

**Author Posting. (c) Taylor & Francis, 2007.**

**This is the author's version of the work. It is posted here by permission of Taylor & Francis for personal use, not for redistribution.**

**The definitive version was published in *Teaching in Higher Education*, Volume 12 Issue 5, October 2007.**

**doi:10.1080/13562510701596406 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562510701596406>)**

## **Diversity and pedagogic practice: reflections on the role of an adult educator in higher education**

### **Introduction**

This paper questions pedagogic practice within a higher education (HE) sector that is being required to accommodate increasing diversity in the prior experiences of students. It does so from a personal perspective which concerns my professional practice as an erstwhile adult educator now working in HE. Its central theme is the extent to which the traditions of adult education (AE) can/should contribute to pedagogic practices and philosophies in HE. In the light of the 'widening participation' agenda and of different approaches to pedagogy in HE and AE, Part 1 identifies issues arising from my teaching on courses for university lecturers; it concludes with a brief history of AE in the context of British universities. This sets the scene for Part 2 which is a worked example of reflective practice in which I consider whether there is any merit in promoting AE values and pedagogic practices in the current climate of HE.

### **Part 1: Scene-setting**

#### *Policy, principles, practices*

In the UK, university expansion is driven by a 'widening participation' policy, about which the Higher Education Academy (HEA) notes:

The term 'widening participation' embraces the idea of broadening diversity in higher education (HE), rather than simply increasing the numbers who enter HE. It focuses on engaging people from groups who are currently under-represented in HE. ... *Successful diversity depends not on 'normalising' students to fit into existing practices, but rather on building on different backgrounds, experiences and interests to develop HE within this dynamic context.* (HEA, 2006, my emphasis)

My intention is not to address the widening participation agenda *per se* but to think about one aspect of it – the growing presence of mature students in HE and implications for pedagogic practice. ('Mature' students are those aged 25+; elsewhere they would be classified as 'adult' students but that term is generally used in the UK to refer to older students *outside* mainstream HE.) It is more than decade since West (1996, p. 204) suggested that 'The arrival of large numbers of adults into higher education might tilt the pedagogic and epistemological balance towards a dialogical and more integrated learning culture' - but a subsequent study (Merrill, 2001) found that few university lecturers had adapted their teaching style as a result of the presence of older students.

I have spent much of my working life in a university department of adult/continuing education where most students were aged over 25. In the late 1990s, the department was restructured and I was relocated into the department of educational studies. I have recently moved to a post in a school of education in another English university. In both, I have been involved in developing and tutoring on courses for university lecturers. My concern is the extent to which such courses can/should promote the principles and practices of AE within the different, and increasingly instrumental, teaching/learning culture that continues to prevail in HE.

Rowland (2006, pp. 73-82) suggests that there are three different, though not mutually exclusive, approaches to teacher development in HE: 'atheoretical', 'educational', and 'critical interdisciplinarity'. The first provides 'training in the craft of teaching'; the second is theory-based, ostensibly in educational theories: both seem to assume that teaching and learning are largely generic and this leads to 'an undue emphasis on the applied psychology of learning'. Malcolm and Zukas (2000, p. 3) also note that, because 'psychology has provided the dominant framework for HE pedagogic writing in Britain', psychological theories are often utilised as tools to shape practice. Theory is thus used to *inform* practice – but such theories do not emerge *from* practice: indeed, 'they discount the context and purpose of educational events, and the disciplinary settings in which such events take place' (*ibid.*). Critical interdisciplinarity, by contrast, is an approach where the theoretical base actually derives from the different disciplinary perspectives of those involved. In Rowland's (*op.cit.*, pp. 80-81) terms, its aim is to enable academics to explore commonalities and differences in disciplinary perspectives 'in order to develop their understandings of the relationships between the forms of knowledge they teach and the methods that are consistent with them'; to ask, for example, not only 'how shall I teach history?' but also 'what is it for my student (and indeed for me) to be a historian?'

The two courses for university lecturers I have helped to shape have been rooted in the notion of critical interdisciplinarity but have also drawn explicitly on educational theory since this is the disciplinary contribution brought to the group by course tutors. Underpinning the design of both courses is an expectation that all participants, including tutors, will reflect on, and critique, not only their own professional practice (especially in relation to teaching/learning) but also the nature and purposes of university education generally. However, the courses differ in terms of their participants. In one, participants are almost all at the beginning of their academic careers, have limited experience of teaching, and their participation is essentially in response to an expectation on the part of the institution rather than a considered personal choice. In the other, most participants are in mid-career and all have made a deliberate choice to participate. The nature of my role as a tutor has troubled me more in the former group than the latter.

Because the conceptual framework for much AE practice, including my own, leans towards emancipatory education (Freire, 1972) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), working explicitly with the life experiences of course participants is usually as important as imparting subject knowledge. Whilst facilitating the course for experienced lecturers who had knowingly 'bought in' to this way of working, I had assumed it was unproblematic: I had no reason to question it, or its appropriateness in HE. As Brookfield points out:

Assumptions are our taken-for-granted beliefs about the world and our place within it that seem so obvious to us as not to need stating explicitly. In many ways we *are* our assumptions. Assumptions give meaning and purpose to who we are and what we do. Becoming aware of the implicit assumptions that frame how we think and act is ... something we instinctively resist ... Who wants to clarify and question assumptions she or he has lived by for a substantial period of time, only to find they don't make sense? (Brookfield, 1995, p. 2, original emphasis)

Starting to work with new lecturers who had effectively been drafted onto a course, and for whom successfully completing it would ultimately be instrumental in determining the outcome of their probationary period and future job prospects, brought me to just such a resistance point. Coinciding with a 'critical incident' (described in Part 2), it highlighted a significant difference in pedagogic practice in AE and HE that went beyond mere theoretical interest to threaten my own professional identity. Analysing a range of 'pedagogic identities' to be found in the respective literatures of AE and HE, Malcolm and Zukas (2000) found two common conceptualisations of the educator - as 'critical practitioner' and as 'psycho-diagnostician and facilitator of learning'. Both identities 'are strongly represented and contested within AE, whilst in HE, one identity [the latter] is dominant, and the other is barely visible' (*ibid.*, p. 2). Malcolm and Zukas also confirm my own experience that:

The educator as a person in the world – as someone with social identity, and conscious of the ‘worldly’ baggage present in the classroom – is perhaps such an obvious element of pedagogic identity in AE that it is taken for granted. (p. 4)

By contrast, in HE:

the teacher’s reality is generally absent; the teacher has a pedagogic function rather than a social identity. ... Thus HE *pedagogy*, where this model is dominant, detaches itself from those issues, such as diversity, that are addressed through social purpose approaches to HE *policy*. (*ibid.*, original emphasis)

Embarking on the course for new lecturers, most of whom seemed to expect that I would fulfil my ‘pedagogic function’ expertly in order that they might gain certification to go forth and fulfil theirs - at a time when HE policy encouraging the presence of mature students in universities is challenging this very pedagogy - has caused me to reflect on Rowland’s questions, slightly re-worded as: ‘*How shall I teach on a course for new university lecturers?*’ and ‘*What is it for my student (and indeed for me) to be an adult educator?*’.

Part 2 encompasses that reflection but, in order to contextualise it, the next section outlines the changing nature of the adult education departments that have been part of many British universities since the early part of the twentieth century, including the kinds of values embedded in them.

#### *University adult education departments*

The origins of these departments lie in the University Extension movement which gathered pace during the late Victorian era (and culminated in the creation of many of the civic universities themselves). Closely linked with voluntary adult education bodies such as the Workers’ Educational Association, the movement was influenced by the radical tradition espoused by Tawney and others who sought to promote better educational opportunities for ‘the working-class’: the primary motivation was to establish ‘an informed, participating, popular democracy’ (Mitchell, 2000, p. 13).

Building on this work after the First World War, the 1919 Report of the National Reconstruction Committee recommended that:

- The provision of liberal education for adults should be regarded by universities as a normal and necessary part of their functions.
- Each university should establish a department of extramural adult education.
- University Extension should be eligible for government grant.

(Mitchell, 2000, p. 15)

By the early 1930s, most universities had established extramural departments and funding for full-time organising tutors had been approved by the Board of Education. The departments initiated and supported a range of activities from public lectures to day-release programmes for workers in industry and local services. They were fairly autonomous, in a unique space between the traditions of the subject disciplines in ‘mainstream’ university education and newly-evolving, often emancipatory, educational practices in local communities. The space was shaped partly by ideals associated with the Enlightenment and a Victorian philanthropic approach that sought to cascade selectively to the general public a cultural heritage hitherto only accessible to a privileged elite; and partly by radical notions of how individuals and communities might be empowered to promote personal and/or political change.

The erstwhile extramural departments have since undergone a series of changes, reflecting the increasing influence of central government on university affairs and shifting political imperatives and funding mechanisms in education generally. ‘Continuing education’ became a fashionable concept in the late 1970s as concerns grew about the need for regular updating of knowledge in the face of rapid

technological expansion. In consequence, many extramural departments began to develop professional and vocational courses alongside their existing provision and re-branded themselves as departments of continuing education (some opted for the hybrid ‘adult *and* continuing education’ in acknowledgement of their liberal heritage). Several also developed ‘mature access programmes’ to encourage and support application to undergraduate courses by adults without traditional entry requirements (at that time the number of students taking this route was minimal, and dropout high).

By the mid-1990s, many adult/continuing education departments were themselves offering credit-bearing courses, including those leading directly to undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. A blurring of boundaries gradually occurred between open and credit-bearing courses as well as between those that had traditionally been located on either side of the further education/HE divide. Particularly significantly, adult/continuing education began to be subsumed within the notion of ‘lifelong learning’ (which, following the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, the European Union identified as a key priority). The point has subsequently been reached where many would argue, as Martin and Merrill (2002, p. 210) do, that ‘the social practice of adult education now needs to be extracted from the muddle of lifelong learning and imbued, once again, with the language of social purpose’.

However, in 2001, the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA), one of the leading research organizations in the UK in the field of adult education and learning, held an international conference entitled *Travellers’ tales: from adult education to lifelong learning and beyond*. The editors of the proceedings noted:

Lifelong learning is the flavour of the times ... The debate about learning as a lifelong process is by no means a recent phenomenon for those of us whose professional backgrounds have been in adult education. However, it has been a novel experience for adult educators like ourselves to see concerns which were often relegated to a marginal position moving to the mainstream in popular debates about education. (West *et al.*, 2001, p. 13)

In university adult/continuing education departments there was a strong sense during the 1990s that their time had come; that their work on the boundaries between universities and local communities had at long last been recognised and was to become a significant feature within the mainstream of HE. Most of these departments were subsequently re-designated as departments (or ‘institutes’) of lifelong learning - but their shining hour was relatively short-lived. Alongside their name change, many were restructured and often downsized as the commitment of universities to education in local communities had not only to be measured against increasing financial constraints on the HE sector but redefined in terms of a political agenda dominated by concerns about market forces and economic competitiveness. There is now considerable pessimism about the future of AE *per se* in the context of British universities.

Currently, too, the prospect of ‘mainstreaming’ AE principles within the pedagogical practices of universities seems to be buried under the fall-out from policy debates that emphasise the economic importance of knowledge and learning and privilege the view that education, including HE, must be especially responsive to the needs of employers. Such debates are far removed from the radical tradition of AE and the notion of social purpose that has always permeated its practice, the characteristics of which may be identified as follows:

- adult students/learners are treated as citizens and social actors
- curriculum reflects shared social and political interests
- knowledge is actively and purposefully constructed to advance these collective interests
- pedagogy is based on dialogue rather than transmission
- adult education exists in symbiotic relationship to social movements
- critical understanding leads to social action and political engagement
- education is always a key resource in the broader struggle for social change.

(Martin, 2006, p. 287)

Additionally, as Zukas and Malcolm (2005, p. 447) point out, although there has historically been a 'demarcation of adult education's difference from other areas of education in terms of students, purposes and practices', with adult educators claiming that theirs is a distinctive field of pedagogic practice:

Policy developments across post-compulsory education and training in the UK have increasingly come to emphasise the significance of *discipline* (rather than the target group) for pedagogy. For example, teachers training for the learning and skills sector are now to be offered 'mentoring to help teachers to develop *teaching skills in their own specialist or subject areas*' (p. 4, DfES, 2004, our emphasis); the Higher Education Academy supports discipline-based learning and teaching development through its various subject centres. (Zukas & Malcolm, 2005, pp. 447-448, original emphases)

Thus, despite a sense that AE has much to offer HE, it would appear that its distinctiveness is currently being redefined out of existence. The times seem somewhat unpropitious for an adult educator in HE. Part 2 encompasses a personal reflection on this situation.

## **Part 2: Using a model for reflection**

### *The model*

I shall work through a method of reflection that I recommend to my postgraduate students when they encounter an incident that makes a mark because of its 'positive, troubling or puzzling' nature. It is based on Brookfield's (1995, pp. 29-39) model of (re)viewing one's professional practice through four different 'lenses': the lens of one's own autobiography as a learner and teacher; of one's students' eyes; of one's colleagues' experiences; and of theoretical literature. I am well-aware that some will dismiss this kind of writing as 'navel-gazing' - but I offer it in the spirit of Stenhouse's (1975) notion of 'systematic inquiry made public' and of autoethnography: 'a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text' (Burdell & Swadener, 1999, p. 22).

### *The lens of autobiography*

This paper originates from one entitled '*Only the trying*': *struggles of an adult educator within the academy* that I prepared for a SCUTREA conference during a very difficult time professionally. It was prompted not so much by a critical incident as a 'troubling and puzzling' period of several months. The title was borrowed from T.S. Eliot's *East Coker*. At times of uncertainty and depression I am often drawn to poetry and the following lines from this particular piece seemed to sum up my situation and feelings exactly:

*So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years –  
Twenty years largely wasted, [...]*

*There is only the fight to recover what has been lost  
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions  
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.  
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.  
(Eliot, 1963, pp. 202-203)*

One of the questions in the call for conference papers was whether 'adult/non-traditional' students are properly served by teachers within the academy. I wanted to turn this around to ask, as here, whether traditional adult education values have a place, or can survive, within an increasingly marketised, university sector. Conditions seemed particularly unpropitious in the context of my job at that time. What concerned me then, as now, is the extent to which, as an adult educator in the academy, I should continue with 'the trying', in terms of voicing and working with values, concepts and pedagogic practices that seem in danger of being marginalised, if not entirely lost.

In order to contextualise this concern, I need to return to January 2005 and the resonances I felt between Eliot's poetry, my own situation, and the questions underpinning the conference. I had been in my job for just over a year, having spent more than twenty in another university. Unexpectedly, a major restructuring exercise had been announced, involving significant job losses. The university hoped these would be achieved through voluntary severance but did not rule out compulsory redundancies.

This caused some painful heart-searching as I considered whether to apply for a redundancy package and effectively end my career several years sooner than planned. Although I had sometimes thought fondly of heading into the wild blue yonder of early retirement, contemplating the imminent reality was difficult. The prospect of uninterrupted hours to enjoy leisure activities was certainly attractive. However, this was not simply an issue about time. That there were also financial considerations goes without saying but, more significantly, questions arose about my personal/professional identity and what my working life has actually been about. Has it, in Eliot's terms, been more than 'Twenty years largely wasted'? If I had to justify the AE work I have been involved in at the Pearly Gates of an afterlife rather than to a potential redundancy committee – and if I also had to argue for the continuation of that work - could I do it?

As an adult educator, the engagement of 'self' in the learning process has always been important to me: of my self, through the processes of critical reflective practice, and of learners' selves in making them central to the learning process. (Besides being responsive to their experiences and needs, I think this also involves encouraging students to examine the contexts, processes and implications of their own past and present learning and their current circumstances.) Latterly, as a facilitator of academic courses geared towards professional development in education, both in and outside the academy, this has remained the touchstone of my practice - but I now wonder whether 'the fight' that I seem increasingly to be engaged in to maintain this value base is worthwhile.

#### *The lens of colleagues and students*

Tutoring on the Certificate in Academic Practice course (CAP) for new lecturers brought my concerns into sharp focus. From the outset, most participants adopted an instrumental approach. They wanted to know what they needed to know - and be able to do - in order to achieve a fast and effective 'outcome', both in their immediate professional practice and for their assessed portfolio. Many clearly felt that to engage with educational theory or the more time-consuming aspects of reflective practice would be an unnecessary distraction from the more important task, in career terms, of undertaking subject-based research. Ironically, this approach paralleled what several said they found difficult in working with students of their own who seemed reluctant to participate in teaching/learning activities that did not have obvious relevance to 'passing' a course.

The CAP raises a number of issues, not least about the problematics of working in an education department where teaching is itself a focus of research but in an institutional environment where teaching as part of an academic's role has a much lower status than research. (As Hannan and Silver [2000, p. 32] demonstrate, even in universities that claim to give greater recognition to teaching, lecturers deem it a 'career hazard' not to prioritise research). It also makes evident the differences in working with experienced educators and those new to their job. I think these can partly be explained in terms of single/double-loop learning: new practitioners need to ask 'Am I doing things right?' before posing the more reflective question that might (should?) be expected of experienced practitioners, 'Am I doing the right things?' (Hunt, 2005).

These issues have worrying implications. Malcolm and Zukas (2002, p. 195) argue that many educators now have an approach to pedagogy 'steeped in notions borrowed from management textbooks and technicist constructions of teaching and learning, within which education is seen as a form of business production'. When a course like the CAP is viewed from this perspective by potential participants and/or their senior managers it becomes imbued with the expectation that it will 'deliver training' in 'doing things right' - rather than that it will provide space for self-reflection and reflection on pedagogic and other matters associated with the purposes of a university, including the possibility of actively challenging assumptions about these matters.

Colluding even partially with this expectation in the hope of ultimately being able to create the conditions for such reflection may be helpful to the institution in terms of what Malcolm and Zukas call its 'organisational accountability' for teaching and learning - but risks diminishing our own 'moral and/or social accountability which could be said to characterise more socially purposeful approaches to educational work' (*ibid.*). On the other hand, standing in opposition to the 'business' approach runs the risk of funding being withdrawn and/or of losing credibility as appropriate 'providers' of the course - which may then be placed elsewhere with even less chance of imbuing it with the 'socially purposeful' approach that is central to so much adult education practice. In essence, this dilemma underpins wider questions about the role of university education in 'transmitting' knowledge and skills and/or developing critically responsible citizens: I shall touch on it again in the next section.

### *The lens of theoretical literature*

I shall use three texts as frameworks through which to reflect further on my value-base as an adult educator tutoring on the CAP course.

#### *Framework 1: Models of the curriculum in higher education (Barnett et al, 2001)*

From their research on changing patterns of undergraduate curricula, Barnett *et al* conclude that there are three 'domains' which affect any curriculum: 'knowledge', 'action' and 'self':

The 'knowledge' domain refers to those components of the curriculum that are based on discipline-specific competences and those aspects of teaching and learning that develop subject specialists, so creating, in our sample, an 'historian' or a 'nurse'. The 'action' domain includes those competences acquired through 'doing': an oral presentation in art history or the clinical practice of a student nurse. The 'self' domain develops an educational identity in relation to the subject areas: history students learn to perceive themselves as 'critical evaluators', while nurses become 'reflective practitioners'. (pp. 438-439)

They argue that, within science and technology, curricula are heavily weighted towards the knowledge domain; some attention is paid to 'action' but virtually none to the 'self'. In the arts and humanities the knowledge domain is also the most significant; 'action' plays little part but 'there is more integration with the self domain' (*ibid.*). In professional subjects all three areas are integrated. This is certainly the case in AE. HE lecturers need to recognise, therefore, that mature students who enter mainstream undergraduate courses in non-professional subject areas *via* an AE route may experience a disjuncture in their relationship with the curriculum, including the nature of tutor-student-knowledge interactions.

Barnett *et al* also examine the 'domain of work' and the incorporation of 'skills associated with the labour market' into the curriculum: this is variable across subjects but seems to indicate a shifting emphasis in HE from 'knowledge for its own sake' to 'use-value' (pp. 444-445). According to Barnett *et al*, this is altering the traditional conception of a graduate so that 'their market worth will be an indication of the form of education they have received' (p. 446). Nevertheless, pedagogical strategies do not seem to be changing correspondingly: lectures continue to dominate, as does 'learning based on reproduction'. Additionally, in the non-professional fields:

the dominant paradigm of the teaching responsibility remains that of the authority in the field engaging with and imparting knowledge and skills to individuals. ... The professional fields contain more relaxed pedagogical frames in which there is a greater openness of exchanges between teacher and taught, and in which students engage more with each other. (p. 447)

The main driver of change in pedagogies seems to be the need to adapt to the *increasing numbers of students in universities, rather than to their diversity*. In consequence, Barnett *et al* found that: 'Innovation that increases efficiency was more valued than innovative pedagogical strategies that require time to develop' (*ibid.*).

I will leave aside my concerns about orienting teaching to the 'market worth' of students or the way in which 'domains' are constituted within this study. However, using the domain framework as outlined, my practice as an adult educator can be clearly defined in terms of the 'integrated' approach which characterises the professional fields. So, too, can the underpinning philosophy of the CAP course which recognises the potential for action in challenging and changing pedagogical strategies through engagement with the knowledge domain of educational theory and the self domain of reflection. However, this approach is evidently not common to all disciplines; is not high on the pedagogical agenda of universities despite the increasing diversity of students' backgrounds; nor, therefore, is it likely to be familiar and/or immediately acceptable to all CAP participants.

Barnett *et al* note that most academics have greater loyalty to their discipline than their institution and that working relationships within the institution are 'framed through the deep, underlying epistemological structures of the knowledge fields' (p. 436). So, given that most academics have been inducted into the communities of practice of their own 'knowledge fields' long before they begin to develop a pedagogic strategy or identity, and that these fields continue to dominate HE despite lip-service to interdisciplinarity, am I displaying signs of arrogance in advocating an 'integrated approach', involving personal reflection and examination of one's learning processes for CAP participants from subject areas other than professional? I think not, for two reasons.

First, in becoming 'lecturers' and not simply 'researchers', academics accept a duty to teach: to step, however temporarily, into the world of the professional educator and, therefore, into a potentially different way of defining the curriculum, including tutor-student-knowledge relationships. Essentially, they accept a duty to consider the nature of an educational worldview and its implications for the worldview embedded in their own primary knowledge field. I am encouraged along this line of thinking by a new lecturer in physics who, referring in his CAP portfolio to the article by Barnett *et al* and his own developing practice, wrote: *The self domain is the most alien to me but ... [meeting] students for tutorials has taught me the value of this component. Hopefully, with increased exposure, I will be able to incorporate more of it into my teaching methods* (reproduced with permission).

Second, the kind of 'integrated' approach that characterises adult education practice is itself embedded in a worldview with core values that are in danger of being overlooked in the new managerialist climate of universities. From the perspective of the next two frameworks there would seem to be good reasons to restate and reclaim such values.

#### *Framework 2: Rethinking academic work (Nixon, 2003)*

Referring to an increasing literature on the multiple 'crises' facing universities, Nixon (p. 3) suggests that, because 'the new public management of higher education has failed to address the changing social conditions within which universities are located', the management solutions being offered are 'part of the problem, not part of the solution'. For Nixon, the roots of the crises lie in a larger one of a 'runaway world' of increasing individualisation, detraditionalisation and globalisation. In such a world, he says, 'institutions gain renewed significance as public spaces within which the competing impulses of differentiation and cohesion can be mediated' (pp. 4-5).

Unfortunately, rather than metaphorically 'holding the space' for this purpose, universities seem themselves, in Nixon's terms, to be 'cast adrift both morally and epistemologically' as their 'frames of understanding, action and self-identity are continually challenged' (p. 6). The new managerialist solution to this is usually to engage in restructuring exercises (analogous, perhaps, to re-arranging the deckchairs on the *Titanic*?). Nixon argues that 'moral agency is a neglected component of any effective restructuring: how we as academic workers define our academic identity is central to the creation of the conditions necessary for a renewed sense of professional and civic purpose within higher education' (p.8). It is therefore essential for academics collectively to re-orientate themselves 'towards alternative forms of association, a renewal of moral agency, and an emphasis on the centrality of learning' (p. 3). In my eyes, these are adult education values.



Discussing moral agency, Nixon points out that ‘The alienation of moral reasoning from the prevailing discourse of the new management of education has rendered us, at worst, not only reactive but also reactionary’ (p. 10). In this context, ‘The task is to ... work towards an opening up of the public sphere to new forms of institutional engagement and old forms of moral commitment’ (*ibid.*). In Nixon’s terms:

The key principle of the university is ... academic duty: the duty of accuracy in one’s beliefs, sincerity in proclaiming those beliefs, authenticity in living according to one’s sincere beliefs, and a recognition of others’ rights to do likewise. (p. 11)

Teasing out what this means in the context of one’s life and professional practice is to be engaged in what Nixon calls ‘the vocation of learning ... as it is handed down to us through the traditions of scholarship that have shaped our understanding of what universities aspire to and what academic leadership means’ (*ibid.*).

Such a vocation not only stands in stark contrast to a career shaped by the number of papers returnable within a research assessment exercise and the ‘market worth’ of one’s students, but the nature of the ‘duty’ that underpins it would have been familiar to the Victorian advocates of the University Extension Movement. It is, in any event, in such terms that I shall present my case at the Pearly Gates for attempting to maintain AE values within the academy. I shall also draw on the following framework since it admits the often-neglected dimension of spirituality into the case. This strongly informed the work of the early pioneers of AE, both inside and outside the academy, and is becoming increasingly significant in current AE practice (see English & Gillen, 2001; Hunt & West, 2006).

*Framework 3: Scholarship and spirituality (Sullivan, 2003)*

Sullivan’s argument is twofold: ‘first, scholarship and spirituality are intimately connected; second, a better understanding of this connection could assist researchers and scholars in rising above inadequate frameworks and impoverishing assumptions for academic work’ (p. 127). This echoes Tawney’s claim that a material framework for education is inadequate because it neglects the potential to release ‘spiritual energy’ ([http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/experiment\\_in\\_democratic\\_education.htm](http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/experiment_in_democratic_education.htm) [20/7/06]). Like Nixon, Sullivan emphasises the significance of reconciling personal belief with professional conduct, noting that ‘While the nature of the material one studies and the reliability of the methods one chooses are crucial, what determines the effectiveness of scholarship are the “inner tools”, the personal qualities, moral and spiritual, of the scholar’ (*ibid.*).

I continue to struggle with the nature of spirituality. Unlike Tawney’s and Sullivan’s understanding of it, mine is not derived from a religious base. My ‘felt-experience’ of spirituality is as a sense of interconnectedness with others and with the cosmos as a whole and this is ever-present as a drive to ‘put things together’, to integrate my ‘academic’ knowledge and within my life (Hunt, 2001). It is clearly no coincidence that I prefer to work with the ‘integrated’ curriculum model described above, or that it is in AE where I have spent most of my working life. It has, nevertheless, taken me the best part of twenty years to understand and articulate my ‘vocation’ in these terms: so, to return to Eliot’s poetry, perhaps these years have not, after all, been ‘wasted’.

Sullivan argues that universities need to ‘encourage institution-wide reflection on the big questions of life that connect with our fundamental commitments’ and that each discipline needs to look to ‘a wider whole, to a community beyond the membership of its own specialists’ (p. 130). He believes this will:

create the conditions where a sustained conversation can be carried out, not only by the scholars in that field but also self-reflexively, with regard to the principles governing the tradition, its provisional and porous boundaries, its relationship with other traditions, its significant unresolved questions. The quality of this self-reflective dimension is enhanced by institution-wide fostering of hospitable spaces for spirited cross-disciplinary exchanges on the questions and issues that transcend particular departments. (p. 131)

For Nixon, the questions and issues that should transcend departments to concern the university as a whole give rise to a 'new professional agenda', focussing on the need to:

- Work through the organisational implications of our own commitment to the academic practices of collegiality, teaching, research and scholarship;
- Make explicit the moral bases of that commitment, the values that sustain it, and the discourses that might frame it;
- Practice those values and discourses across a wide range of communities, forums and networks. (Nixon, 2003, p. 14)

In this context, it is arguable that self-reflective, person-centred work which challenges assumptions and encourages change in the interests of social justice – the very stuff of AE – does have a place within the academy. Indeed, it seems to be urgently needed if academics are to articulate and develop a new professional agenda rooted in values that extend beyond current preoccupations with material and economic aspects of education - and which reasserts principles that once underpinned the relationship between the university and the wider community.

## Conclusion

Prompted by a Government agenda to encourage more mature and other 'non-traditional' students into HE, and the HEA's view that 'Successful diversity depends not on "normalising" students to fit into existing practices, but rather on building on different backgrounds, experiences and interests', I set out to reflect on the extent to which the principles and practices of adult education may have a place in higher education. Driving the reflection were questions affecting my current practice: *How shall I teach on a course for new university lecturers?* and *What is it for my student (and indeed for me) to be an adult educator?*

I may not have definitive answers but, despite apparently unpropitious conditions, these reflections encourage me in 'the trying' to uphold values, including a particular 'way of being' in educational relationships, that are embedded in the traditions and practices of AE. I think these can usefully inform pedagogic practice *in* HE and *for* HE lecturers, not simply because of the increasing diversity of students' backgrounds but because such traditions and practices evidently bring from the past the seeds of a new professional agenda for the future. Whether at the Pearly Gates, before a redundancy committee, or with CAP participants, it is a case I will argue. Adult Education still *is* my business – and, if lecturers as well as students in HE are not to be 'normalised' into a pedagogic relationship that ignores their status as persons in a world where difference and commonality are the starting points for mutual exploration and understanding, I believe it is their business too.

## References

- Barnett, R., Parry, G. & Coate, K. (2001) Conceptualising curriculum change, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6, 4, 435-449.
- Brookfield, S. (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass).
- Burdell, P. & Swadener, B. (1999) Critical personal narrative and autoethnography in education, *Educational Researcher*, August-September, 21-26.
- DfES (2004) *Equipping our teachers for the future* (Nottingham: DfES).
- Eliot, T. S. (1963) *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber) 196-204.
- English, L. & Gillen, M. (Eds) (2000) *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning*. (San Francisco: Jossey Bass).
- Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin).
- Hannan, A. & Silver, S. (2000) *Innovating in Higher Education* (Buckingham: SRHE/OUP).
- HEA (2006) Supporting learning: what is widening participation? (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/4211.htm>, accessed 20/07/07).
- Hunt, C. (2001) Climbing out of the void, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6, 3, 351-367.
- Hunt, C. (2005) Book Reviews, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10, 3, 395-401.

- Hunt, C. & West, L. (2006) Engaging with spirit: researching spirituality in adult learning, in: P. Armstrong (Ed) *Inter-cultural perspectives on research into adult learning* (University of Leeds: SCUTREA) 176-183.
- Malcolm, J. & Zukas, M. (2002) Altered states of teacher identity, in: R. Edwards, P. Gray, B. Morgan-Klein, M. Murphy & L. Tett, (Eds) *Cultures, Communities and Citizens* (University of Stirling: SCUTREA) 193-198.
- Malcolm, J. & Zukas, M. (2000) Constructing pedagogic identities (<http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2000/malcolmj&zukasm-web>, accessed 19/12/06).
- Martin, I. (2006) Principled positions for adult learning, in: P. Armstrong (Ed) *Inter-Cultural Perspectives on Research into Adult Learning* (University of Leeds: SCUTREA) 285-291.
- Martin, I. & Merrill, B. (2002) Trouble with words, in: R. Edwards, P. Gray, B. Morgan-Klein, M. Murphy & L. Tett, (Eds) *Cultures, Communities and Citizens* (University of Stirling: SCUTREA) 205-210.
- Merrill, B. (2001) Learning and teaching in universities: perspectives from adult learners and lecturers, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6, 1, 5-17.
- Mezirow, J. (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass).
- Mitchell, G. (2000) *Responsible Body* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield).
- Nixon, J. (2003) Professional renewal as a condition of institutional change, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 13, 1, 3-15.
- Rowland, S. (2006) *The Enquiring University* (Maidenhead: SRHE).
- Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* (London: Heinemann).
- Sullivan, J. (2003) Scholarship and spirituality, in: D. Carr & J. Haldane (Eds) *Spirituality, Philosophy and Education* (London: RoutledgeFalmer) 127-140.
- West, L. (1996) *Beyond Fragments* (London: Taylor & Francis).
- West, L., Miller, N., O'Reilly, D. & Allen, R. (Eds) (2001) *Travellers Tales: From Adult Education to Lifelong Learning* (University of East London: SCUTREA).
- Zukas, M. & Malcolm, J. (2005) Discipline and pedagogy, in: P. Coare, P. Armstrong, M. Boice & L. Morrice (Eds) *Diversity and Difference in Lifelong Learning* (University of Sussex: SCUTREA) 447-454.