

Losing the Plot, Plotting the Lost:

Politics, Europe, and the Rediscovery of Lifelong Learning

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One of the oddities of international lifelong learning over the past couple of decades has been the European Union's enthusiastic distancing of itself from what Europe has contributed – through education – to Western civilisation. That this has coincided with the EU's coming-of-age as an educational agent makes it all the odder. Until the early 1990s, education was very much at the margins of the Union's activities; it was only in the early 1990s the European Commission established a Directorate General for Education (and Culture) for the first time. One might have imagined that the new band of European educational civil servants, tasked with developing a new 'European dimension' in education, would encourage growth from distinctively *European* roots. Far from it: their first major statement – the white paper *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society* (European Commission 1995) was virtually indistinguishable from a host of other policy papers which emerged in the 1990s from international organisations such as OECD, UNESCO and the Group of Eight industrial nations: 'in essence,' as Field (2000: 8) observed, 'they said much the same'.

This chapter does not address the question of why EU policies on education and lifelong learning have been so similar to those across the 'developed' world. Although this is far from fully understood, the broad contours

of the explanation – the apparently inexorable advance of marketisation and neoliberal ideology, the globalisation of policy-making – have been widely rehearsed. The focus instead is on what this abandonment of European achievement and traditions in education has meant this for the nature of education policy (in particular what this has meant for the field of the education of adults), and on the importance of ensuring that these achievements are not consigned to the ‘dustbin of history’.

The Consensus: Markets, Competitiveness, Employment

The essential message international organisations sought to convey from the early 1990s was that ‘globalisation’ required individuals – and just as urgently, economies – to be ‘flexible’. The future was *change*; success would go to enterprises and economies which adapted most quickly and best. People would have to change through the life-course: they could no longer expect to work in a single job, or even a single sector, for life: and to be able to move from one occupation to another, they would have to develop new skills. To stay employed, they had to remain employable, and this required constant training and retraining. And just as the capacity for constant change was an imperative for individuals, so it was for the economy and society as a whole. No longer was it good enough for educational systems to decide what people should be taught; it was individuals themselves who could best decide what they had to learn. Markets sent the best signals: provided people became self-motivated lifelong learners, they would know what was best for them.

The problem – on this view – was that educational institutions, and educational systems, did not, on the whole, recognise this new reality. Hide-bound by traditional thinking, controlled by professionals and bureaucrats, they were far too rigid and resistant. They had to become more adaptable. This was the message adopted by the EU. In a ‘permanently changing economy’, the European white paper argued, the ‘crucial problem of employment *compels* the education and training system to change’ (EC 1995: 25; emphasis added). Education and training strategies had to address work and employment as ‘a central preoccupation’. International organisations sang the same tune. ‘Everyone is convinced of the need for change.’ Employment and the needs of business and the economy provided the overriding purpose of education; as the economy was permanently changing, so education must be permanently flexible. ‘The central question now is how to move towards greater flexibility in education and training systems, taking take account of the diversity of people's demands.’ (EC 1995: 23). Leaving aside whether ‘everyone’ really did indeed agree (in the early 1990s it was common to overlook even the possibility of alternatives to the ‘end of history’), the brute fact is clear: from the mid-1990s onward it became increasingly difficult, across most countries, to justify the public provision of education for wider purposes than generating a more efficient economy and a more employable workforce.

To students of educational policy, this is all pretty commonplace: the rise, over the past quarter-century, of a new common-sense about education. In this, the needs of the economy (sometimes framed as employment or employability) are primary. ‘Everyone’ knows they need to be flexible in a permanently changing

economy. The ‘flexibility’ of education and training systems – whatever that may mean – has increased (though some think much remains to be done): partly through the development of new approaches to public sector management; partly through ‘marketisation’, privatisation and the growing penetration of private sector enterprise into educational provision at all levels. (It is probably in the education and training of adults that marketisation has gone furthest.) And partly, of course, through what has been called the retreat of the state: the preference for low-tax levels, lower levels of state provision, poorer welfare, the apparently inexorable advance of neoliberal ideology.

Many have described this ‘global imaginary’ (Rizvi and Lingard 2010), and explained both its increasing dominance and its effects. Viewed through a ‘global’ lens, the EU’s adoption of this perspective calls for no special explanation; indeed, it would be remarkable if it had done anything very different. Some suggested, in fact, particularly in the early years of the present century, that the EU’s version of globalisation was in some ways distinctive: either through its development of a potentially more democratic European educational ‘space’ (Nóvoa and Lawn 2002), or through its greater emphasis on social inclusion and ‘citizenship’ – a heritage, perhaps, of the European social model. Vida Mohorčič Špolar and I have pointed to the continuing presence, albeit residual, of ‘non-economic themes – equity, social inclusion, social cohesion, citizenship, and so forth’ in EU lifelong learning policy (Holford and Mohorčič Špolar 2012: 41). It would be wrong to deny that European education policy has given prominence to particular features which have a citizenship or inclusion dimension. The 1995

white paper's emphasis on 'proficiency in three European languages' is clearly part of this; social inclusion remains a central element of EU policy rhetoric.

Whether EU education policy was ever really as different from the global mainstream as these authors imagined (or hoped) remains debated, but since the 2004 'crisis' of the Lisbon strategy, and the post-2007 financial crash and depression, global trends have clearly dominated (Dale and Robertson 2009). European policy, and EU policy, of course does have its own particular features: a global consensus on policy does not mean global uniformity. At the EU level, policy-making has been marked by particular features – the need to work with a wide diversity of member states, the problem of achieving some kind of unity of policy amid this diversity, while doing justice to the principle of 'subsidiarity'. There are, of course, a host of unique mechanisms which make EU policy processes fascinating – the 'open method of co-ordination', the European semester, and so forth (Milana and Holford 2014). In trying to establish a common direction, the EU has encountered the deep resilience of national institutions: a single model of lifelong learning across Europe seems as unlikely today as it did to observers (Holford *et al.* 2008) a decade ago; perhaps less so. But this diversity should not blind us to the common trend: justification by competitiveness.

Few educational policy-makers, national or international, now dissent from this conventional wisdom that the principal purposes of education, both initial and lifelong, are related to work. In 1995 the EU white paper saw this as 'proof' of the 'demise of the major ideological disputes on the objectives of

education' (EC 1995: 23). As Grubb (1996: 535) wrote, 'vocationalism is rampant again': the idea that 'public education should be more "relevant" to our ... economic future is widespread'. While this label (vocationalism) does some violence to the richness of the concept – for instance, to the insights into the notion of 'vocation' which have derived from Weber – it is common, and must serve us here.

Adult education and the 'Learning Turn'

The education of adults was hit by vocationalism in the 1990s. Initially, this was somewhat masked. Many adult educators were optimistic about a 'learning turn'. Lifelong learning was endorsed and adopted by international organisations – the OECD, the European Union – as key to public policy. Corporations, long been encouraged to treat training seriously, were now falling over each other to become 'learning organisations'. In the words of one contemporary:

Everyone has heard the story. Being a learning organization or engaging in lifelong learning is now essential to economic health. It enables organizations to compete in the global economy. Moreover, by properly deploying technology such as the worldwide web, individuals can all be linked into learning networks. Now everyone has access to education without having to endure the indignities of admissions procedures, let alone authoritarian and disciplinary teachers. (Boshier 1998: 3)

Adult educators soon discovered, however, that there was a price to pay for these enthusiastic new supporters: it was vocationalism. In recent decades, ‘lifelong learning’ has become as strongly vocational as education more generally – probably more so. Tongue-in-cheek, Boshier suggested that adult educators ‘must be delighted’: their ideas had ‘moved out of church basements, extension offices, institutes of adult education and community groups and into corporate boardrooms’. But those who had helped UNESCO and others build ‘an architecture for lifelong education’ were discovering that lifelong learning was ‘recurrent education or human resource development (HRD) in drag’. It might, he said, ‘look splashy and alluring; it can preen and prance and strut its stuff. And it goes out at night. But what you see is not necessarily what you get. Remember what your mother said about going out with strangers?’ (Boshier 1998: 4)

Boshier’s argument was that the lifelong education, as formulated by the Faure Report (Faure et al., 1972), had been ‘a blueprint for educational reform’, a ‘master concept’ developed in ‘response to the ferment of the 1960s [and] ... launched on a wave of protest spawned by student activists, grave concerns about ecological catastrophe, crisis in French education and politics and the toxic remnants of the Vietnam war’. In the 1990s, however, ‘architects of the new right’ had ‘hijacked some of the language and concepts’ of lifelong education while ignoring its central purpose: ‘developing civil society and democracy’. And, Boshier pointed out, in doing so they also challenged longer-standing adult education traditions. ‘In some ways the Faure Report echoed the British Ministry of Reconstruction 1919 Report, also billed as a “design for democracy” (Waller

1956)' (Boshier 1998: 4); we shall return to the Ministry of Reconstruction below.

In fact, as Lee, Thayer and Madyun (2008) have shown, this 'new neoliberal context' was beginning to mark international policy communities' discussions of lifelong learning as early as the 1980s- a decade they see as 'an important formative period out of which emerged a neo-liberal discourse on lifelong learning' (p. 448).

In short, while contributions since the 1990s have added detail, texture and theoretical bells and whistles to Boshier's argument, the essentials remain. A 'neoliberal' tide, premised on a 'global imaginary' (Rizvi and Lingard 2010) and the political economy of free markets, has swept the democratic, humanist and liberal dimensions of lifelong education aside. With them have been lost professional discourse and expertise, institutional practices, beliefs, principles and memories – sacrificed on the altar of market efficiency, victims of narratives of 'creative destruction' originating in Schumpeter (1942), but developed and popularised in more recent US strategic management theory (Christensen, Johnson and Rigby 2002). If vocationalism is now common sense, it is partly because so many of the social bases for alternatives, and for critique, have been razed.

The Worlds we Have Lost

This chapter explores how we might develop a basis for refusing this common sense. We do so – in part – by drawing on historical perspectives. One of the vanities imposed on political (and to some extent intellectual) debate by the

‘global imaginary’ is the notion that the modern world is entirely different from the past – and that historical insight is therefore *a priori* irrelevant. At political and managerial levels, this is associated with a range of incontestable tropes – ‘modernisation’, ‘change’, ‘flexibility’, and the like. Even at the level of theory, we find the notion of a ‘learning society’ portrayed as descriptive of a novel world. Jarvis (1998) identified three main interpretations in the literature. There was the learning society ‘as reflexive society’, based on understandings of modernity (or for some, late- or post-modernity) as risky and in constant flux; learning becomes an essential coping strategy for individuals, organisations and even nations. The learning society as a market phenomenon emphasises the invention or reinvention of knowledge as a ‘desirable’ and tradeable commodity: learning therefore becomes something to be demanded in markets, rather than provided as a matter of public policy. Radical perspectives – such as Faure (1972) – were posited on the learning society as novel – an as yet unrealised, perhaps even utopian, future.

It is worth adding, perhaps, that framing change as implying the desirability of the new, and the past primarily as impediment to change rather than source of understanding, has long been a favoured view among modernisers. ‘History,’ Henry Ford is widely said to have said, ‘is bunk.’ He continued: ‘It’s tradition. We don’t want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker’s dam is the history we made today.’¹ Whatever he really thought (his actual words – ‘History is more or less bunk’ – were a little

more qualified), he has been quoted, or misquoted, often enough since to demonstrate the lasting rhetorical value of his claim.

Our case goes roughly as follows. First, we draw attention to the fact that today's vocational common sense would have seemed odd not only to most educators of adults, but to significant political thinkers on left and right, through most of the twentieth century (not to mention earlier). We do this through a case study of twentieth century British (in fact, mainly English) adult education. No claim is made that British experience is representative: merely that it is illustrative. The hope is that through pointing to some of the richness of this tradition, we will encourage researchers to explore, rediscover and recover the traditions and practices which marked adult education in other European countries. Toward the end, we draw attention to the fact (not, apparently, so self-evident as one might assume) that the problems facing Europe and the world today are by no means only – in the narrow sense – economic: they are in very real ways cultural, social and political.

Comparative Perspective: Learning from Adult Educations Past

It may, today, be common sense to seek vocational rationales for lifelong learning, but common sense, as Gramsci (1971: 196-8) taught us, is ideological, and located in specific social and historical milieux. For most of the twentieth century, assumptions about the proper content of (post-school) education for adults were rather different. We sketch an account based on British examples. No doubt similar stories could be told about other European countries – each would,

of course, have its own particular inflection, and no student of European history could doubt that some of the inflections would be substantial.

Of course, *nominally* the EU has valued its links with great European educators of the past. Socrates, Grundtvig, Erasmus, and Comenius have been preserved in the names of programmes and funding mechanisms. While we may wonder whether this reduction to sources of Euros leads their contributions to be better understood, or even better remembered, such names give some small clue to the richness of the traditions Europeans have inherited. And behind the names – and these are four among many – lie not only philosophies and programmatic statements, but centuries of practices shaped by people – students, teachers and others – institutions, ideologies, movements, revolutions. The difficulty involved in encapsulating the diversity and history of European educational systems is immense. Arguably, Jarvis and Griffin (2003) was in some ways an attempt to revalorise the European tradition in the education of adults: they found five volumes insufficient to it justice.

The case we examine here is that of English adult education. I have argued elsewhere that

Policy development for a learning society in England could have drawn on rich traditions in further and higher education, and perhaps especially in adult education. During the twentieth century, these traditions had been particularly strongly entwined with the politics, ideology and thinking of

the labour movement, though they had also been widely endorsed on the political right. (Holford and Welikala 2013: 146)

The specific formation we shall explore here is the form of working-class adult education developed in the early twentieth century as a result of pressure on universities from – broadly – the labour movement. The particular vehicle for this pressure was the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), a body which has remained at the centre of adult educational activity since its establishment in 1903. The WEA was formed by students in university 'extension' courses, who argued that universities and government should devote resources to the education of working class adults and children. What its founder – Albert Mansbridge – and its early members valued above all was liberal education. This was 'true education': it 'directly induces thought, which permeates the whole of society'. In contrast, most education provided to the working classes promoted only 'unthinking absorption of facts', putting people 'at the mercy of the opinion of the hour, however irresponsible', and leaving them susceptible to 'flights of mere rhetoric.' (Mansbridge 1944: 1) The specific form in which this education was provided was the 'tutorial class': relatively small classes (a maximum of thirty) of mainly working class students which met weekly, normally for two hours on each occasion, over 24 weeks in each of three successive years.

From a modest start, this quite quickly became a substantial movement. Universities – first Oxford, then others – were persuaded to organise and subsidise classes in industrial towns, often far away from the university itself. In 1907, the Board of Education had set in train arrangements (which were to persist until the

1990s) whereby universities and other bodies, particularly the Workers' Educational Association, were provided with public funds 'in aid of part-time Courses in subjects of general as distinct from vocational education' (SR&O 1919: 31). The Great War cemented this – though the amount of money involved was always modest. As the war progressed, and the soldiers died, government established a Ministry of Reconstruction to contemplate and plan a post-war world 'fit for heroes to live in'. The Ministry appointed a committee on Adult Education which itself produced a large – and landmark – report in 1919. This made strong assertions about the content of education. 'Technical education,' it argued 'must be an integral part of our educational system'. However, it 'is not an alternative to non-vocational education. The latter is a universal need; but whether the former is necessary depends on the character of the employment.' (Ministry of Reconstruction 1919, p. 174) The committee also argued for the liberalisation of technical education by

the inclusion in the curriculum of pure science and of studies which enable the student to relate his own occupation to the industry of which it is a part, to appreciate the place of that industry in the economic life of the nation and the world, and to interpret the economic life of the community in terms of social values, i.e. of economic history, economics and sociology. (Ministry of Reconstruction 1919: 174)

Following the war, this became an established and influential (if small) feature of the English educational system. In 1918, as we have seen, 'adult education' was defined in law as involving 'general as distinct from vocational

education' (SRO 1919, p. 31), and over the following half-century the term adult education developed in Britain connotations of 'specifically liberal education' (Jarvis 2004, p. 44). This had a wider influence: in 1921, for instance, the Board of Education issued a booklet on *Humanism in the Continuation School*. Continuation schools were newly-established institutions for compulsory part-time study by adolescents. In this, the Board declared:

... the world in which we find ourselves to-day is something very different from that upon which the eyes of men have been accustomed to rest for ages past, so different indeed, and so recent in its coming upon us, that the human mind, and still less the machinery of education, have hardly begun to adjust themselves to it in any conscious fashion. Yet if the necessary readjustment is not made our civilisation is doomed, as any civilisation must be in which material progress outruns the intelligent control of the human spirit. It is not technical instruction we stand in need of so much as an informed humanism, ... (Board of Education 1924: 6)

This is hardly the place to explore in detail this tradition, but it is worth mentioning that the commitment to liberal adult education for workers spread across the political spectrum, and lasted into the 1970s. In the early 1950s Winston Churchill famously wrote that 'no branch of our vast educational system ... should more attract ... the aid and encouragement of the State than [liberal] adult education.' It ranked, he said, 'far above science and technical instruction ... [and] demands the highest measures which our hard-pressed finances can sustain.' The 'whole range' of evidence considered by the Ashby Committee, was

‘unanimous’ that liberal adult education was ‘still essential’ (Ministry of Education 1954: 33): ‘adult education students represent in relation to the community at large a social and intellectual asset the loss of which would be deplorable; and we put on record our hope that their genuine educational needs will never go unfulfilled through lack of funds’ (Ministry of Education 1954: 34).

As late as the early 1970s, a major government report (the report of the Russell Committee of Inquiry) was adamant that adult education should not be judged by its vocational outcomes:

The value of adult education is not solely to be measured by increases in earning power or productive capacity or by any other materialistic yardstick, but by the quality of life it inspires in the individual and generates for the community at large. It is an agent changing and improving our society: but for each individual the means of change may differ and each must develop in his own way, at his own level and according to his own talents. No academic subject or social or creative activity is superior to another provided that those engaged in it develop a greater awareness of their own capacities and a more certain knowledge of the totality of their responsibilities as human beings. (DES 1973: xi).

Forty years on, it is perhaps quaint that Russell thought it helpful and relevant to emphasise the value of the views expressed by a previous major government investigation: the Ministry of Reconstruction fifty years earlier (1919). The achievements of the [English] educational system since 1900 had

been ‘spectacular’, and ‘nowhere more perhaps than in the growth of technical education in the last twenty years’ (DES 1973: 3). But ‘lifelong continuance’ of education was essential, and the Russell committee quoted at length ‘words from our predecessors’ Report’ which it thought ‘even more relevant today than when they were written in 1919:’ (DES 1973: 4)

We do not wish to underrate the value of increased technical efficiency or the desirability of increasing productivity; but we believe that a short-sighted insistence upon these things will defeat its object. We wish to emphasise the necessity for a great development of non-technical studies, partly because we think that it would assist the growth of a truer conception of technical education, but more especially because it seems to us vital to provide the fullest opportunities for personal development and for the realisation of a higher standard of citizenship. Too great an emphasis has been laid on material considerations and too little regard paid to other aspects of life. (Ministry of Reconstruction 1919: 153; quoted DES 1973: 4.)

Sketching the broad parameters of this tradition does not, of course, do justice to the nature and richness of its educational and societal contribution. Within this space there evolved a network of educational institutions and practices, which intersected with social, economic and political institutions at a range of levels. We have seen its deep connections with the trade union and labour movement: the WEA was central and – although always constitutionally neutral as regards party politics – always gave succour and comfort to socialists

and trade unionists. We have touched on its particular pedagogical character: the tutorial class. There were other features: a marked reverence for ‘residential education’, so adult education was marked by residential summer and weekend schools; emphasis on Socratic dialogue and discussion; strong reliance on books and strong links with the educational mission of public libraries.

The Limits of Vocationalism

Let us turn back to the educational challenges facing Europe. According to the European Union these are – in the spirit of vocationalism – essentially to support the EU’s economic aims. In 2000 the Lisbon Strategy announced that Europe would become ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world ... with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’ by 2010. The Strategy failed. Instead, Europe in 2010 was facing a ‘global recession’ (perhaps more accurately described as a European and North Atlantic depression). The EU’s response was ‘more of the same’: the Europe 2020 strategy is built around similar aims:

- Smart growth – developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.
- Sustainable growth – promoting a more resource-efficient, greener and more competitive economy.
- Inclusive growth – fostering a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion. (European Commission 2010, p. 8)

Although the aims are similar, in practice social concerns have been – at least initially – played down. There was a renewed emphasis on economic competitiveness – particularly through strengthened mechanisms of ‘soft governance’, such as the European Semester (Holford and Mleckzo 2013). The Commission’s Communication *Rethinking Education* (2012) spoke loudly of such thinking: education and training have a ‘broad mission’ which ‘encompasses objectives such as active citizenship, personal development and well-being’, it admitted. But ‘against the backdrop of sluggish economic growth and a shrinking workforce due to demographic ageing, the most pressing challenges for Member States are to address the needs of the economy and focus on solutions to tackle fast-rising youth unemployment’ (EC 2012: 2). These meant concentrating on ‘developing transversal skills’ (p. 3), ‘particularly entrepreneurial skills’ (p. 3), on ‘STEM related skills’ (p. 4). Curricula should be made ‘more relevant to the workplace’ (p. 11), partly through ‘a reinforced partnership approach’ between public and private sectors (p. 13). Vocationalism rules.

Five years into ‘Europe 2020’, do the Strategy’s achievements seem more impressive than Lisbon’s? The EU’s economies have been stagnating for the best part of a decade; the ‘employment problem’ remains unsolved. The crisis of the Eurozone continues, despite the punishment inflicted on the people of Greece (and, if to a lesser degree, other peoples). If education has been serving the economy, its success has been limited. This may, of course, be because – as Wolf (2002), and Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011), have in different ways argued – what education can achieve is limited. But at roughly the same time, the EU has

been facing the most profound political and social challenges. Until 1995 the EU had 12 member states; by 2007 it had 27. Its population grew from roughly 350 million people to over 500 million. The changes were profound. The countries of the EU have very diverse economies, polities, societies, and histories. Four have populations in excess of 60 millions each; 13 have populations smaller than that of London, the continent's largest city. In 2010, 86% of EU GDP came from the twelve countries which were member states before 1995.

It is hardly surprising that this rapid growth and social change generated crisis. Manuel Barroso (quoted in Charter 2007) compared the EU 'to the organisation of empires': 'We have the dimension of empire', he said (though in contrast to empires which were made 'with force' and 'a centre imposing diktat', EU members had 'fully decided to work together and to pool their sovereignty'). The management of Europe's diversity must be profoundly difficult, and the European Commission's growing enthusiasm for mechanisms which will provide simple but reliable ways of describing and measuring social phenomena is probably a natural result. The rejection in 2005 of the Constitutional Treaty by the peoples of France and The Netherlands in popular referenda threw the political project off course; the crisis of the Euro has stressed the relationship between richer and poorer member states virtually to destruction. At the same time, growing migration has been matched by newly assertive far right political parties, often of a highly 'Eurosceptic' kind. Political instability in the Middle East and Afghanistan, the growth of 'Islamist' political movements, not to mention the

West's 'war on terror' have challenged Europe's sense of identity. And in 2015 the refugee crisis grew to a scale unknown since the late 1940s.

This suggests, of course, that many of the challenges facing Europe are not economic after all; and 'economics' may not provide all the answers. A recognition of this – or perhaps a partial recognition – is apparent in the Paris Declaration of EU education ministers (March 2015), 'Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education'. This began:

In response to the terrorist attacks in France and Denmark earlier this year, and recalling similar atrocities in Europe in the recent past, we reaffirm our determination to stand shoulder to shoulder in support of fundamental values that lie at the heart of the European Union: respect for human dignity, freedom (including freedom of expression), democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. These values are common to the Member States in a European society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail. (EU Education Ministers 2015)

The ministers continued in similar vein, with a ringing endorsement of their collective commitment to 'protecting and strengthening Europe's spirit of freedom, a spirit which values critical thinking as much as respect for others in line with the values of the Union':

we have a special duty to ensure that the humanist and civic values we share are safeguarded and passed on to future generations. We remain united in our efforts to promote freedom of thought and expression, social inclusion and respect for others, as well as to prevent and tackle discrimination in all its forms. (EU Education Ministers 2015)

The Paris Declaration was, in fact, issued in the name not only of education ministers, but of the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. And the Commission's Communication, *New priorities for European cooperation in education and training* (EC 2015), acknowledged that the 'pressing challenges' of 2012 (the economy and youth unemployment) have broadened. Europe, it says, now faces 'a number of urgent tasks': not only 'restoring job creation and economic recovery, achieving sustainable growth; bridging the investment gap' but 'enhancing social cohesion; giving radicalisation and violence priority attention' (EC 2015: 2). There is a renewed emphasis on education's 'important role in fostering inclusion and equality, cultivating mutual respect and embedding fundamental values in an open and democratic society' (p. 2), and the need 'to prevent and tackle marginalisation and radicalisation' (p. 5).

So far, the spirit of the Paris Declaration pervades the 2015 Communication. But when we look for practical policies to these ends, it falls considerably short. While there are extensive recommendations on the theme of 'quality and relevance of learning outcomes is key for skills development' (EC 2015: 3), the section entitled 'Education must contribute to social cohesion, equality, non-discrimination and civic competences' is does little more than

reassert what the ministers had declared in Paris five months earlier. Some of its assertions are important – if only because of their new, or renewed, prominence:

Inequality is at its highest level in 30 years in most European and OECD countries, and has a negative impact on educational outcomes, as education systems tend to reproduce existing patterns of socio-economic status. Breaking the intergenerational cycle of low qualifications must therefore be a priority. While a majority of Member States has taken measures to improve access to education for disadvantaged learners, a significant educational gap persists and access to good quality mainstream education and training remains a challenge in many parts of the EU. ... Gender gaps in education must be tackled and gender differences in educational choices addressed. (EC 2015: 4-5)

But rhetoric is seldom enough, and in these areas the Commission's ability to suggest concrete measures – its policy imagination – has served the peoples of Europe poorly. There will, it says, be 'funding from the Erasmus+ programme, in line with the four areas identified in the Declaration'² (p. 5). But on the whole – for the Commission – moving ahead on the Paris agenda seems likely to involve travelling along its well-established vocational tracks. For example, in relation to 'violent extremism', it asserts education and training's 'important role in fostering inclusion and equality, cultivating mutual respect and embedding fundamental values in an open and democratic society.' Quite so. But the mechanisms it envisages are only 'reaching out' to the most disadvantaged with education and training 'to prevent and tackle poverty and social exclusion and discrimination':

‘step up efforts to improve access to quality learning for all, thereby fostering upwards social convergence’ (p. 2). Few would disagree that education for all is important. Any education, even the most narrow and vocational, probably plays helps to ‘build a foundation on which active citizenship rests’ (p. 2). But education – especially, European education – has much more to offer. It is time the European Commission educated itself about the practical and professional knowledge that European educational systems, movements, institutions and traditions have developed in areas outside vocational education. It might then be able to make meaningful suggestions about curriculum and methods for ‘cultivating mutual respect and embedding fundamental values in an open and democratic society’.

In this context, it is salutary to consider whether the destruction of non-vocational expertise and knowledge in education – and here we refer in particular to adult education – might have been an error. And in this respect, it is well to refer back to our English example. Until the mid-1980s, as we have seen, all British governments endorsed and funded liberal adult education. They did so in part for reasons which today might be labelled ‘citizenship’ or ‘inclusion’. This came from different directions. Liberal adult education had a strong ethos of ‘service’; its leading intellectuals were strongly influenced by idealist philosophers such as T.H. Green and Benjamin Jowett, which ‘elevate[d] public service, whether to government, empire, church or community, as the highest ethical and professional imperative’ (Goldman 2000: 299; see also Steele 1994). We can see this in one of the movement’s foundational speeches: by John

Mactavish, a worker in Portsmouth Dockyard, at a conference at Oxford University of academics and 'working class representatives'. He began with a claim for rights: 'I am not here as a suppliant for my class. I decline to sit at the rich man's table praying for crumbs. I claim for my class all the best of all that Oxford has to give. I claim it as a right – wrongfully withheld – wrong not only to us but to Oxford.' There has always been an ambiguity in the claim: was it for his class (in the sense of his fellow adult education students), or was it for the working class? But it was not just an assertion of right; he was also making an argument about the role of higher education in society, and of society's need for 'service':

What is the true function of a University? Is it to obtain the nation's best men, or to sell its gifts to the rich? Instead of recruiting her students from the widest possible area, she has restricted her area of selection to the fortunate few. ... We want workpeople to come to Oxford [and] ... to come back as missionaries. ... The sons of the working-man come to Oxford to escape from their class, not to lift it. We want Oxford to open wide her doors to the best of our people, and take them in. We want her to send them back as doctors whose business will be health-giving, not wealth-getting; we want her to send them back to us as lawyers whose business will be justice not fees; we want her to send them back to us as living teachers, not mechanical manipulators of child-life. We want her to inspire them not with the idea of getting on, but with the idea of social service. ...
(In Mansbridge 1913: 194-197)

This was one perspective on citizenship and inclusion: there were others. By the mid-1920s Lord Eustace Percy, President of the Board of Education, argued in a memorandum to a colleague ‘that £100,000 spent annually’ on liberal adult education through the WEA ‘would be about the best police expenditure we could indulge in ...’ (quoted in Fieldhouse 1985: 123). But this was by no means the only perspective on the political right. Thirty years later, Churchill wrote:

I have no doubt myself that a man or woman earnestly seeking in grown-up life to be guided to wide and suggestive knowledge in its largest and most uplifted sphere will make the best of all the pupils in this age of clatter and buzz, of gape and gloat. The appetite of adults to be shown the foundations and processes of thought will never be denied by a British Administration cherishing the continuity of our Island life. (Churchill 1953: 173)

The point of this chapter is not to say that English adult education has ‘the answers’ to Europe’s problems. Like all other forms of education, it had strengths and limitations; and of course, it was ‘of its time’. It generated a wealth of literature about itself – some of it, in the positive sense, research-based, some much more normative, some celebratory, some highly self-critical. Its practitioners argued about matters of policy and practice for the best part of a century. The point, rather, is to suggest that the historical traditions and institutional forms of education – from all of Europe’s nations – should be reviewed, and sympathetically reassessed. They are, and should be treated as, a treasure-chest of experience and insight, from which new forms of education able

to address the continent's social and political challenges can evolve. If this is to be achieved, the European Commission, and indeed policy-makers across the continent, should acknowledge their need to learn; and to learn from the past – critically, of course – as well as from today's 'best practice'. A non-vocational Cedefop, dedicated to adult education for 'fostering inclusion and equality, cultivating mutual respect and embedding fundamental values in an open and democratic society'? Encouraging – and supporting – research on European educational traditions would be a good start.

¹ Interview with Charles N. Wheeler, *Chicago Tribune*, 25 May 1916.

Burlingame (1957: 9) quotes Ford as asking John Reed, 'How can anyone claim to know the truth about history?' when it is 'rewritten every year from a new point of view'.

² These are, according to the Commission: '(i) promoting the acquisition of social, civic and intercultural competences, enhancing ownership of Europe's fundamental values, and fostering active citizenship (ii) enhancing critical thinking and media literacy (iii) fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people and (iv) promoting intercultural dialogue.' (EC 2015: 5) The Educational ministers phrasing was slightly different: '(1) Ensuring that children

and young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship ; (2) Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to all forms of discrimination and indoctrination ; (3) Fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people, by ensuring that our education and training systems address their needs; (4) Promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders.’ (EU Ministers of Education 2015)

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