go beyond many forms of existing social constructions, which assume multiple perspectives on a single world out there. Research influenced by sociomateriality adopts the notion of many worlds, and multiple ontologies, enacted through the different forms of material assemblings.

Complexity and actor-network theories as sociomaterial arenas

While deriving from very different theoretical roots and premises, sociomaterial arenas bear some important resemblances. First, they take *whole network relations* into account regardless of what small slice of material or activity has been chosen as a primary focus for study. They explore the webs of entangled human/non-human actions, matters and meanings that give rise to and emerge from networks, and acknowledge the processes of boundary-making, boundary-marking and exclusion that establish what we take to be objects and systems, and their internal elements or objects with properties. Second, they focus on closely tracing the formations and stabilization of elements that are produced, reinforced or transformed by subjects that emerge with/in a particular activity. That is, they trace the *relational among non-human as well as human* parts of the system, emphasizing both the heterogeneity of elements and the need to focus on relations, mobilities and mediations, not separate things or separate individuals. Third, they understand human knowledge and learning in the network to be embedded in *material action and inter-action (or intra-action)*, rather than focusing strictly on internalized concepts, meanings and feelings of any participant. In other words, they do not privilege human consciousness or intention in any conventional sense, but trace how knowledge, knowers and known (representations, subjects and objects) emerge together with/in activity as "knowing locations" (McGregor, 2004). Finally, these approaches trace the

orderings and disorderings that become entities. They show the material and relational workings through which hybrid assemblings that produce identities, institutions, bodies of knowledge, practices, radical movements etc become stabilized and powerful, or transformed, reconfigured, distorted, or dissolved. Hybridity and mess are therefore the norm (Latour, 1993) and the focus of research. Making sense is a reduction to the singular when all is multiple performances.

Complexity theory

Complexity theory is actually a heterogeneous body of theories originating in evolutionary biology, mathematical fractals, general systems theory, cybernetics, and so on. The present discussion draws from analysts who have theorized complexity theory in terms of human and organizational learning (e.g. Davis & Sumara, 2006; Stacey, 2005). Complexity theory provides an approach to understanding learning processes in a system such as a work organization. The first premise is that the systems represented by person and context are inseparable, and the second that change occurs from emerging systems affected by the intentional tinkering of one with the other. The key concept is *emergence*, the understanding that in complex adaptive systems, phenomena, events and actors are mutually dependent, mutually constitutive, and actually emerge together in dynamic structures.

Davis and Sumara (2006), among others, have drawn upon these concepts to research human learning, showing how environment and learners emerge together in the process of cognition. Elements that come to comprise a system interact according to simple rules that are recursively re-enacted. Elements often couple, in a process of co-specification. As each element interacts and responds within the activity, the overall shape and direction of the system shifts, as does the emerging object of focus. Other elements are changed, the relational space among them all changes, and the looping-back changes each element's form and actions. The resultant coupling changes or co-specifies each participant, creating a new transcendent unity of action and identities that could not have been achieved independently. These interactions are recursive, continuing to elaborate what is present and what is possible in the system. They also form patterns all by themselves. They do not organize according to some sort of externally imposed blueprint but are *self-organizing*. Through the ongoing processes of recursively elaborative adaptation, the system can maintain its form without some externally-imposed discipline or organizing device, such as hierarchical management.

In education, people constantly influence and adjust to each other's emerging behaviours, ideas, and intentions as well as with objects, furniture, technologies, etc, through myriad complex interactions and fluctuations. A whole series of consequences emerge from these micro actions. Most of this complex joint action leaks out of individual attempts to control what they are doing. No clear lines of causation can be traced from these interactions to their outcomes, because at any given time among all these interconnections, possibilities are contained in the system that are not visible or realized. It is for this reason that Freud described education as an impossible practice, as its ends cannot be mandated (Edwards, 2008). This means, among other things, that humans are fully nested within and interconnected with many elements of the systems comprising them and in which they participate. They are not considered to be autonomous, sovereign agents for whom knowledge can be acquired or extracted.

Overall, in complexity theory knowledge and action are understood as continuous invention and exploration, produced through relations among consciousness, identity, action and interaction, objects and structural dynamics. New possibilities for action are constantly emerging among these interactions, and cognition occurs in the possibility

for unpredictable shared action. Knowledge or skill cannot be contained in any one element or dimension of a system, for knowledge is constantly emerging and spilling into other systems. No actor has an essential self or knowledge outside these relationships. Thus, for example, an organizational change initiative would focus on enabling connections instead of training individuals to acquire understanding of the new policy. These are connections between this initiative and the many other initiatives likely to be lurking in the system, between parts of the system, between the initiative and the system's cultures, and between people, language and technologies involved in the change. It would encourage experimentation among people and things involved in the change, and would focus on amplifying the advantageous possibilities that emerge among these connections as people tinker with the things and language involved. Learning is defined as expanded possibilities for action, or engaging in more sophisticated and flexible action (Davis & Sumara, 2006).

When examining different arenas of sociomateriality, complexity theory provides a rich analysis of the *biological* (as well as social, personal, cultural) flows inherent in materialization processes. It highlights the elaborate intertwining of human/non-human elements, and the non-linear simultaneous dynamics and conditions which produce *emergence*. The system in complexity theory is an effect produced through self-organization via these dynamics and is continuously adaptive. Studies are able to model system patterns in various scalar spaces as they interact, shift and change. Knowledge (e.g. new possibilities, innovations, practices) emerges along with identities and environments when the system affords sufficient diversity, redundancy and multiple feedback loops. Diversity is not to be managed towards producing greater homogeneity, as some approaches to workplace learning might advocate, but by being interconnected. In multiplying connections, different possibilities emerge. In elaborating this point, Davis and Sumara (2006) explain that difference in an identified system needs ways to become visible – the conditions must enable the enactment of difference – which is often not the case. As diverse elements become enacted, they could also be able to interconnect through overlap. In classrooms or organizations, emergence can be enabled where there is diversity and constraints (purposes and rules of engagement) by amplifying difference and perturbations, decentralizing organizing processes, encouraging continuous interaction, and ensuring ongoing feedback among various elements/sites (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Stacey, 2005). In this way, complexity theory becomes not only a way of enacting research, but also for developing pedagogical practices.

Actor-network theory

Actor-network theory has emerged from the social rather than natural sciences, in particular the study of science and technology, both in terms of knowledge and innovations. Yet it shares similar concerns with complexity theory. Proponents of ANT claim it is not a theory but a sensibility, indeed, many diffused sensibilities that have evolved in ways that eschew its original tenets. Their shared commitment is to trace the process by which elements are connected together and manage to *hold* together, to assemble collectives, or networks. These networks produce force and other effects: knowledge, identities, rules, routines, behaviours, new technologies and instruments, regulatory regimes, reforms, learning and so forth. No anterior distinctions such as human being or social structure are recognized as foundational categories.

ANT takes knowledge generation to be a joint exercise of relational strategies within networks that are spread across space and time and performed through inanimate – e.g. books, mobile phones, measuring instruments, projection screens, boxes, locks –

as well as animate beings in precarious arrangements. Learning and knowing are performed in the processes of assembling and maintaining these networks, as well as in the negotiations that occur at various nodes comprising a network. ANT focuses on the minute negotiations that go on at the points of connection. Things persuade, coerce, seduce, resist, and compromise each other as they come together. They may connect with other things in ways that lock them into a particular network, or they may pretend to connect, partially connect, or feel disconnected and excluded even when they are connected. When anyone speaks of a system or structure, ANT asks, how has it been compiled? Where is it? What is holding it together? All things are assemblages, connected in precarious networks that require much ongoing work to sustain their linkages. ANT traces how these assemblages are made and sustained, how they order behaviours as well as space and objects, but also how they can be unmade and how counter-networks or alternative forms and spaces can take shape and develop strength.

Latour (1999) argues against any ontological separation between materiality and meaning as a rupture between the thing and its sign that are part of each object. He considers a central problem to be the "circulating reference" between words and world that attempts to transform matter, the objects of knowledge, into representations, as though there were justifiable a priori distinctions between mind/matter or object/sign. He, like Hacking (1999) and Barad (2007), is therefore critical of social constructivists as well as realists in assuming that materiality and representation are separate realms. The important point is that ANT focuses not on what texts and other objects represent or mean, but on what they do. And what they do is always in connection with other human and non-human things. They are what he refers to as gatherings rather than discrete objects with properties. Some of these connections link together to form an identifiable entity or assemblage, which is referred to as an "actor" that can exert force. "University", for example, represents a continuous collaboration of machines and information, routines, supplies, bodies and their capacities, techniques and timetables, gazes, safety rules, legislation and so on. This unversity is both an assemblage or network of things that have become connected in a particular way, and an actor itself that can produce fears, policies, pedagogies, forms of study and resistances to these forms – hence, actor-network. And the gatherings that have become part of this actor-network are themselves effects, produced by particular performances with one another.

ANT analyses show how the entities that we commonly work with in educational research – classrooms, teaching, students, knowledge generation, curriculum, policy, assessments, inequities, reform – are in fact gatherings of myriad things that order and govern educational practices. Yet, these assemblies are often precarious networks that require a great deal of ongoing work to sustain their linkages. The focus is on how things are enacted and the practices through which this is achieved rather than attempting to explain why they are the way they are. The former always contain the possibilities for difference and multiplicity rather than being foundationally grounded.

Researching sociomateriality

There is a danger in becoming overly fascinated with conceptions that trace complexity and assemblings, without asking how such analysis is any more productive in understanding and responding to educational concerns. While sociomaterial approaches offer researchers different ways of engaging and intervening in educational issues, educational researchers also bring important questions to sociomaterial arenas around core questions of knowledge, pedagogy, and purpose. What forms of knowledge are

produced in current educational arrangements, what productive forms of knowledge are possible, and what engagements can develop these? What is competency, and what is expertise, in sociomaterial practices? How is pedagogy achieved sociomaterially, and what effects are produced by different pedagogies? How are educational purposes produced (or resisted, defused, undermined) through different heterogeneous assemblages, and how can these be influenced? How can we conceptualize "good education" in a sociomaterial orientation? How can we understand and promote productive enactments of educational responsibility? What does education for equity and justice look like if we approach it as vital materiality, and how can it be promoted?

Adult educators have for some time worked with notions of situated learning, accepting metaphors of learning as more about participation than acquisition. But who and what participate, and how, with what effects? Sociomaterial orientations offer more fine-grained analyses of participation than are commonly undertaken in conceptions of communities of practice, as Nespor (1994) illustrated. Similarly, the concept of practice in education, while recently reclaimed in the so-called practice-based turn of learning (Hager et al., 2012), is a vast domain that needs more nuanced consideration: visible activity and invisible infrastructure, forms and purposes of knowing activity, and various practicing combinations of materials, meanings and energies that sociomaterial analyses can help us to appreciate.

Adult educators working within sociomaterial arenas also continue to raise the question of human subjectivity and meaning. They wonder if, when we move away from the individual, are we then in a world of techno-determinism? Or, from a different set of concerns, do these approaches simply remain at a systemic level that abstracts, or omits, the person and the personal that are crucial in education? For some, sociomateriality represents a post-human orientation. However, this is not an anti-human post-humanism where technological enhancements and digitized bodies are the nightmare of lost human dignity and subjectivity (Fukuyama, 2002; Hayles, 1999). Rather, this is a post-humanism that refutes the anthropomorphic centrality of human beings and human knowledge in defining the world and its relations. It accepts the value of transgressing boundaries and disrupting uniform ideas about what it means to be human. It even may suggest expansion of human being-ness beyond current naturalized limitations of physical body and brain-based intelligence. To be human is enacted through materializing practices. Here, the language of human/nonhuman (like material/immaterial, and natural/social) can create problematic binaries. These have been critiqued in ANT debates (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Lee & Brown, 1994; McLean & Hassard, 2004), along with the paradox of anthrocentricity when human researchers assemble accounts assuming to speak for non-humans. The point is not to indulge in what McLean and Hassard (2004) call "symmetrical absurdity", pretending to banish human meanings, subjectivities, desires, values and so forth from the process and representations of analysis. The point is to insist upon recognizing important influences in assemblages as emanating from nature, technology, objects and all manner of quarks, which may overlap and infuse what is human.

An important radical tradition in adult education has been devoted to empowering human beings to act agentically in promoting decency and justice and resisting inequity. However, when actors are understood to be assemblages of many things that are continually (dis-/re-)assembling, the focus shifts to understanding how and when these variously distributed human and non-human materials collectively generate exercises of power, consolidate or resist it and when they cannot. When agency is thus understood as a distributed effect produced in material webs of human and non-human assemblages, some argue that a more responsible, ecological politics is possible (Barad, 2007;

Bennett, 2010). But how can this be if agency is precisely about a human being becoming an agent (e.g. for social change)? How can we think about collective action when we have “agency without actors”? (Passoth et al., 2012).

“Agency”, which Callon (2005, p. 4) defines as ‘capacity to act and to give meaning to action’, is problematic for many sociomaterial analysts. Some refuse to use it altogether with its associations of human individuals’ intention, initiative and exercises of power. Others like Bennett (2010) and Callon (2005) write of agency as relational, possible only through assemblages. Barad (2003, 2007) calls this relational entwining “intra-activity”. Entities become linked through intra-actions, a term she uses to indicate the mutual constitution that occurs simultaneously with their joint activity. *Inter*-action suggests that entities are separate and pre-determined prior to their encounter. But in fact, argues Barad, complexity science shows that all entities (human and non-human) as well as their “relata” – the nature of the links through which they become related in some way – emerge together through their continuous *intra*-activity. Working with these ideas through feminist theory and quantum physics, particularly the physics of Neils Bohr, Barad develops a sophisticated conception of complex materiality that she calls “agential realism”. Here ‘the world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which “mattering” itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities’ (Barad, 2003, p. 817).

However, in specific intra-actions, an “agential cut” is enacted that causes a boundary to appear. This boundary separates matter into distinct entities and identifies some relationship among them such as causality, or observer and observed – subject and object. An agential cut is realized through what Barad calls an apparatus of observation, which is a specific material-discursive configuration that is exercised in an act of agency. These apparatuses also emerge through other agential cuts. An agential cut is always a performance: the boundaries distinguishing knower, known and knowledge do not pre-exist the cut. Further, an agential cut can only be performed in a local moment and place. Agency emerges through iterative changes that are enabled in the dynamic openness of each intra-action. Those who draw upon these ideas in education and educational research, such as Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010, p. 538), propose approaches such as ‘diffractive seeing’ and ‘nomadic thinking’. The researcher (or teacher, or learner) learns to understand themselves as part of and activated by ‘the waves of relational intra-actions between different bodies and concepts (meanings)’ in active encounters with a things such as data. To read these encounters diffractively is to see how ‘you install yourself in an event of “becoming-with” the data’.

For adult education, this emergentist ontology radically calls into question the material separation of humans, objects and their relations, including the separation of entities and representations, in activities of learning and pedagogy. It also insists that the future is radically open, for at every local performance of intra-action, there is space for material-discursive agency. The important issues are not *where* agency is located or what kind of agency is human or non-human, but rather the profound uncertainty about the nature of action, and controversies about how agency is distributed. Some critical educators, like Holifield (2009) who writes from the perspective of environmental justice, argue that sociomaterial accounts are powerful precisely because they can register a range of competing accounts of agency. The aim is to understand not what agency *is* but how certain accounts of it become stabilized and their effects.

Questions of power and the normative inspire continuing debate among adult educators. Some approaches such as ANT have been critiqued for offering a flat ontology where nothing can be challenged and no standpoint for intervention formulated. However, other researchers have shown clearly that ANT traces very well

how powerful assemblages – whether ideas, institutions, machines or dictators – emerge and extend themselves. It is an approach that is precisely about intervention and experimentation given the performative ontology it enacts. Sociomaterial approaches can reveal materialist dynamics of oppression, exclusion, transgression and agonism that are at play but often overlooked in educational processes. They also can illuminate openings and ambivalences for entry, opportunities for interruption, and strategies for productive materialist coalitions. More importantly, as political philosopher Bennett's (2010, p.107) work shows, a materialist theory of democracy is enabled when we encounter the world 'as a swarm of vibrant materials entering and leaving agentic assemblages'. She follows the French philosopher Rancière in accepting that a political act not only disrupts, but also disrupts in order to radically change how people perceive the dominant partition of the sensible: the boundaries that distribute bodies so that some are visible as political actors and others ignored. However, Bennett asks, why is the power to disrupt limited to human speakers, and the power to provoke dramatic public perceptual shifts assumed to exclude non-humans?

> We might then entertain a set of crazy and not-so-crazy questions: Did the typical American diet play any role in engendering the widespread susceptibility to the propaganda leading up to the invasion of Iraq? Do sand storms make a difference to the spread of so-called sectarian violence? Does mercury help autism? In what ways does the effect on sensibility of a video game exceed the intentions of its designers and users? Can a hurricane bring down a president? Can HIV mobilize homophobia or an evangelical revival? (Bennett, 2010, p. 107)

As Bennett concludes, when the sensible is repartitioned, and the regime of the perceptible overthrown, new tactics emerge for enhancing, or weakening particular arrangements of the public. This opens different possibilities for research and practice.

A final contribution of sociomaterial approaches is to debates around the difficulties of conducting research. Suchman (2007) explains that sociomaterial orientations constantly remind us that we are an integral part of the apparatus through which our research objects are made. Once we step outside a representational idiom of (re)searching phenomena, we must confront the ways in which our practices of research and knowing are specific material entanglements that participate in (re)configuring the world as research. Sociomaterial approaches offer two starting points for this. The first is a sensibility for, and a language for speaking about, both the order and the mess that are mutually enacted in the material swarms of educational worlds. The mess is the lumpy stuff that continually spills out of categorizations and models: a necessary hinterland of details, contingency and banality that so often disappears in a focus on what appears to be self-evidently important and significant in research. As Suchman (2007) has been arguing for over two decades, we keep trying to order the mess with prescriptive devices – typologies, plans, maps, procedures, and instructions – but these are in themselves practices that are mutually constituted of ordering impulses and messy hinterlands. Sociomaterial approaches emphasize responsible knowing, research that explicates the boundary-making and the exclusions crafted through its own processes, and that traces the entanglement of the researcher in the vital swarms of the researched. This is a fraught endeavour of course, particularly when a human researcher is, in the final representation, speaking for the swarms and when a "unit of analysis" is a gathering, raising ethical and political questions of where one stops to "cut the network" in following the actors (Strathern, 1996).

Concluding remarks

We have been arguing that sociomaterial approaches offer useful theoretical and methodological sensibilities and questions for adult educational researchers. Our interest here has been primarily in the emphasis on materiality offered by these approaches, which show how it is relational and distributed within webs of thought and activity, social and physical phenomena in education. Further, they offer methods for analyzing how materializing processes are bound up with assembling and reassembling policies and practices, subjectivities and knowledge. While very different in their points of departure and foci for analysis, these approaches analyze processes termed learning as phenomena of emergence and orderings within and across space-time. They show the interdependence of entities, which not only de-centres the knowing subject but also unseats idealizations of enterprising, autonomous knowers. Most important perhaps, these approaches have offered resources to understand and engage, both pedagogically and critically, with the unpredictability and impossibility of educational processes. They could be enacted to unpick the fragile stabilities of devices that appear to be immutable and to show the productive openings created.

A key contribution of them all is to de-couple learning and knowledge production from a strictly human-centered socio-cultural ontology, and to liberate agency from its conceptual confines as a human-generated force. Instead, agency as well as knowledge is understood to be *enacted* in the emergence and interactions – as well as the exclusionings – occurring in the smallest encounters. In these material enactments bursting with life, this “vital materiality”, or “material-discursive agency”, boundaries and properties of elements come into being, subjects and objects are delineated, and relations are constituted that produce force. Nothing is determined in advance of its own emergence. Therefore, (unknown) radical future possibilities are available at every encounter. This is attuned to certain traditions of adult education research and may enable the emergence of sociomaterial questions and sensibilities as a matter of concern in its enactments. But all this is conditional upon moving research from a focus on representation to a more experimental performative engagement with the materializing of practice.

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Between external prescription and local practice

The uses of official knowledge by adult education professionals in Portugal

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Abstract

This article presents the results of research where the main objective was to achieve a better understanding of the uses made by professionals in the adult education sphere of the official knowledge that provides the framework and guidelines for their work. The study was undertaken using Bernstein's theoretical model of the structure of official pedagogical discourse, and employed an essentially ethnographic fieldwork methodology to analyse the work of a team of adult education specialists working in a local development association in the north of Portugal. The results of the study show that the team was able to make both reproductive and recontextualising use of official knowledge, thereby demonstrating that, even in workplaces where external prescription is extremely influential, it is possible to put official knowledge to alternative i.e. more effective, locally-adapted use.

Keywords: official knowledge; knowledge use; adult education professionals; sociology of education; Portugal

Introduction

In the field of adult education, the study about professional educators and trainers has a long standing tradition (Scheffknecht, 1980; Jarvis, 1997; Merriam & Brockett, 1997), and we can say that in the last years this research has gained more visibility. Several studies funded by the European Commission provide concrete evidence in this respect

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(Research voor Beleid & PLATO, 2008a, 2008b; Buiskool, Broek, van Lakerveld, Zarifis & Osborne, 2010), namely analyzing the adult learning professions in Europe and the key competences for adult learning professionals. A series of thematic issues dedicated to the adult education professionals, organized by the *European Journal of Education* (Osborne, 2009), and by the *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* (Jütte, Nicoll, & Salling Olesen, 2011a), are also symptomatic of the growing importance of this particular area of research.

Some of this research has described and reflected about the diversity of adult education professionals (teachers, trainers, animators, training managers, etc.), their work contexts (schools, associations, training or community centers, etc.), their working conditions, (volunteers, part-time or full-time paid professionals) (Jarvis, 1997; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Osborne & Sankey, 2009; Jütte, Nicoll & Salling Olesen, 2011b). Most studies about adult education workers, however, have been made around such issues as the profession, professionalization procedures and professional development. The debate about the existence (or not) of adult education professionals and the necessary requirements to be a professional (academic degree, basic theoretical competencies, codes of ethics, regulations to define and access the profession, among other issues) has been enriched by different authors in the last two or three decades (Jarvis, 1989; Jarvis & Chadwick, 1991; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Osborne & Sankey, 2009; Ackland, 2011).

The issue of professionalization, professional development and professional knowledge of these actors has gaining increasing interest and has been mainly based on the critical analysis of: the most influential educational policies in different countries (Guimarães, 2009; Osborne & Sankey, 2009; Lassnigg, 2011); the differences between professionalization and other approaches, such as quality management (Egetenmeyer & Käpplinger, 2011); and the required competences of these professionals, including the pedagogical knowledge (Maier-Gutheil & Hof, 2011).

In our view all these analytical and research perspectives contribute to improve the knowledge basis of those working in the vast and complex field of adult education. However, there is one area of research which has been underestimated and that we consider quite relevant, namely the study of the uses that adult education professionals make of the official knowledge in their institutions (Loureiro & Cristóvão, 2010). In fact, professionalization is not simply a question of acquiring knowledge, but one of putting that knowledge into uses within the work context.

Sociology of education approaches (or, at least, part of it) can be helpful in considering the use of knowledge in educational work contexts. In fact, it is important to note that sociology of education has long focussed its attention primarily on school education and, when it analyses the knowledge used therein, concentrates above all on the content and transmission of that knowledge, and the corresponding effects (Young, 1971; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1978). Bernstein (1990) argues, however, that those working with sociology of education approaches have not paid appropriate attention to the intrinsic characteristics of communication in the pedagogical sphere, nor indeed has any theory of communication been developed for this sector. While researchers have concentrated on communication as being something that transmits external relations of domination, their analysis has treated the means of communication, i.e. the specialist discourse of education, as if they were unimportant in concretising these relations.

Educational sociologists have dealt with school-based knowledge in the following ways: (a) knowledge assumed to be neutral, and therefore requires no analysis; (b) being non-neutral, school-based knowledge causes some to succeed and others to fail but, while the use of knowledge may count among the possible causes of this situation, it

remains largely unanalysed, and the school remains a "black box"; (c) school-based knowledge is a social construction that involves struggles and conflicts and the analysis of its content and organisation is therefore crucial (Loureiro, 2009).

The research reported in this article treads different ground in two senses. Firstly, its concern is not so much the curricular content and organisation of knowledge, but the uses to which educational agents put knowledge in their daily practice. Secondly, it focuses on practitioners in non-formal adult education. More specifically, it seeks to understand the uses to which these professionals put the official knowledge or official pedagogical discourse in Bernstein terms (1990, 1996), that guides their activity. In other words, the main objective of this article is to contribute to a better understanding of the uses made by professionals in the non-formal adult education sphere of the official knowledge that provides the framework and guidelines for their work.

In spite of what has been suggested above regarding the conventional approaches adopted in the sociology of education, it is possible to find authors who have, to some extent, studied what educational agents do with the knowledge that is central to their profession (Apple, 1986, 1993; Bernstein, 1990, 1996, 1999; Perrenoud, 1999). Such studies constitute a tangible shift in how this area of sociology analyses knowledge. Before summarising the methodology used in our study and discussing the results obtained, in the section that follows we review the work of some of these analysts, which can be used to do research on how professionals in the field of adult education make use of official knowledge.

The sociology of education and its analysis of the use of knowledge

Knowledge and official pedagogical discourse: from Apple to Bernstein

Apple (1979, 1982, 1986, 1993) has produced a vast body of work on school-based knowledge; of particular interest to the present study is his analysis of the how the official bodies that control official knowledge influence the work of teachers, since this has direct bearing on the relation the latter have with knowledge. His research on the production, distribution and organisation of official curricula in the USA indicated that large educational publishing houses, in partnership with the state, exert a determining influence (Apple, 1982, 1986, 1993), and are able to control both the content and the form of school-based knowledge, as well as the tools used to put it into practice. As a result, teachers' work falls under outside control, since the content transmitted, the way the teachers' work is planned, and the pedagogical techniques used, are all externally predefined and prescribed. A sharper separation emerges between those who conceive and plan the content of education and those who transmit it: teachers become mere executers and, as such, their work is deskilled, they lose competences and knowledge, and their reflexive capacity is diminished.

Apple (1982, 1993) believes that teachers nevertheless make creative use of both curriculum and textbooks whenever they deconstruct and reconstruct officially-sanctioned knowledge, and whenever they make alternative use of official procedures, i.e. whenever they subvert what has previously been formatted by external agents. Regardless of the degree of real autonomy available to teachers, Apple's findings encourage analysts to carefully examine how actors respond to the official documentation with which they are required to work. In the specific case of education, much remains to be done if we are to understand how teachers, students and other actors in this field come to accept, interpret, reinterpret or reject (totally or in part) the texts with which they work (Apple, 1993).

Another important contribution to our analysis has been Bernstein's (1990, 1996, 1999, 2001) theory of the structure of official pedagogical discourse, i.e. his theory of how educational institutions construct, regulate and distribute this discourse. In his model, educational discourse, practice and organisation is constructed in three interdependent fields: production, recontextualisation and reproduction. Here, a pedagogical device provides the internal grammar of official pedagogical discourse through the rules of distribution, recontextualisation and evaluation that it imposes. These hierarchically inter-related rules underpin all three of these fields, thereby structuring pedagogical discourse (Bernstein, 1990). The field of production is responsible for creating the intellectual dimension of the educational system: it is where educational discourse and practices are generated (along with the processes of creation, modification and exchange of new ideas and specialist discourses), and where new knowledge is legitimately produced. The distribution rules aim at controlling access to the field where legitimated knowledge is produced, as well as who may transmit it, to whom, and under what conditions (Bernstein, 1990, 1996).

Those active in the field of recontextualisation selectively undertake transfers from the field of discourse production to that of reproduction i.e. the original discourse is detached and relocated. The function of this field is to act as a bridge between the fields of production and reproduction, thereby regulating the circulation of texts between these fields. This field's main activity is the appropriation of discourse from the field of production and its transformation into official pedagogical discourse. When recontextualising agents first appropriate a text, it is subjected to an initial transformation before it is inserted into the field of reproduction.

Thus the principal activity in the field of recontextualisation is the construction of the "what" and the "how" of official pedagogical discourse, i.e. the establishment of the categories and relations to be transmitted and the manner of their transmission. The rules of recontextualisation fix both the external and internal limits of official pedagogical discourse and provide the basis for constructing the "what" and "how" involved. It is around these rules that real official pedagogical discourse is built and it is these rules that regulate the work of specialists in this field (Bernstein, 1996).

The field of reproduction is where practical pedagogy is undertaken, and where the selective reproduction of official pedagogical discourse occurs (Bernstein, 1990). Evaluation rules regulate pedagogical practice, for they guarantee that teachers transmit material with a specific content in a given locale, and that a predetermined cohort or age group of students absorbs it, in accordance with clearly defined levels of achievement to be attained (Bernstein, 1996).

The model envisages a structural and functional hierarchy that extends from the field of production through to that of reproduction, each field having its own organs and agents. But, as Bernstein (1990, 1996) notes, the model has its own internal dynamic and, as it develops, generates spaces and opportunities for divergences from the model to occur. As Bernstein (1996) stressed and the present article also demonstrates, the model is applicable outside the formal school context, though certain adaptations are required.

Both hierarchy and internal dynamic are essential if we are to understand if and how actors discover and take advantage of the spaces left by the state, or create such spaces themselves, while they are reproducing the official discourse. In our view, recontextualisation can also occur in the sphere of practice, opening up the possibility for actors to establish an active type of relationship with knowledge and with the official pedagogical discourse.

As contemporary society becomes increasingly "pedagogised", "new pedagogical cadres" emerge, with new professional discourses based on updated research and policy reforms, as well as the corresponding 'new positions, planners and transmitters of knowledge' (Bernstein 2001, pp. 15-16). Thus, applying Bernstein's model outside the conventional school context provides a test of its wider relevance, and allows us to map these recent shifts and to analyse both 'new content and the recontextualisation process that the new content presupposes' (Bernstein, 2001, p. 15).

The importance that new non-formal education contexts and actors have progressively gained over the years confers even greater explanatory potential to Bernstein's model. However, before looking at non-formal adult education and training, we will assess the contribution of two models that focus on the uses of knowledge in schools, and that recognise the important role official pedagogical discourse plays in communicating a particular "officialised" version of theoretical knowledge at the local level.

Towards an active relation between actors and knowledge

The work of Perrenoud (1999) and Caria (2000, 2002) provides a basis for identifying the potential that exists for teachers, while undertaking their professional activities, to establish and maintain an active relationship with the knowledge they use. This perspective permitted these authors to examine knowledge recontextualisation in a new context – that of reflection-in-action among professionals.

Caria (2000, 2002) studied the contextual use of abstract knowledge among primary and junior school teachers. His broad aim was to understand how they 'use the abstract knowledge that is transmitted to them either in initial higher education and/or in their subsequent in-service training' (Caria, 2002, p. 805). This knowledge consists of 'written discourse of a scientific-ideological, scientific-technical and philosophical-ideological nature, the formal organisation of which may relate to general questions, thematic specialisation or problematisation, internal coherence, systematising and/or validation of the development of the arguments advanced' (Caria, 2002, p. 806). The author produced a typology of knowledge-uses, ranging from the articulated use of abstract and local knowledge, to the non-use of abstract knowledge when undertaking specific actions.

Perrenoud (1999) analysed the professional practice of teachers with a view to understanding what resources they used when acting, in particular, in complex circumstances and situations. He began with the notion of competence, understood as the correct mobilisation of diverse resources (including, though not necessarily, abstract knowledge) in a given action. The relevance of this approach to our own study is that it allowed for the possibility of actors' making competent use of theoretical knowledge, which would only be possible if they were capable of reflexive intermediation between this knowledge and the practical situation confronting them, i.e. between theoretical knowledge and their experiential knowledge. Perrenoud's approach helps us to assess the actors' relations with knowledge in terms of its social and creative use, rather than merely its applicative mobilisation. Moreover, his specific concept of competence also helps us to understand if, how, when and in which particular practices educational agents establish a more active relationship with knowledge.

Research methodology

The research reported on here was undertaken on the basis of an ethnographic study of a team of adult education professionals in an Education and Training Centre (ETC) attached to a local development association (LDA) in the north of Portugal. Ethnography provides the means of understanding and translating "the other" (Geertz, 1983) and offers an appropriate strategy for confronting what is said with what is done (Silva, 2001). For these reasons, it was felt that this method was the most appropriate for studying how, in reality, official pedagogical knowledge is used. Furthermore, it did not require us to have recourse merely to the actors' own views and representations regarding their use of discourse.

The choice of the LDA, and the corresponding ETC and adult education team was the result of a three-phase process: (1) a survey of all the associations of this type active in the north of Portugal was conducted; (2) an assessment was made of the extent of each association's involvement in adult education; and (3) a representative case was chosen for further in-depth study.

The unit of analysis consisted of a six-member team of adult education specialists (of which 5 were female) between 25 and 45 years old. All had first degrees in either education or sociology, and varying periods of professional experience. The team's activities and the uses its members made of official knowledge as they carried out their duties were systematically observed.

The ETC was visited three times a week over six months. The physical facilities comprised a reception area, and offices and rooms used for technical, administrative, training, relaxation and other activities, though observations were primarily made in the main office. Information was collected by systematic observation over extended periods, and through informal conversations with team members i.e. the data consisted of what they said and did. All questions were posed in context i.e. based exclusively on what had been directly heard and observed. Written documents were only examined if team members had produced used or explicitly referred to them.

This strategy permitted – indeed demanded – the use of other techniques, such as informal conversations and interviews, and documentary analysis. Thus, a combination of distinct observation- and observer-based techniques lay at the heart of the ethnographic strategy adopted (Merriam & Simpson, 1989; Burgess, 1997).

All the information was recorded in the form of field notes in various locales, and each day it was organised in a fieldwork diary under the following headings: (1) descriptive notes, presenting what had been observed, where and concerning whom; (2) methodological notes, relating to the tools used, the type and amount of information gathered, with reflections on the relevance the observations; (3) empirico-theoretical notes, reflecting an initial theoretical interpretation of the data.

The processing of the information was done in two stages: (1) the first interpretations of the data were made while we still had the ETC "under observation", allowing us to provide team members with the initial, provisional results of the research; (2) later, with the fieldwork concluded, more detailed and in-depth analysis was undertaken. The basic technique used to process the data was triangulation, i.e. the cross-referencing of (a) our own interpretations with the views expressed by team members; and (b) of team member's written and oral discourse, content analysis being applied to discourses of both varieties.

In the content analysis it was of fundamental importance the confrontation between what we can consider the guiding hypotheses that resulted, in essence, from the literature review and the explanatory emerging hypotheses that resulted from field

observations. These last hypotheses made us look for new theoretical insights in order to better interpret the collected data. As such, the confrontation between theory and field data was a dynamic process and permanent process, inspired by both the literature and the fieldwork.

Official knowledge and pedagogical-professional recontextualisation

This section presents the results of the study; it begins by conceptualising the activities the adult education team undertook, and ends by analysing precisely how team members employ official knowledge.

A typology of team activities

We identified 5 types of activities: (1) technical activities connected with the diagnosis, planning, conception, organisation, execution and evaluation of adult educational initiatives; (2) coordination of the team, and organisation and evaluation of its work; (3) management activities related either to the physical, material, human and financial resources deployed in the ETC; (4) directive (or decision-making) activities, associated with actions/initiatives requiring a formal commitment by the ETC; and (5) "other" activities not directly related to adult education. Team members' involvement is quite distinct in each of the above types of activity.

The adult education team's activities can also be categorised according to three distinct time-scales: (1) the cycle of day-to-day activities involving the organisation, implementation and evaluation of adult education initiatives, along with the associated managerial, team-coordination and directive functions; (2) the annual cycle of activities focussing on the evaluation of past initiatives and the diagnosis, planning and conception of future adult education initiatives; and (3) a highly variable cycle of work that corresponds to the "other" above-mentioned activities.

The field of official recontextualisation

The work context observed in this study has two striking characteristics that both connect and regulate the types of activities undertaken by the team: (1) the extent of the normative dimension of education in general; and (2) the specific institutional framework in which adult education functions. These characteristics constitute an essential basis for addressing the question of how official knowledge is used.

In reality, apart from the normativity of what team members do, there exist informational structures that mark out the type of adult education provided. In other words, from the very beginning, the philosophy underpinning the activities to be undertaken is defined by the structure that Bernstein (1990, 1996) refers to as the field of recontextualisation of official pedagogical discourse. The field of recontextualisation is delineated by the sphere of influence of officials from the government departments directly responsible for adult education, namely the Directorate General for Vocational Training (DGFV), the Institute for Training Innovation (INOFOR), the Portuguese Institute for Employment and Professional Training (IEFP), and staff from the nation-wide Operational Programme for Employment, Training and Social Development (POEFDS). Recontextualisation takes place in these organisations i.e. knowledge that has been generated in the field of production (i.e. by researchers, experts, etc.) is transformed into official pedagogical knowledge and communicated down to the local level, using official pedagogical discourse.

Concrete examples of Bernstein's field of recontextualisation of official discourse include: (a) the way in which certain aspects of adult education and training courses (e.g. teaching loads, module content) are previously defined and predetermined; (b) the philosophy and methodologies underpinning the framework documentation adult education professionals receive from the official bodies responsible for their activities, and (c) in the forms that team members habitually are required to use. The RVC (Skill Validation & Certification) documentation used to monitor and validate the competences trainees acquire over the course of their careers provides a good example of the latter manifestation of the recontextualisation process. It is this type of documentation (forms, records, etc.) that Apple (1986, 1993) calls texts.

The main activities of the team are situated within Bernstein's sphere of reproduction of official pedagogical discourse, and are bounded by the corresponding recontextualisation field, which in turn prescribes the "what" and the "how" of the knowledge that is generated in the field of production. From a Bernsteinian viewpoint, the adult education staff reproduces the discourse that has already been recontextualised in the intermediary field that separates the production of official knowledge from its reproduction.

Though the recontextualisation field presupposes a rather rigid and hierarchical relationship between adult education practice and official pedagogical discourse, with team members merely reproducing official discourse, might there be more to their role in determining the relationship they establish with the official knowledge on which this discourse is based? Despite the government control of the activities of adult education professionals, do they have any space for autonomy in which to make alternative use of official knowledge, as in Bernstein's (1990, 1996) concept of room for manoeuvre?

Forms and uses of official knowledge

The official pedagogical knowledge employed by adult education staff takes three forms – conceptual, philosophical and procedural (Loureiro, 2009):

1. Conceptual knowledge refers to "what is", providing a framework of concepts (e.g. evaluation, partnership, trainer, diagnosis), typologies (e.g. of adult education), and phenomena/categories whose conceptual pertinence is typically communicated in statistical form (e.g. data on illiteracy rates). Thus the purpose of this type of knowledge is to define and classify.
2. Philosophical knowledge refers to the general principles that underpin a theoretical model, on the basis of which particular actions may be justified and/or legitimised. In adult education, the philosophical knowledge in question is that deployed through the EFA (the national Adult Education & Training model) which, in certifying both vocational training and equivalence between informally- and formally-acquired competences, invests adult education with a quite specific meaning. Thus the purpose of this type of knowledge is to legitimise actions.
3. Procedural knowledge is used to define an action that is to be taken, indicating how, when and through which instruments given objectives are to be achieved. It is therefore used to prescribe and regulate specific actions, and often is to be found in documentation providing guidelines for particular actions or initiatives.

Members of the adult education team were found to use all three types of official knowledge in practically all their activities, ranging from the most routine to the most

complex of tasks, though the procedural form is used far more than others. This contradicts the notion that professional practitioners only use implicit knowledge when dealing with difficult situations. Moreover, team members use official knowledge with different aims in mind: (a) planning a given set of actions (using the procedural and conceptual forms); (b) undertaking planned actions (drawing on the same two forms); (c) legitimising past or planned actions, and/or justifying changes to them (deploying all three forms); and (d) describing/explaining actions taken (applying the procedural and conceptual forms).

While the above analysis provided some clues to the uses team members make of the knowledge emanating from the field where official knowledge is recontextualised, we needed further clarification of whether official knowledge is, in fact, transformed in some way when it is put into practice i.e. do alterations occur in the purposes of official knowledge and/or its specific content (understood as the features that distinguish each of its three forms) as it passes from the recontextualisation field to that of adult education practice?

At first sight, it seems that there is only one reproductive use of official knowledge, i.e. where it is drawn on by practitioners in precisely the form in which it manifests itself in the recontextualisation field, i.e. where it is merely applied, without there being any change in its purposes or content. However, team members made reproductive use of all three forms of official knowledge: conceptual knowledge was applied in this way when, for example, they used educational and training typologies (supplied from above) to classify the type of initiatives and actions they were undertaking, or when they were preparing documents that responded to external institutional imperatives (e.g. when the ETC was applying for accreditation as a provider of a particular type of training). In these cases, neither the purpose nor content of official knowledge were transformed as they were being applied, team members accepting the necessity of the classificatory and definitional aims contained in the documents originating in the recontextualisation field.

The reproductive use of procedural knowledge was visible in many procedures team members followed in which there was no transformation of the purposes or content of official guidelines. For example, when they (a) prepared documents relating to the planning of a specific course, based on the procedural guidelines of the specific government training programmes involved; (b) created dossiers containing all the technical and pedagogical details of a particular course (based on the guidelines provided by the same entity); (c) wrote the minutes of meetings of Adult Education & Training (EFA) teaching teams; or (d) filled in forms relating to the work and performance of EFA trainees. Thus, neither are the purposes of official procedural knowledge altered as team members undertake their duties, nor is the corresponding content transformed, because they dictate the order in which things are to be done, how actions are to be executed, as well as providing the instruments that provide a framework for ensuring that what was intended is carried out.

The following reflection, proffered by a female member of the team with regard to the technical-pedagogical dossiers of specific training courses, illustrates the procedural form taken by official knowledge:

> … I'm organising the technical-pedagogical dossier for one of our courses … We are obliged to do this; there are POEFDS guidelines [on the internet] for how to compile these dossiers, and it's those that we follow …

Reproductive use of the philosophical form of official knowledge was also readily identifiable. For example, when one member of the team was explaining to a trainer what the RVC was and how EFA course curricula were organised, she picked up an

official document, and read out to him the principles underlying the key competences the training was intended to impart, in order to justify the type of actions he was to undertake.

While the existence of widespread reproductive use of official knowledge cannot be denied, a more detailed analysis of the data collected indicates that team members also make recontextualising use of such knowledge, altering at least one of the two dimensions (either purpose and/or content) of the official knowledge coming from the recontextualisation field. This type of use was more visible where the knowledge involved was most subject to official guidelines, namely procedural knowledge. We were able to identify three distinct types of recontextualising use of official procedural knowledge, essentially related to the outcome-structuring tools (or "texts", to use Apple's terminology) provided for the guidance of adult education teams. These tools/texts were subject to: (a) partial use; and/or (b) re-sequenced use; and/or (c) transformative use.

A good example of both partial and re-sequenced uses of these texts can be found in the planning of the "Life Themes" component of EFA courses, in which at least one broad theme (such as Culture) is integrated into all course modules. For planning purposes, the DGFV provides four tools/texts to be used in a predetermined order: "Overall Design", "Key Competences Management", "Life Themes", and "Integrating Activity" (Loureiro, 2009). The conversation below occurred during the fieldwork (all names are fictitious): while team members retain the original purpose of the official knowledge they are deploying, they transform its content by dropping one of the four tools/texts provided ("Key Competences Management") and changing the sequence in which they are applied (leaving "Overall Design" until last).

Episode 1. Partial and re-sequenced use of tools/texts

On her desk, Margarida has a pile of material provided by the DGFV for the preparation of "Life Themes", one of which must be incorporated into each training course. After leafing through the documents, she turns to Jaime and asks for help.

Margarida: Jaime, do you understand all of this?

Jaime: Yes.

Margarida: So tell me… the trainers have to indicate here the "sub-themes" they're going to use, don't they?

Jaime: Yes, there on the "Life Themes" form you've got in your hand. Then put the details of the corresponding activities on the "Integrating Activity" form.

Margarida: And what about the "Overall Design" form?

Jaime: Well, Joana, Sílvia and I discussed this and decided not to fill in the form for the whole course right at the beginning, as the DGFV expects us to do, but to do it bit by bit instead.

Margarida: Joana, I'm sorry to interrupt you. Are you applying the "Overall Design" form?

Joana: Well yes, we are using it. But we don't apply it to the whole course right at the very beginning, as we were told to do in our training sessions. We're developing the design as the course proceeds.

Cristina: But when the local DGFV officer was here, he told us to use all the forms, filling in the "Overall Design" form first. So that's what I did.

Joana: Yes, I know that's what we were told, but we're not doing it in that order. And we're not using all the forms either. When they introduce these new systems, it's only by using the forms that you're able to figure out whether they work or not. And it turns out that what we were told just isn't viable.

Margarida: Right, I see. So which forms are we using and in what order?

Joana: Firstly, we never fill in all these tables because some of them duplicate the same information. The "Overall Design" and the "Key Competences" forms are very similar, as you can see. So we don't use the "Key Competences" form at all.

Margarida: Yes, I see what you mean.

Joana: That's why we don't use this one. In our day to day work, we use the "Life Themes" form, where we include the sub-themes into which the life theme is to be divided; and we use the "Integrating Activities" form, too. The work is done sub-theme by sub-theme: for each sub-theme we devise an "Integrating Activity". So we fill in the tables bit by bit. We only fill in the "Overall Design" form at the end, once we've completed all the sub-themes.

Margarida: I'm starting to understand now. It really makes more sense this way.

Joana: In our initial training, we did an exercise on how to fill in these forms. But here we don't follow that procedure exactly, because we soon realised that the forms weren't adapted to the type of situation we're working in. Our instructions were to fill in the "Overall Design" form first. But this makes the whole process really inflexible, and if we want the trainees to participate, and to contribute to defining the themes, and to work well on them, we thought it was better to work theme by theme, rather than planning all the "Life Themes" at the beginning.

Margarida: I think you were right.

Since one of the team members came to make reproductive use of official procedural knowledge, while others did not, this episode shows that the recontextualisation process is neither even nor instantaneous, i.e. it does not necessarily incorporate everyone at the same time. It is important to recognise that the recontextualisation that led to changes being made at the local level involved team members' (a) capacity to be selective in the use of the tools/texts supplied by the government bodies; (b) capability to adapt tools/texts to the real-world circumstances in which they have to apply them; and (c) capacity to apply critical and evaluative faculties (drawing on their individual and collective know-how) as well as being able to legitimise the use of such tools/texts in a partial, re-sequenced or transformative manner. It is the combination of these skills makes it possible that changes in how the training courses will be made. Also, since the way in which the team arrived at this change involved recontextualisation, the subsequent description and explanation (by one member to another) of the new procedure to be adopted should be seen as an integral part of the recontextualisation process at the local level.

The documentation provided by state bodies in support of the RVC (Skill Validation & Certification) process provides an example of a use of official knowledge that transforms rather than merely reproduces the knowledge inherent in the tools/texts involved. The following excerpts from a further episode observed during the fieldwork

illustrates how oral and/or written changes were made to questions contained in these tools/texts, and how questions that were not originally contemplated in them were included.

Episode 2. Transformative uses of tools/texts

When consulting the dossier of a particular EFA course, a researcher noticed that some of the forms that were being used for the RVC process were different from the official forms he had analysed earlier. As Joana was responsible for the training course in question, he checked with her why these differences existed.

Researcher: Joana, this RVC dossier on the Geriatrics course contains forms that differ from those used by the DGFV.

Joana: Yes, we made some changes to them because, as we started to use them, we realised this was necessary. Sometimes we add a few questions, and sometimes we change the language to make it easier for trainees to understand.

Researcher: Exactly how are these changes made?

Joana: Changes to the Portuguese are made orally when we have meetings with the trainees. When we add questions aimed at collecting more data than the original document contemplated, we ask trainees to make additions on the various forms they fill in. For example, here on this "Participant Details" sheet, where they're asked to provide data on their participation in social activities, we've added a question asking them to specify what form that participation takes.

Researcher: Yes, I noticed that.

Joana: The way the original form was organised, trainees only put a cross in a box to indicate if they had participated in any type of association. But that doesn't tell us very much, so we put more specific oral questions to trainees, and they write their answers here in the space we've created. It's important for us to have more data on issues like this: it'll help us to do a better evaluation of citizenship, which is one of the key competences we have to examine.

Researcher: So, basically, you've added this question with a view to obtaining more information?

Joana: Yes. In other situations, we write down additional questions in our notebooks and get the answers in meetings with the trainee. This is also to complement the information we collect using the official forms. We do this because we've already seen that the forms have certain shortcomings. On other occasions, additional questions can be put during the RVC process itself. Since we've concluded that it was necessary to get more detailed data, we also take advantage of informal conversations with the trainees to collect information on certain issues. Basically, these are the alterations we've made to the tools we're provided with.

Researcher: Tell me something else. Do you ever put into written form, i.e. include in the official RVC documents you prepare, the questions that you have only posed orally?

Joana: Sometimes we do. Not the corrections we make to the Portuguese; but we have written down the questions relating to the type of participation trainees have had in associations. In fact, the question arose in a session with the trainees: we hadn't prepared it in advance. That's how it normally happens: whenever we find that a question is pertinent to the work we're doing, and that the answers will help us achieve our aims, we subsequently include it in the materials we use.

Researcher: So there are questions that you have prepared in advance, and that are put to trainees in your meetings with them, and there are others that just arise in your conversations with them?

Joana: Yes. Also, there are issues that emerge out of conversations here, amongst ourselves, concerning the documentation we're using. We sometimes conclude that what's on the forms doesn't go far enough, and so we develop complementary questions. We always analyse the documentation in advance, and if we feel that something's missing, we make the alterations we consider appropriate. In the beginning, because we lacked experience, we jotted down any doubts in a notebook; later, if we found that they were well-founded, we would alter the original materials. But now we don't do it like that. Now we analyse all the documentation first, check whether any alterations are necessary, if anything needs to be added, or if the format of the document needs to be altered and, if so, we make the changes immediately, before the RVC process begins, so that right from the start we're using the materials in their adapted form. The aim is always to obtain more and better information.

Researcher: What are these adaptations based upon?

Joana: That varies. Sometimes they're based on our own training and sometimes we refer to books. But mostly we work as a team, so as the work of applying the documentation progresses, we are all learning how to identify materials that either aren't sufficiently well-adapted to the situation in which we have to use them, or that have gaps. But you have to realise that we draw on our experience when we make these alterations; when I began here, I did everything exactly how I had been shown in my DGFV training. Once I'd gained experience, I started to make alterations and to introduce new things.

As in the case of Episode 1, this episode allows us to see how, in concrete activities, official knowledge and contextual knowledge articulate: it is this very articulation that generates the recontextualised use of official knowledge; and it is the contextual knowledge that enables professionals to apply their critical faculties to the official knowledge contained in the tools/texts provided by the state bodies involved. The critical analysis of RVC documentation was either performed in advance i.e. was based upon a reflexive assessment of the activities to be taken, or it was the result of improvisation in which the alterations judged to be appropriate were made in the very act of applying the tools/texts in question. In both cases, team members made use of what Schön (1983) has referred to as "reflection-in-action".

Episode 2 also demonstrates the crucial importance of experience in the whole process. Experience permitted team members to go beyond being mere appliers, and become recontextualisers of official knowledge, allowing them to fulfil tasks in a different way, more in line with local conditions. Their experience also gave them the capacity to identify in advance the relevance of making adjustments to the tools/texts involved in their work.

Thus contextual knowledge provided the basis for a reflexive exercise through which team members were able to detect any deficiencies in key documentation, and assess the contribution that the respective alterations would make. Their recontextualising use of official knowledge took place in two distinct phases: (a) experimentation i.e. the "trying out" of various modifications to official knowledge; where this yielded positive results, there was (b) a "mainstreaming" of a specific recontextualising use of official knowledge. Proceeding in this way is crucial to the construction of contextual or local knowledge, in which official knowledge is incorporated.

In all the cases referred to above, the recontextualisation process is applied to the content of official knowledge; as the adult education professionals undertake their activities, the purpose of official knowledge remains unaltered.

Conclusion

The results of this research demonstrate that it is possible, even where little structural flexibility exists, for official knowledge (i.e. resources and rules) to be used in alternative ways. The adult education professionals that constituted the focus of the study not only made reproductive but also recontextualising use of official knowledge, and this was possible because of their ability to articulate official knowledge and their own contextual knowledge. This capacity provided clear evidence of the existence of what Bernstein (1990, 1996) called the "margin for manoeuvre" – a limited space for autonomy that the system either concedes to practitioners, or that the latter creates and secures in the course of their professional activities, and in which they may make alternative use of texts (Apple, 1993). Put another way, our conclusions support Schön's (1983) idea that when official knowledge is applied in a specific and concrete context, it is frequently subjected to a practical epistemology that works in the opposite direction to that of technical rationality.

Based on the observations made and reported on in this article, we can conclude that, in practice, contextual knowledge and official knowledge regularly interpenetrate one another, and that if the latter is subjected to a recontextualisation process, it comes to form part of the former. This is how official knowledge contributes to the construction and reconstruction of a contextual knowledge that has relevance not only for the locale in which adult education professionals work, but also for the territory their activities serve.

The fact that the professionals analysed in this study are not mere appliers but also recontextualisers of official knowledge, as well as being producers of local knowledge, suggests that they have an active relation with both official knowledge and contextual knowledge, and that in their daily practice they play a reflexively mediating role between structure (i.e. knowledge originating in the official field of recontextualisation) and the specificities of their own practice and contextual knowledge. In this manner, actors can be considered reproducers of structure (Giddens, 1984), though not necessarily only reproducers, since they have sufficient room for manoeuvre to put to alternative use the resources that are placed at their disposal and the rules that are intended to govern their activities.

In spite of the limitations of our results, derived from the ethnographic nature of the study and, particularly, of its validity to a specific context, the research done provides a contribution to a better understanding of the uses adult education professional make of the official knowledge they deal with. Sociological approaches in general, as Giddens' one (1984), or the sociology of education perspective used in this research (for example Bernstein, 1990, 1996) that notwithstanding the normative and hierarchical character of its analysis - permits to reflect about the existence of room to manoeuvre for social actors - are, in our perspective, a very relevant contribution to a stronger epistemological development of the field of adult education.

In our view the problematic of professionalization and professional development of adult education workers should be analyzed through research focusing on the uses these actors make of the official knowledge structuring their action, in their daily practice. Besides other aspects or dimensions, these studies can show that the degree of

proximity between the educational programs and the adults' needs and expectations depends on the type of knowledge use. In fact, this study demonstrates that a reproductive use of the official knowledge will lead to educational programs that are more distant from the needs and interests of the participant adults in adult education programs.

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Comparing 'Popular' and 'State' education in Latin America and Europe

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Abstract

In the 1970s, a radical adult education movement in Latin America, operating outside the state and engaging in what it called 'popular education', sparked world-wide interest in its educational theory and practice. More recently, with a change in state formations in Latin America, the movement has reconsidered its potential relationship with the state. Though Europe has its own history of popular education, some have argued that advanced economies and welfare states co-opted any strong independent educational movement: today popular education is more likely to take place 'within and against' the state, rather than outside it. Based on literature review, personal interviews and site visits, this article (a) discusses what is understood by popular education (b) outlines the development of popular education in Latin America, examining its relationship with different types of state (c) considers differences between Latin America and Europe and what, if anything, popular educators in the two regions might learn from each other.

Keywords: popular education; radical education; social movement education; Latin America

In the 1970s, the emergence of a radical adult education movement in Latin America, operating outside the state and engaging in what it called 'popular education', sparked world-wide interest among educators working for social change. Consequently, the term 'popular education' became adopted, resurrected or increasingly used throughout the globe (Arnold & Burke, 1983; Crowther, Martin & Shaw, 1999; Hunter, 2010). In recent decades, however, changing patterns in state formations in Latin America, particularly from dictatorship to 'democracy', have led to debates about whether or not popular education should continue to remain apart from or should now engage with the state (Gadotti & Torres, 1992; Brandão, 2002; de Souza, 2004; Quintana, 2006/2008). Similar issues have been discussed in Europe, though less urgently and against a

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different social and political background (Jackson, 1995; Allman, 1999; Crowther, Galloway & Martin, 2005).

In trying to adapt aspects of Latin American popular education to Europe, where 'education' and 'state education' are almost synonymous, it is helpful to understand how the independent popular education movement has fared within different state formations in Latin America. Conversely, as Latin Americans seek to engage with the state, they may have lessons to learn from popular education in Europe. This article first discusses what is understood by popular education, including how its theory and practice is affected by different ideological outlooks. It then (a) outlines the development of popular education in Latin America, examining its relationship with different types of state (b) considers differences between Latin America and Europe and what, if anything, popular educators in the two regions might learn from each other.

Understanding popular education

Globally, the meaning of 'popular education' has varied according to where, when and by whom it has been cited. Braster (2011) and Tiana Ferrer (2011) analyse the term historically; Steele (2007) charts a variety of interpretations and practices in Europe, from the middle ages onwards; the Popular Education News (2011) provides links to contemporary initiatives. In the 1970s and 1980s, having been inspired by the ideas of the Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire (1972/1985, 1993), when Latin Americans made imaginative developments in theory and practice (Kane, 2001; Carrillo, 2011) they strongly influenced global approaches to popular education, albeit in some contexts terms like 'radical education' or 'education for transformation' retained more currency.

In Spanish and Portuguese, the lingua francas of Latin America, the adjective 'popular' suggests belonging to 'the people', the majority of a nation's citizens who, in Latin America, are normally poor. It carries connotations of social class and could often be translated into English simply as 'poor' or 'working class'. 'Educación popular' (Spanish) or 'educação popular' (Portuguese), then, communicates the idea of an education of and for 'the people' rather than the elite. More recently, as people organised around issues like gender, human rights and interculturalism, 'popular' stretched to include these initiatives too; since the mass of people involved come from lower economic sectors anyway, however, class-based nuances generally still apply.

In Latin America, popular education is conceptualised as both a social movement of educators and an educational philosophy-cum-practice:

> …on the one hand it is a broad and open movement, with a degree of articulation and organisation (such as CEAAL [the Latin American Council for Adult Education] ...and other regional networks), while, on the other, it is a particular brand of critical thinking. (Zarco, 2001, p. 30)

In and outside Latin America, most definitions of popular education now share a number of characteristics (Kane, in press [A]) which, summarised briefly, are that in popular education:

- All education is considered political in that if it fails to challenge social injustice and inequality, by default it promotes it.
- There are different types of knowledge, engendered by different social circumstances, and education should consist of 'dialogue' between them.

- Education should encourage people to be authentic 'subjects' of change, to think critically and act for themselves, not follow leaders.
- Exciting methodologies have been developed to put these principles into practice (Arnold & Burke, 1983; Bustillos & Vargas, 1993). However, while Freire (1972/1985) criticised the 'banking' ('knowledge transfer') approach to education as elitist and dehumanising, the alternative is not simply a formulaic application of learner-centred methods: these too can have reactionary purposes.
- The concern is to help groups, or movements, collectively take action to try and bring about social change.
- 'Popular education' refers to a generic practice covering a variety of social actors – from peasants to factory workers, women to Indigenous people's groups and so on – and a variety of topics, whichever generate interest in bringing about change.

Having said that, contemporary definitions of popular education continue to vary and none is definitive or absolute. Differences are often subtle, simply emphasising some characteristics over others, and occasionally serious, often reflecting attempts to co-opt popular education for conservative ends (Carr, 1990; Gibson, 1994).

Ideological variation in popular education

Despite a sizeable literature on its definitions, then, and common ground over key principles (Arnold & Burke, 1983; Martin, 1999; Kane, 2001; Núñez, 2001; Schugurensky, 2010), in both Latin America and Europe there still remains variety in how popular education is understood, conceptually, and how it is put into practice. Reviewing one European event, von Kotze and Cooper (2000) were surprised that

> the explicitly political and social purpose which framed the conference proposal and which was restated unambiguously in the opening session seemed to be interpreted in such different ways. We were unsettled by the wide range of conceptualisations of popular education that emerged in some of the presentations and papers. (pp. 22-23)

At heart, the issue seems less related to education and more to do with general political or ideological outlook. Though a fundamental tenet of popular education is that it cannot be politically neutral, that it sides with the 'oppressed' and promotes critical thinking and 'conscientisation', in practice this is understood in different ways. The predominant ideological lens through which popular educators view the world may be Marxist, social democrat, nationalist, feminist, religious, environmentalist and so on, with many combinations and variations in-between. Kane (2001) analyses ideological differences among popular educators in Latin America and Scandrett (2001) and Nicholas (2001) address similar issues in Scotland.

While no expression of popular education should try to impose an ideology on learners, even if popular educators are exemplary practitioners, against 'banking education' and competent in the use of educational methodologies, their ideological orientation arguably affects their practice in three areas.

First, while popular educators problematise issues rather than provide answers, the problems they see and questions they ask inevitably spring from their particular view of the world. While the questions and problems to be addressed will not dictate what people should think, they direct what people will be thinking *about*. The Masters course I teach on popular education revolves around questions *I* think are important to address; a different educator would probably ask different questions, leading to different discussions.

Second, popular education is based on a *dialogue of knowledges* ('diálogo de saberes: Ghiso, 1993) to which educators do and should contribute their own ideas. How this affects the educational experience of learners depends on many factors – how it resonates with their experience, the regard they have for the educator – but their ideological outlook inevitably enters the educational blender.

Finally, popular educators regularly engage in 'conjunctural analysis', reading society to consider how, where and when they might maximise their contribution to change. Clearly influenced by their (or collectively, their movement or organisation's) ideological outlook, this analysis affects how the educators operate, including their perceived relationship with the state. Social democratic educators, for example, are likely to see fewer problems working with the state than their Marxist counterparts.

In discussing the relationship between popular education and the state, then, it is important to recognise that while in theory the principles of popular education should be universal, in practice, due to a range of ideological perspectives, there is no single, homogenous popular education movement, in Latin America or anywhere else, and this ideological variation may influence the manner in which popular educators and social movements engage with the state.

Popular education in Latin American states: from dictatorship to revolution

Before examining its interaction with different types of state, it is helpful to have an overview of how the popular education movement has developed in Latin America.

Overview of the popular education movement

Though its roots have been traced back to Europe and the French revolution (Puiggrós, 1994; Soethe, 1994), to early 20th century working class movements (Jara, 1994) and to the Pervian thinker-activist José Mariátegui (Núñez, 1992), I would argue that the contemporary popular education movement in Latin America has had five broad periods of development. They offer a starting point for understanding the movement today, albeit the divisions between them are blurred and contestable.

Period 1 covers the late 1950s and 1960s, when Freire and others were developing new educational ideas in Brazil and the term 'popular education' started to be used. Period 2, the 'boom' period, covers the 1970s to mid 1980s when, against a backdrop of growing authoritarianism and economic hardship, social movements flourished and attempted to bring about change through extra parliamentary activities. The movements took the new ideas on education and radicalised them further and when popular education centres and networks began to appear, a new social movement in its own right emerged. Marxism was particularly influential during this period (Gutiérrez & Castillo, 1994; Núñez, 1992). Period 3 covers the mid 1980s to late 1990s, which saw a crisis in popular education parallel to the general 'crisis of paradigms' prevalent at the time (Carrillo, 2010, p. 20) since, with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the defeat of the Sandinista revolution in 1990, many concluded that the dream of large-scale social change was over (Castañeda, 1994). From the late 1990s to early 2000s, Period 4 saw a settling-down of the various debates and the emergence of a wider range of activities under the banner of popular education, some more overtly radical than others and now with varying degrees of engagement with the state (the Latin American Council for Adult Education [CEAAL], 2004).

Finally, in Period 5, from the mid 2000s onwards, with the so-called 'turn to the left' (Uggla, 2008, p. 9) in Latin American politics, particularly in Venezuela and Bolivia, accompanied by the rhetoric, if not the delivery, of increasing participatory democracy from below, state-led structural change is on the agenda again and popular education has responded accordingly (Kane, in press [A]). But social movements continue to be important in popular education and some, such as the Landless rural Workers movement in Brazil or the Zapatistas in Mexico, consciously developed into full-blown learning organisations. The degree of articulation between social movements and the state also varies (Zibechi, 2008), some arguing that the 'dance' between social movements and the state currently determines the kind of social change taking place in Latin America (Dangl, 2010).

The way in which the popular education movement should relate to the state, then, has been a constant theme for discussion and, occasionally, fierce debate. The next section examines how popular education – both in terms of a set of principles and a social movement – has interacted with different state formations in Latin America.

Dictatorship

Historically, politically, geographically and culturally there are enormous variations between and within countries in Latin America. Archer and Costello (1990) analyse twelve popular education projects in different settings, from Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, to refugee camps in Honduras, social democracy in Ecuador and revolution in Nicaragua. At one extreme, clandestinely, in communal laundries, women in Chile imaginatively used soap opera as a 'generative theme' to raise awareness. In the wake of the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti, I witnessed how popular educators promoted action-orientated discussions leading to great improvements in the quality of their lives (Kane, 2001). Examples like these are inspiring and show that popular education can take place in the worst of circumstances. However, it is undeniably difficult to engage in popular education in a dictatorship and the consequences, if things go wrong, are potentially catastrophic. As Chomsky (2009) observes, 'there is a tendency to underestimate the efficacy of violence. Quite often it succeeds' ("The long view", para. 10).

¡Viva La Revolucion!

At the other extreme there are 'revolutionary' states where, in theory, some aims are similar to those of popular education and there should be harmony between the two. But it is not straightforward. Cuba is the best-known revolutionary state, still surviving decades of US attempts to engineer its demise (Rumbaut & Rumbaut, 2009). Its achievements in literacy rates, higher education, life expectancy and attainment of Millennium Development Goals equal or surpass those of much richer countries (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2007; Glennie, 2011) and as in Europe, 'education' tends to mean 'state education'. As for popular education, in the 1970s and 1980s Cuba stood outside the Latin American movement, its approach to education characteristically top-down as opposed to bottom-up, left-wing 'banking education' rather than a 'dialogue of knowledges'. The situation changed from the late 1990s onwards, CEAAL (the Latin American regional network of popular educators) now has a growing number of Cuban NGO affiliates (CEAAL, 2012) and state educators also participate in Latin American popular education events. During the 'crisis of paradigms' in Latin America, some saw the new injection of Cuban radicalism as a refreshingly positive development (Ponce, 1999). In many respects, however, Cuba remains an

authoritarian state and popular education does not sit easily within an educational culture often seeking to promote governmental policy, however egalitarian and enlightened, rather than independent autonomous movements. At a popular education event I attended in Brazil, when a Cuban state educator was asked to evidence a particular claim about Cuba, her proof was that 'Fidel said so'; opening the 2003 World Education Forum in Porto Alegre – a spin-off from the World Social Forum – an eloquent 11-year-old Cuban girl delivered a passionate, detailed Marxist analysis of global capitalism to some 80,000 participants. I felt uncomfortable at what must have been the outcome of 'banking education' allied to dramatic performance. In defence of Cuban education, it has many achievements and its promotion of the revolution is arguably an inevitable response to powerful attack from outside. However, while popular education has made inroads into Cuba, tensions between mainstream and popular educational still exist and are addressed and resolved differently in different micro contexts.

The Nicaraguan revolution, from the military victory of the Sandinista's in 1979 till their electoral defeat in 1990, is a different case. Here was an experimental laboratory in which the principles of popular education were explicitly supported by the government:

> to create a new nation we have to begin with an education that liberates people… Only in that process can people fulfil their human destiny as makers of history and commit themselves to transforming that reality. (Fernando Cardenal, minister in charge of the literacy crusade, as cited in Miller, 1985, p. 113)

The revolutionary period was initiated with a popular education literacy 'crusade'. Over 40,000 urban students spread throughout the country to engage in a 'dialogue of knowledges' in which they taught literacy skills to *campesinos* and learned about their country's social reality. For one literacy worker:

> the Crusade was the best school, the best workshop, the best study circle we ever had. Instead of being told about how the campesinos had to live, we went to see it and experience it for ourselves. (Oscar, brigadista: Instituto Nicarguense de Investigacion y Educacion Popular [INIEP], 1995, p. 114)

After talking of the initial difficulties another said 'eventually it began to work. My students learned to write the word machete and I learned how to use one' (Rodriguez, brigadista: Archer & Costello, 1990, p. 31).

It is difficult to gauge the impact of popular education at macro level with so many variables involved. Despite governmental support, there were many obstacles to promoting popular education, particularly the war waged from Honduras by the US-funded 'contra' revolutionary army, specifically targeting health workers and educators: for the US, independent development in Nicaragua was seen as the *threat of a good example* (Melrose, 1985). There was also internal opposition to the Revolution, resource difficulties, a shortage of trained popular educators, poor infrastructure and the shortcomings of the government itself (Arnove, 1994): for the Sandinistas there existed tension between promoting authentic popular education from below and trying to persuade people to support Sandinismo, from above.

While Nicaragua indicates the limits facing popular education, it also showed that much can be achieved in a revolutionary context, despite the difficulties (Carnoy & Torres, 1990). Barndt (1991) discusses a range of successes and Arnove argued that as a result of popular education 'tens of thousands of previously illiterate and poorly-skilled

individuals are now playing important roles at all levels of the society, from co-op to national legislative bodies' (1986, p. 68).

Arguably, the greatest legacy of popular education was its contribution to a culture of participation which lasted long after the Sandinistas lost power. In fact, many understood the Sandinista electoral defeat not as the death of a revolution but the considered choice of a politically aware populace who saw this as the only way to stop the war, as well as to register dissatisfaction with aspects of Sandinista government (Harris, 1992; Gonzalez, 1990). Ironically, freed from the need to defend the Sandinistas, many grassroots organisations - the women's movement in particular – became more protagonistic than before (Montenegro, 1997; Stahler-Sholk, 1999).

Most recently, Venezuela's 'Bolivarian revolution' is championed by an elected government; it is not the outcome of a civil war in which a ruling oligarchy was deposed, though the internal opposition, supported by the United States (Golinger, 2010), is also powerful. But there has been little dispossession of property, entrepreneurs are welcomed into the governing socialist party, private media still dominate communications and revolutionary posters stand side-by-side with adverts for major multinationals. Rather than a head-on assault on the interests of the ruling class, then, some describe this revolutionary strategy as an attempt to create a 'parallel' society from below, in which old dominant interests will eventually wither away (Vera-Zavala, 2005).

More than any other government in Latin America, this one talks the language of participatory democracy, with 'popular power' considered a 'motor' of the revolution (Wilpert, 2007), enshrined at the highest level in Ministries of Popular Power. Some debate whether this is a genuine commitment to people power or simply a way for president Chávez to strengthen his position, enlisting grassroots support to subdue the opposition, in the Latin American tradition of 'populist' leadership (Denis, 2003; Gonzalez, 2004; Petras, 2004; Gindin, 2004), but it does create a climate in which popular education has an opportunity to flourish, outside and inside the state. Visiting Venezuela in December 2008, I saw an independent popular education movement engage constructively with the state-owned Simón Rodríguez Experimental University to organise degree-level education in popular education (Kane, 2010).

Aside from declared efforts to promote popular education through initiatives like Communal Councils (Bowman & Stone, 2006), the Venezuelan government also hopes that formal, state-run education will enhance the Bolivarian revolution. With the new constitution guaranteeing universal rights to higher education, in 2002 the government set up the Bolivarian University of Venezuela to address the increasing demand for places (Podur, 2004). But it was considered part of the revolutionary project, with an explicit remit to make higher education work for everyone:

> Traditional universities produce depoliticised professionals who see themselves as using technical skills but do not have any sense of social responsibility. We want to contribute to the reconstruction of our society. We want to create professionals with a sense of public service. (Castellano, as cited in Podur, 2004)

The entrance mural says 'Welcome to the Bolivarian University of Venezuela: 5 years of emancipatory education' and official political events are advertised throughout the campus. Most staff members have a picture of Che Guevara in their office, usually one of Chávez too. The University published *Theories in Latin American Emancipatory Pedagogy: for a Popular and Socialist University of the Venezuelan Revolution* (Damiani & Bolívar, 2007), an impressive collection of original writings in radical education from Latin America and beyond. In line with popular education thinking,

curriculums are designed to relate practice to theory, most teaching revolving around community-based projects and forms of participatory-action research (Comisión Nacional del PNFE, 2006).

But the difficulties in promoting popular education within Venezuela are similar to those of the Nicaraguan revolution. First, it is not easy to operationalise a popular education programme targeted at millions of people: enough supportive, experienced and competent popular educators, specialising in all curricular areas, do not appear overnight. Some university lecturers are esteemed academics but ambivalent about the social purpose underlying the revolution; others are enthusiastic but with fewer traditional academic credentials, like publications; others are both enthusiastic and esteemed academically but remain wedded to a traditional rather than a popular education pedagogical approach.

Second, for the revolutionary government there exists the same tension as in Nicaragua between promoting development from below and trying to win support from above. In the Bolivarian university, with the physical space communicating unquestioning support for Chávez, at a time when even supporters of the 'process' were concerned about its direction, it raised questions as to whether the university was leaning towards spreading propaganda rather than promoting popular education. Third, not everyone will act according to the principles espoused by the revolution; with a history of institutionalised corruption, this is a problem in Venezuela and popular education initiatives can be discredited due to the different personal agendas of opportunistic officials.

On the surface, then, revolutionary states create a climate in which popular education can flourish, new initiatives can be tested and many positive outcomes are achieved. On the negative side, there remain significant problems implementing popular education on a large scale and what is meant to be happening, in theory, is not necessarily translated into practice.

'Democracies'

In the middle lie the states described, to varying degrees, as 'democratic', though the adjective requires qualification. In the 1980s, when United States support for authoritarian governments in Latin America became embarrassing, there was a move to provide them with at least the appearance of democracy, while still trying to maintain control. Parodying the so-called 'low intensity' war waged by the US against Central America, some labelled these new states 'low intensity' democracies (Cendales, Posada & Torres, 1996, p. 121). In the 1990s and 2000s, some of these states remained authoritarian (Colombia, Haiti), while others moved to reject the 'neoliberal' model (Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, in addition to Venezuela).

Even if nominally democratic, the power of these states to enact the will of its people is tempered by the 'dictatorship of the market' (Betuto Fernández, 1998, p. 75) and their status as 'third world' countries, indebted to first world creditors. World Bank and International Monetary Fund 'austerity packages' have forced governments to cut public spending, increase exports, privatise services and so on. The gradual (semi) privatisation of services has also affected popular education: independent NGOs who supported popular education, which was often critical of the state, were now tempted to procure government funding, silencing themselves in the process (Petras, 1999).

So where states are formally democratic, the picture is varied and constantly changing, even within countries. From the late 1980s onwards, the popular education movement has generally tried to make its influence felt within the state. In certain times and places, this has clearly been welcomed and state organisations have played an

important role. A prime example has been local government in Brazil. The Workers Party, of which Freire was a founding member, was set up in 1980, an umbrella group of workers and social movements struggling to overcome the dictatorship (Branford & Kucinski, 1995). Initially, the party committed to the values of participatory, not just representative, democracy. When it won power in São Paulo, it appointed Freire minister of education from 1989-1991. In Porto Alegre, it attempted to engage the city's inhabitants in the now famous exercise of 'participatory budgeting'. The same council set up and financed the first World Social Forum and its spin-off 'World Education Forum', important gatherings for radical educators from around the world.

On the one hand then, in these various forms of capitalist representative democracy, opportunities could be exploited within the state sector as spaces opened up for increased participation by civil society. On the other hand, limits were imposed on what could be done, initiatives could be co-opted away from radicalism and educators faced the dilemma of where to prioritise their efforts, within autonomous movements, its traditional 'school', or within the state. Folquito Verona (2008), an academic, organiser of the Regional Popular Education Forum for the West of São Paulo (FREPOP) and a former Workers Party education minister in the town of Lins, argues that popular education cannot be properly done within the state, even when administrations are radical, and that it is important to maintain and develop independent popular education initiatives. The extent to which popular education should engage with the state, then, continues to be an important subject for discussion in Latin America, with no straightforward answers. In general, I think the dominant position is that articulated by Gadotti when he argued for social movements to have a foot inside the state 'but it has to be only one foot, inside. The other foot should be outside… The negotiating strength of the movement within the State depends on its own capacity for mobilisation outside it' (Gadotti & Torres, 1992, p. 71).

Comparing popular education in Europe and Latin America

In mainstream Europe, states also have wide historical, cultural and economic variations within and between them, particularly since the incorporation of former Soviet Block countries, where the former dominance of the state could mean that 'the phenomenon of Community was erased from society' (Nazaretyan, 2010, "The Role of the South Caucus", para. 1) or a history of resistance was co-opted into the new order (Zielińska, Kowzan & Prusinowska, 2011). In this article, however, analysis is restricted to European states sharing the characteristics of relatively prosperous Western capitalist democracies, albeit the current economic crisis means some might soon be known as 'formerly advanced economies' (Hahnel, 2012, para. 2).

A first difference with Latin America is that in much of Europe state education is so widespread that by definition 'education' means 'state education'. In Latin America, state provision is variable and, where deficient, popular education can fill the vacuum, particularly in basic education. In Europe, popular education either complements or competes with state education, on the outside in social movements or on the inside, in a struggle to promote its alternative philosophy and practice.

A second difference lies in the nature of social movements. In the Europe of wealthy economies and welfare states, theorists generally characterise social movements as more middle-class than their Latin American counterparts, concerned with deepening democracy and improving the quality of life in a post-materialist society, rather than struggling for basic material needs (Foweraker, 1995; Hellman, 1995; Radcliffe, 1999).

'New' social movements around issues like gender and ethnicity have also developed in Latin America but these tend to overlap with class-based concerns. Caution is required in generalising about social movements, however, and in both Europe and Latin America exceptions to the rule are easily found. Movements also change constantly and Della Porta and Diani observed in 2006 that in Europe 'working-class action seems to be back with a vengeance' and 'basic survival rights and social entitlements seem to play a more balanced role in contemporary mobilizations, alongside more post material ones, related to quality of life, than was the case in the recent past' (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. vii). Today this is even more true, with the rise of movements like the 'indignados' in Spain and Greece, combating unemployment and austerity in a way reminiscent of so many throughout the 'third world' (Ouziel, 2011).

Another difference is the extent to which an articulated popular education movement exists independently of the state. In Latin America it is a 'broad and open movement, with a degree of organisation and articulation' (Zarco, 2001, p. 30). Steele (2007) has systematised the history of popular education in Europe, though with various interpretations of what the term means only what he considers 'radical popular education' relates to the Latin American equivalent. Contemporary experiences of popular education in Europe, particularly Germany, were recently examined in Essen (Essen Conference, 2009); in Spain, the south has much in common with Latin America, including regular exchanges of experience (Abrio, Sánchez & Herrera, 1998) and a number of popular education movements have been documented in Cataluña (Puigvert & Valls, 2005); Guimarães and Sancho (2005) give an honest assessment of the ebb and flow of popular education in Portugual; from Malta, Mayo and others make prolific contributions to the literature on popular education (Mayo & Borg, 2007); in the UK Grayson (2005) analyses education in the British tenants movement and a range of initiatives have been documented in Scotland (Crowther et al., 1999). Finally, the Popular Education Network for academics, started in the late 1990s, has succeeded in forging lasting European-wide (and global) collaboration amongst its members (Crowther et al., 2005).

But do these and other activities constitute a popular education movement? On the one hand, much seems to be happening in the field of adult education for social change, probably more than is known. On the other hand, the extent to which these examples relate to an articulated theory of 'popular' education appears variable. Sometimes the educational aspect of a struggle is consciously understood as popular education by those involved; sometimes a different qualifier might apply, such as radical education or, returning to the discussion on ideology, workers, feminist or environmentalist education. Sometimes it may be thought of simply as the informal education people acquire in action, which others then categorise as popular education. While the same points could be made about Latin America, in general the explicit link to the concept of popular education seems much stronger in Latin America than in Europe, further enhanced by its association with Paulo Freire: in Europe the term 'popular education' is not quite as popular!

Independently of their allegiance to the term 'popular education', is there a degree of conscious 'organisation and articulation' which brings these different, alternative experiences together? While the picture varies across countries, outside the state, at least, such organisation seems significantly weaker in Europe than in Latin America, though given the different context, with the greater prevalence of the European state in the provision of services, of which adult education is one, this is hardly surprising. In the UK, alternative education movements were strong in the past but are weaker now, despite attempts to resurrect the tradition (Bane, Shaw & Thomson, 2000).

While I generally find that in terms of educational practice and the organisation of independent popular education initiatives, the cutting-edge nature of popular education in Latin America has much to teach Europeans, it is perhaps in the relationship popular education has with the state that Europe has lessons to offer Latin America. In Europe Steele argues that 'the functionalist and vocationalist policy of much state-sponsored adult education has evacuated it of meaningful personal, cultural development or radical social purpose' (Steele, 2010, p. 120); for Fragoso and Guimarães, with particular reference to Portugal, 'EU programmes have made it very difficult for CSOs [civil society organisations] to escape national state control. This situation impedes innovative and alternative attempts to promote social emancipation' (Fragoso & Guimarães, 2010, p. 17).

In the UK, as early as 1909, there were heated debates within and between organisations such as the Workers Education Association and the Plebs League over the extent to which Independent Working Class Education could exist if beholden to government funding (Fieldhouse, 2000; McIlroy, 2000). While sporadic radical practices managed to survive, in accepting funding there is little doubt the WEA was deliberately and consciously co-opted into the politics of social democracy and stripped of its radical credentials:

> this was recognised very clearly by the Conservative President of the Board of Education, Lord Eustace Percy, when he defended the adult education grants to the WEA...against Treasury scepticism in 1925, because in his view '£100,000 spent annually on this kind of work, properly controlled, would be about the best police expenditure we could indulge in' as a protection against socialist ideas being spread abroad by such bodies as the National Council for Labour Colleges. (Fieldhouse, 2000, p. 176)

Steele concludes that today

> the WEA and similar voluntary movements like the Scandinavian folk high schools are still active and offer potential. However, the funding restrictions which limit so much of their valuable activity to social first-aiding and 'vocational' preparation – or 'training' – may not permit the kind of radical or liberatory politics enjoyed by Latin American movements. (Steele, 2010, pp. 122-123)

In 1990s Scotland the anti-poll tax movement, often credited with causing the downfall of the Thatcher government, bore some resemblance to a Latin American style popular movement. Local government, responsible for collecting the tax, simultaneously funded Community Education, including some projects pursuing a 'Freirian' approach (Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1989). But educators in those projects felt unable to work with the anti-poll tax movement in case their funding was withdrawn. In Latin America, it is precisely those sorts of movements popular education centres would work with as a priority.

Popular education is linked to action, another area where states are likely to impose limits. In the UK, the belief that the Iraq 'war' of 2003 was about imperialism and oil, not weapons of mass destruction, led to the largest political demonstrations in UK history. Yet young people attending school were not allowed to participate in them, even when old enough to leave education altogether. Teachers blockaded the gates of my local school and 17 year-old pupils who insisted on leaving to demonstrate were threatened with suspension. As professionals, teachers were expected to appear politically 'neutral', the opposite of what popular education stands for. Subsequently, the 'weapons-of-mass-destruction' argument was proven to be false: if formal education cannot be linked to action even in the face of what many consider large-scale blatant

injustice, committed by their own elected government (Miller, 2004), this puts the strictest of limitations on the ability to engage in popular education within the state. One possible lesson is that where Latin American popular educators engage with the state, they should do so with eyes wide open and simultaneously be wary of giving up their independence.

More positively, the state is also a 'site of struggle' and astute, creative educators will push the limits to the maximum. In the same local school, some pupils walked through the teachers' blockade and demonstrated. At school the next day, several teachers openly supported the pupils' actions and in the end they were 'spoken to' but not suspended. Recent research into the influences on political activists in Scotland encouragingly showed that formal education, and the work of individual educators, had generally been seen as contributing positively towards their radicalism (Kane, In press [B]). So a familiarity with the European experience of widespread state-run education may help alert Latin Americans to both the pitfalls and opportunities in trying to engage in popular education within state structures.

Conclusion

At one level it is problematic to compare the relationship between popular education and the state in Latin America and Europe. Both regions consist of different countries, each with its own particular historical, political and cultural variations. There are differences within countries too and this diversity affects the way in which popular education is expressed. Nothing is static, moreover, and there is a constant dialectical relationship between popular education and the context in which it tries to intervene.

But it is possible to discern general patterns. Europe has a long history of popular education outside the state though this has been significantly co-opted by the spread of welfare states and mass education. Currently, there are various attempts to maintain or resurrect that tradition. In this they have taken inspiration from the recent past in Latin America where the independent popular education movement has been more visible and organised, as well as having original contributions to offer in terms of theory and practice. In both regions there are infinite numbers of groups involved in processes of informal education, a by-product of their struggle for social change, who are potential beneficiaries of a strong, independent popular education movement. In Europe, characteristically, attempts to promote popular education are more commonly located 'within and against' the state, and that is now becoming common practice in Latin America too. There remain substantial contextual differences between the two regions - greater degrees of poverty in Latin America, its continuing struggle against neo-colonialism – and these influence the shape of popular education. At the current time, however, in Europe and Latin America the relationship between popular education and the state is more similar than ever before.

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Aims & Scope

The European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (RELA) is a refereed academic journal creating a forum for the publication of critical research on adult education and learning. It has a particular focus on issues at stake for adult education and learning in Europe, as these emerge in connection with wider international and transnational dynamics and trends. Such a forum is important at a time when local and regional explorations of issues are often difficult to foreground across language barriers. As academic and policy debate is increasingly carried out in the English language, this masks the richness of research knowledge, responses and trends from diverse traditions and foci. The journal thus attempts to be linguistically 'open access'. Whilst creating a forum for international and transnational debate, contributions are particularly welcome from authors in Europe and other locations where English is not the first language.

RELA invites original, scholarly articles that discuss the education and learning of adults from different academic disciplines, perspectives and traditions. It encourages diversity in theoretical and methodological approach and submissions from non-English speakers. All published contributions in RELA are subjected to a rigorous peer review process based on two moments of selection: an initial editorial screening and a double-blind review by at least two anonymous referees. Clarity and conciseness of thought are crucial requirements for publication.

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