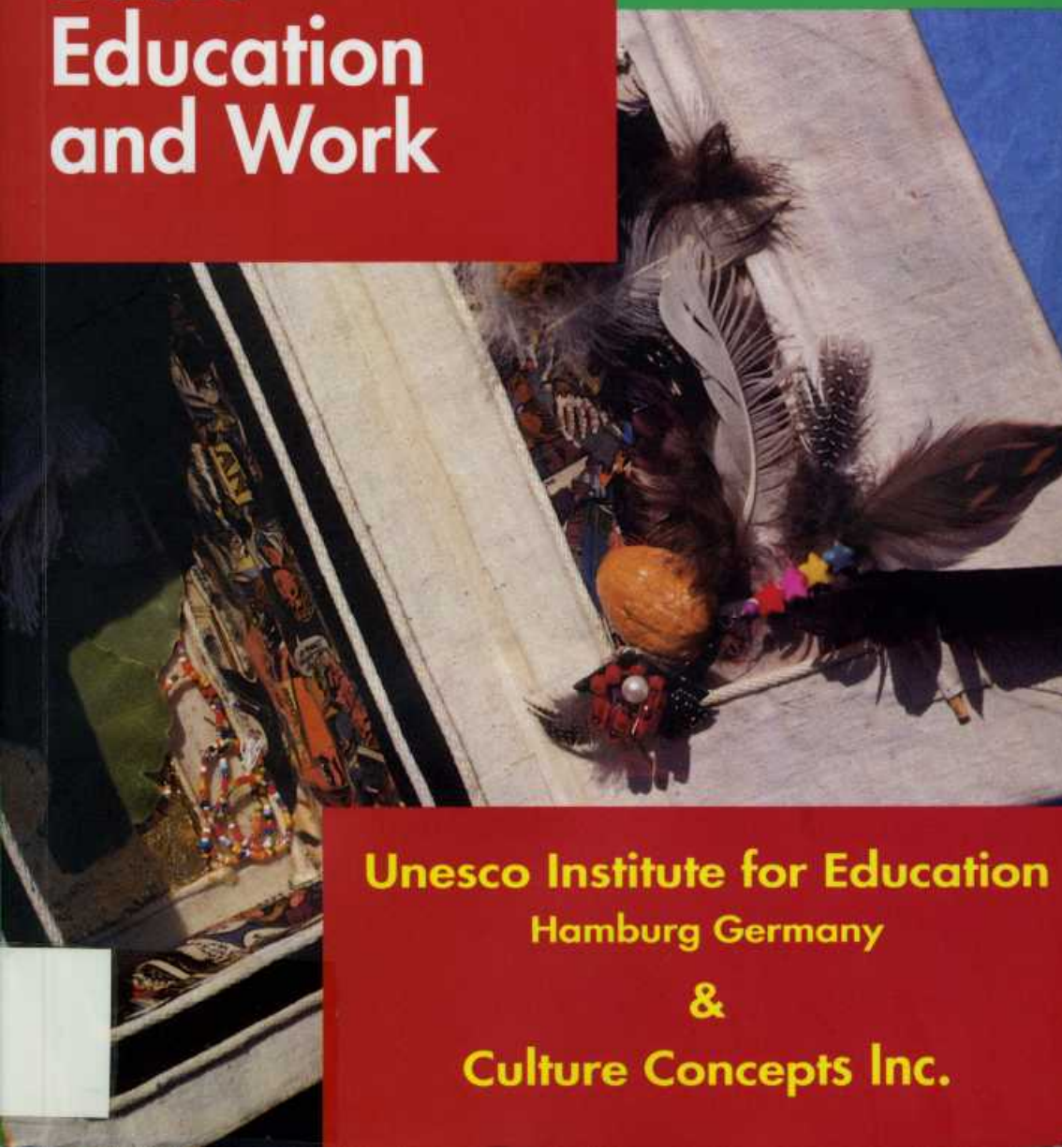


# Alpha 96



Edited by Jean-Paul Hautecoeur

## Basic Education and Work



**Unesco Institute for Education  
Hamburg Germany  
&  
Culture Concepts Inc.**

# Alpha 96

## Basic Education & Work

*Edited by  
Jean-Paul Hautecoeur*

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the Ministry of Education, Government of Québec  
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# INTRODUCTION

Jean-Paul Hautecoeur  
UNESCO Institute for Education

ALPHA 96: *Basic Education and Work* is the fourth publication in the UNESCO Institute for Education's ALPHA series, compiled as part of the research programme on *Literacy Strategies in Industrialized Countries*. This two-year programme of action-research aims to develop international intellectual cooperation in the field of adult literacy, to support experimental socio-educational practice, and to disseminate the research results to an international readership. Such projects can only be conducted with the support of government partners and non-governmental organizations, and with the voluntary collaboration of numerous researchers.

The subject of ALPHA 96: *Basic Education and Work* is obviously highly topical, unlike that of ALPHA 94: *Cultural Development in Rural Areas*, which might suggest that it was a piece of marginal dilettantism. Nonetheless, the issues of the crisis of work, of resistance to loss of culture, of dislocation and disqualification, and of the search for appropriate methods and forms of organization to replace imposed training "provision", as well as the major issue of resistance to impoverishment through community initiatives, were to be found throughout the earlier work, ALPHA 94. This volume, ALPHA 96, is a logical progression, on a larger canvas and with a new team, of the same approach to research based on a phenomenon of change: literacy.

In the title of ALPHA 96, *Basic Education* ("formation de base" in the original French title) has replaced literacy. The change in terminology reflects changes in usage and practice in the fragmented field of adult education. The influence of economics and the priority given to work and employment justify the choice of education rather than literacy, which is restricted to the field of sociolinguistics. Also, our critical approach obliged us to look for different words to observe, reveal and name experimental and marginal social practices which are, willingly or not, dissociated from dominant practice. Amid the often unbearable problems of everyday life for the groups and

individuals who are discussed in this volume, there is rarely any thought of literacy. Literacy is a term used by professionals, politicians and pressure groups, and has not become part of the vocabulary of citizens to whom it is applied. As for literacy provision, in reality this only covers an infinitesimal proportion of the population, despite the attempts of central bodies to involve the huge numbers of people who are disqualified and discarded.

*Basic education*, as we understood it at the beginning of the research, means something other than the education and training models and programmes run by educational establishments, by companies and some voluntary associations. *Basic* does not have the usual meaning of the initial skills on which an educational curriculum can be based; nor does it mean minimal or prosaic skills, as though seen from a superior position and as though there were only one centre to the universe and one direction for history.

**We understood *basic education* in the anthropological sense, analogous to *basic personality*: a structure for assembling and transmitting knowledge, a generative grammar of total exchange. And as a *skill* particular to a group that was structuring its identity and transforming itself through chance events, encounters with other cultures, and a number of individual wills.**

This is decisively different from contemporary ideas of training. Usually, education and training are prescribed when a person is judged by an external observer, generally someone in a central or superior position, to be under-qualified or unskilled. Education and training serve the purpose of acculturation rather than enrichment of cultural capital. The political vocabulary that gives rise to this is not deceptive: socialization, entry into employment, employability, adaptability, flexibility, and so on. Basic education is thus applied to outsiders who lack the basics, to reconstruct their identities and give them a chance. Educators and trainers are expected at best to rehabilitate and at worst to neutralize deviance, since they do not have the objective conditions to improve the skills of the disqualified and help them to participate in equal exchange. Evidence for this is to be found in several monographs in this volume.

Our attitude is rather derived from a prejudice in favour of cultural differences, of curiosity about other practical forms of education and training beyond the limits of the "single market", and of a desire for reciprocal transactions with partners or associates (not with "clients" or pupils). The basis of exchange is found in the two-way movement of giving and counter-giving, with value added on both sides in a relationship founded on solidarity rather than domination or even "annihilation".<sup>1</sup> A good part of our task lies in discovering this giving — this knowledge — in order to make contact, to enter into a relationship and thus jointly to improve skills. We like to call this type of work which links different and frequently unequal types of education and training, cooperative research. One of the participants in this research venture has summed it up thus: "Knowledge is already there. We just have to find it."<sup>2</sup>

## OUR ATTITUDE IN THE PROJECT

The ALPHA 96 project was described as follows to potential collaborators:

"The object of the research is to understand what those who are called "illiterate" (excluded from legitimate skills) set out to do in the world of work: their own strategies of work, of getting into the market, of finding networks for the exchange of goods, services, values and symbols, and of their strategies for organization and communication. This 'object' is to be described, observed and questioned. Instead of prescribing education and training, we want to find information, elucidate knowledge and skills, reveal projects and desires, make supportive links, strengthen partnerships, claim and defend rights.

We are in fact talking about *cooperative research, action-research, implied research*. This presupposes both methodological distance and sociological proximity, which is feasible if we recognize that the researchers are effectively on both sides — the educated and the illiterate — if we have suffered disqualification and contempt, and if we know that we can renew our own skills with the help of the discarded. We can only make a common commitment with the discarded of North and South by reference to a basic or participatory model of democracy, which thus runs counter to the habits of imposed democracy.

*Cooperative action-research* consists in enabling exchange to take place in a dialectic of reciprocity and a dynamic of change. How does this come about at the local level, among varied projects and resources? With what results? How can it become more effective in the practical search for solutions to the crisis of work?"<sup>3</sup>

The crisis of work is not restricted to the growing scarcity of jobs or to the problems arising from chronic unemployment. It concerns the value of work, its objective value on the money-based exchange market, and its subjective or ethical value in postindustrial societies. The decline in the exchange value of paid employment is less of a disaster than has often been suggested. It has in fact obliged societies to conceive of a different division of work, to recognize economic activities that had been illegitimate, and to open the field of work to activities that are non-productive but are socially useful and even vital from the point of view of the global economy.<sup>4</sup> It also forces individuals and a growing number of groups to take initiatives and to look for independent routes to survival that do not mean enrolling in some dead-end training course or other. The potential for economic creativity is by no means restricted to those with higher qualifications.

The erosion of the subjective value of work and the loss of its cultural and social functions (identity, integration, participation) have consequences of varying severity for individuals, for social cohesion, for the environment, and "for a continuing world".<sup>5</sup> It is better to measure the seriousness of the crisis of work by crime statistics than by the rise in unemployment, or frequency of labour disputes. The lifting of censorship in post-totalitarian countries has provided confirmation, as has the fact that exclusion has become an everyday phenomenon in the richest countries.

The economic consequence of the scarcity of jobs is poverty, which leads to the development of a more or less illegal parallel labour market. But the collapse of the economic structure also brings about a breakdown in the



structure of poverty, nullifying the relationships of dependency, even parasitical dependency (reverse exploitation) which used to hold the parties together. Exclusion destroys all existing contracts. In economic terms, it turns the value of production upside down, so that it becomes destruction (as the final stage of productionism). In terms of culture and social ecology, normalized exclusion unveils chaos. One of the following chapters provides testimony (M. HART, in a black ghetto in Chicago).

## THE FIELD OF OUR RESEARCH

The field of our research is the area of variously degraded socio-economic relationships: traditional situations of poverty, in which small groups of associates are trying with the means at hand to survive economically; a situation of advanced structural decay, in which intermediate organizations are trying to rehabilitate the "survivors" on the basis of the remnants of their own culture and of temporary, alternative ways of working; various other situations in which local groups are attempting to change their cultural capital and traditional social training into new economic forms of organization on the fringes of the dominant market.

The premise is the assumption that these individuals, groups and communities have hidden abilities that are sufficient for the adaptation of some traditional skills to present-day requirements of production and participation in economic exchange. But also, that they should put their own (basic) cultural education into these economic projects and shape them in light of the constraints and choices of everyday life (working time, distance, equipping of workplaces, division of work, sharing of profits, information and decisions, etc.). The main hypothesis is that such varied initiatives within their own contexts, are the beginnings of a solution not only to the crisis of work but also to the unconstrained predominance of the single market, however degraded may be the living conditions of the populations encountered. Experience of chaos may lead to annihilation, but it can also be transformed into refusal and resistance.

Such is the provocative, ambitious and (in the Nietzschean sense) joyous gamble of the authentic research conducted by all the contributors to ALPHA 96. It is the antithesis of the "only way of thinking" (of neo-liberal ideology), according to which the social and economic crisis of our time is a consequence of the labour force not adapting to the new industrial environments, and states not adapting their management of human resources and investment in education and training.

The aim of the research is to

- provide better documentation of the antithesis,
- find better arguments for criticism of current education and training policy and practice, and above all

- reveal strategies for resisting what seems to be the “final stage” of capitalism as a way of irrevocably destroying the planet’s resources.

We shall evaluate these strategies by their results, economic, monetary, but also global, assessed by the value of their usefulness and their improvement of the quality of life. We shall show clearly the education processes at work, and the methods of transmitting and transforming knowledge in local practice. We shall estimate the potential transferability of such education for the benefit of other local actors, outside educators and other partners involved.

## QUESTIONS PROVOKING OUR RESEARCH

- To what extent does vernacular education succeed in adapting itself to the new requirements of economic organization?
- To what extent can former solidarity change so that it becomes a part of new networks?
- How can intermediate organizations manage to improve both their performance and that of their associates?
- Do these economic experiments really have the will and the power to open up new paths in the face of the world crisis of work?
- Are they, as their protagonists maintain, repeated attempts to re-enter the one and only labour market which lacks even the vaguest desire to change the imposed relationships of exchange?
- Does their potential for resistance apply particularly to the projects and the transversalist ideology which this cooperative research represents?
- If professionals choose to commit themselves to areas of exclusion and to experiment with critical strategies there, does it harm the greater requirements for integration, social recognition and the right to work?
- How can educators design such new interventions in communication and mediation?
- What methodologies and types of organization can make them rational and more effective?

The team assembled for ALPHA 96 initially comprised more than 30 people from 17 countries in Europe and North America: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Slovakia, Romania, Spain, Ukraine and the United States. The policy of the UNESCO Institute for Education in this action-research programme on literacy strategies in industrialized countries is to make it possible for researchers from post-communist countries and other regions to take part on an equal footing. At the end of this two-year venture, a score of researchers in a dozen countries had completed their work, most of which features in ALPHA 96.

## OUR METHOD OF WORKING

The project was coordinated by the project director at the UNESCO Institute for Education, received the technical support of the Ministry of Education of Quebec, and was conducted by distance methods between the introductory seminars (one in each region, in Toronto and Bucharest, in autumn 1994) and the synthesis seminar, in which all the authors were invited to take part (Bratislava, spring 1995). The conclusion to this publication has been written on the basis of the questions raised and discussions held during these seminars.<sup>6</sup>

The aims of the project were stated as follows:

1. To produce and disseminate a thorough study of the topic of ALPHA 96, *Basic Education and Work*.
2. To help in developing, within the local projects, an international, cross-disciplinary action-research approach.
3. To validate and promote these alternative experiences of work in marginalized, peripheral areas, with the support of a cooperative network of researchers, professional workers and affiliated bodies.
4. To encourage revision of basic education policies associated with work, and of job creation programmes, in the interests of participation, support for community development and renewal of total resources.

This volume contains 19 chapters divided into the following sections:

- **Section One** provides a critique of literacy ideology and of some current literacy practices in North America, revealing hidden abilities and other bases for alternative design of educational intervention (S. Gowen, M. Hart, and J.P. Hautecoeur).
- **Section Two** documents the transition from traditional literacy and basic education practices to workshops started by learner-workers (W. DesBrisay, M. Chourin, D. Semencescu).
- **Section Three** brings together four basic education experiences which share a global, community development approach but have different intervention strategies (A. Rogojinaru, P. Ahern, J.G. Orgales, and A. Böcs).
- **Section Four** documents the transition from traditional work practices in rural areas to new types of economic organization, which also involves broader projects of regional development and a will of resistance to dislocation (E. Pieck, J. Carolino, E. Fulková, and F. Balipap, D. Kovács and E. Markolt).
- **Section Five** examines the education and training practised in a new type of socially useful enterprise (L. Smeyers and D. Wildemeersch, J.M. Fontan and E. Shragge, and J. Stummer).
- **Section Six** standing alone but speaking of solidarity, takes up again a monograph which appeared in ALPHA 94, applying its critical approach to the relationship between basic education and work in the postmodern context.<sup>7</sup> This illustrates the fertile link between "*bricolage*" and the *mass media* or *communications*, which might well replace the original title of ALPHA 96 (S. Hubik).

The contents only account for some of the written evidence of our work. There are other forms: memorable events such as the seminars and receptions in the host countries, other publications, the creation of an association in Slovakia inspired by ALPHA 96, new cooperative action-research networks at national and inter-regional level, professional links, projects, and so on. A sober publication such as ALPHA 96 unfortunately leaves out everything that cannot be written in a book, in joyous contrast to our pious statements!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals, groups and organizations have been associated with ALPHA 96. In the name of all the authors and the UNESCO Institute for Education, we thank them most warmly. They are, first, the Ministry of Education of Quebec, the Literacy Secretariat of the Government of Canada, the Ontario Training and Adjustment Board and the Ministry of Culture of Slovakia, without whose help this ambitious project could never have been conducted. In running the seminars we were fortunate to have the collaboration of the Lumen Association of Slovakia, the Slovak Commission for UNESCO, the Institute of Educational Science in Romania, the Ontario Board named above, and the professional assistance of Emilia Fulková, Florentina Anghel, David Greig, Jorge Garcia Orgales, Raymond Day and H  l  ne Gravelle Korski. The Language Services Department of the Ministry of Education of Quebec, and the Adult Education Department, played a large part in preparing the publication. And we do not forget all the organizations which enabled the researchers to play an active part in the project.

### Notes

1. In an editorial article in the periodical *Fortune*, the task of enterprises in a period of post-recession and restructuring is described as follows: "First get rid of jobs. Second, redesign the organization (of the workplace) to get the best of the de-jobbed worker. A big task ... It will separate the survivors from the extinct." "The End of the Job", *Fortune Magazine*, 19 September 1994.
2. The report of the three seminars in the ALPHA 96 project will be published separately, in a bilingual English-French edition, in the *UIE Reports* series of the UNESCO Institute for Education.
3. *Alpha 96 Literacy and Work/Formation de base et travail*, bilingual English/French presentation of the action-research project, UNESCO Institute for Education, 1994.
4. Bernard EME and Jean-Louis LAVILLE (eds.) *Coh  sion sociale et emploi*, Paris, Descl  e de Brouwer, 1994; "Economie solidaire" dossier of the periodical *Travail*, no. 29, autumn 1993; Bernard PERRET and Guy ROUSTANG, *L'Economie contre la soci  t  *, Paris, Seuil/Esprit, 1993.
5. This is a reference to a documentary made by Pierre Perrault, Michel Brault and Marcel Carri  re, *Pour la suite du monde*, Montreal, National Film Board, 1964. With the help of former fishermen, this film relives the ancient techniques and practices of porpoise fishing in the Saint Lawrence River. It is a remarkable example of vernacular "basic education" rediscovered and reconstituted on site and in reality, for mass broadcasting: local crafts and mass media.
6. UIE Report of the ALPHA 96 Seminars, UNESCO Institute for Education, 1996.
7. Stanislav HUBIK, "Television and literacy in the Czech Republic", ALPHA 94, Montreal/Hamburg, UNESCO Institute for Education, 1994, pp. 259-276.

# **SECTION ONE**



**A critique of literacy ideology & some  
current literacy practices  
in North America**

# Chapter 1

## HOW THE REORGANIZATION OF WORK DESTROYS EVERYDAY KNOWLEDGE

Sheryl Greenwood Gowen  
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### TOTAL QUALITY AND WORKPLACE LITERACY

The post-industrial, lean and mean workplace of late-twentieth century America is the latest configuration of pure market capitalism. High Performance, Total Quality, and Continuous Quality Improvement have replaced Taylorism and Fordism as the organizing principles by which managers attempt to order workers and work. In this “restructuring,” many workers have lost their jobs while others have been relegated to temporary or contractual labor (Parker, 1994). New jobs generally offer lower wages and few benefits. In fact, some analysts (e.g. Reich, 1992) predict that the ratio of secondary labor-market (low skills/low wages) jobs to primary labor-market (high skills/high wages) jobs (Gittleman and Howell, 1993) may soon be 4 to 1.

As the workplace changes, literacy and educational requirements have also changed. The changes are complex, however, and serve not only as a gate-keeping mechanism to reduce the number of workers “qualified” for good jobs, but also to draw attention away from the fact that American laborers are being relegated to a workplace underclass (See Drucker, 1993; Faraclas, 1994; Gee and Lankshear, 1994; Gowen, 1995; Hull, 1993; Kazemek, 1991 for a more detailed discussion).

In this chapter, I will discuss how shifts to "Total Quality Management" and the co-occurring implementation of "Workplace Literacy" programs have served to further marginalize and alienate two different communities of workers. The first discussion is drawn from a larger study of a workplace literacy program (Gowen, 1992). Here I will focus on Edward Stone, who works as a housekeeping aide in a local public urban hospital and is also a long-time member of the House of Prayer Church, Rib Shack, and Used Car Lot. In the second study, I will describe the process and fundamental problems of designing and implementing a "workplace literacy" program for a large corporation "moving towards Total Quality."

It is not coincidental that the "literacy crisis" has occurred in tandem with the reorganization of the workplace.

At the end of the nineteenth century, family-owned businesses, in response to a series of crises from over-production, subsequent depressions, declining profits, and mass reductions in wages, were restructured (similar in magnitude, if not in content, to the "re-engineering" of the late twentieth century workplace), into giant corporations. Two important characteristics of the giant corporation were the creation and "scientific management" of mass labor and the creation and media management (advertising) of mass consumption. Frederick W. Taylor devised a system, generally referred to as "Taylorism" or "Fordism," to organize large numbers of the population into efficient assembly line workers (Whyte, 1984). As we know, the assumption behind Taylor's method was that tasks should be broken down into their simplest, least intellectually demanding forms. Workers then were trained to perform these tasks with mechanical efficiency.

In the Newtonian sense, workers literally became extensions of machines, fine-tuning their individual skills to perfection. But Taylor's methods were more than simply prescriptions for performance. They were also part of a sweeping social reorganization of the workplace that took both the application of personal knowledge and the control of work away from workers and placed both in the hands of professional, highly educated managers (Clawson, 1980; Whyte, 1984). Thus Taylorism not only produced an efficient workplace but also undercut indigenous communities of practice that workers had relied upon up until that point. These informal communities of practice were replaced by a hierarchy of high-wage, well-educated managers overseeing pools of low-wage, high-turnover workers who needed only basic educational skills to perform their work.

At the same time that the workplace was being reorganized, Ohmann (1985:676) argues that the term "literacy" came to be used "as a mass noun that isolated that ability [to read and write] from other human practices and that referred to it as a measurable attribute of individuals, groups, or whole societies".

As the twentieth century unfolded, American educational and economic policy came to rely more and more on standardized testing and measure-

ment, which isolates human abilities apart from their social contexts and then separates people according to those abilities. Important for the discussion here, the polarization and xenophobia of the late nineteenth century (again not unlike the late twentieth century), allowed literacy to be used as “the analytic division of people into measurable quantities, the attempt to modify these quantities, the debate among professionals and political leaders over what’s good for the poor...” (Ohmann, 1985:677).

Since the end of the 1970s technological advances in production and communication have served to further diminish the informal communities of practice that have survived despite industrialization. In addition, the Taylorism of the early twentieth century had, by the beginning of the 1980s lost its usefulness as a management framework. According to Drucker (1993:54), management generally responded by trying to “patch” or tinker with the system without making the needed fundamental changes. When this didn’t work, management turned to “downsizing ... Management picks up a meat-ax and lays about itself indiscriminately”. This, too, has resulted in failure for many organizations.

Drucker argues that “Total Quality” means more than slashing programs and jobs, but rather a “rethinking” of the organization and its mission. It is theoretically possible, then, that “Total Quality” could mean changes to more democratic workplaces with shared-governance and a closing of the deep mistrust and misunderstandings between labor and management. Table 1 presents such a theoretical framework for a possible post-industrial rethinking of the workplace (Bergquist, 1993; Covey, 1989; Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993).

As we can see, unlike the industrial framework, whose emphasis is on technology, the bottom line, and short-term goals, in the above theoretical post-industrial framework, the emphasis would be on an integration of social and technical systems that make the human aspects of work dominant over the mechanical and technical aspects. Theoretically, in this new model, workers would be valued as members of a democratic community committed to long-term achievement based on continuous learning, shared problem-solving, and participatory management. Some of the strategies generally recommended to accomplish this transformation include programmatic changes such as cross-training, chain-of-customers, and Just-In-Time (JIT)<sup>1</sup> inventories as well as more organizational changes, such as becoming a “learning organization,” with flattened hierarchies and worker “empowerment”.

Ideally, the current call to reinvent the workplace could provide an opportunity to revitalize the values of communities of practice that industrialism and colonialism destroyed (Butler, 1965; Schumaker, 1979; Steady, 1989). It could also be the springboard to more equitable and democratic methods of compensation that would shrink gross disparities between workers and management.



**Table 1**  
**ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES**

| INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION   | POST-INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION  |
|---|---|
| Technical systems are of primary importance   | Social and technical systems are interdependent   |
| Workers extend the work of machines   | Workers facilitate & compliment the work of machines  |
| Workers are interchangeable parts in a mechanical system                                | Workers are primary and limited resources   |
| Work consists of narrow, discrete categories of skills                                  | Work consists of a wide repertoire of skills  |
| Control is in the hands of management hierarchy and is embodied in rules and procedures | Control is shared and is embodied in problem-solving processes and participatory management |
| Short-term goals and low-risk taking  | Long-term goals and innovation  |
| Resources are directed exclusively towards achieving "bottom line" goals                | Resources are directed towards integrating "bottom line," individual, and social goals.     |
| Work and workers are competitive  | Work and workers are cooperative  |

But in reality, these programmatic and organizational changes have fallen far short of any real redistribution of power, which is abhorrent to most of American business and industry. As Lakes (1994:110) has observed about the current problems facing vocational education:

...educational policymakers are operating under a false assumption that schooling youths for so-called high performance settings will heighten workers' organizational commitment to the firm. Students may receive an education in symbolic-analytic skills for postindustrial settings, but the curriculum hardly advances the moral claims of shared labor and worker "ownership".

American workplace restructuring has been circumscribed by a labor/management "great divide" that assigns knowledge to management and assigns ignorance to workers. While the discourse of Total Quality includes a strong emphasis on worker empowerment and flattened hierarchies, some experts predict that only about five per cent of all workplaces actually accomplish those ends (Huey, 1994). Few large corporations have moved towards the real empowerment of workers (Huey, 1994, maintains that Levi-Strauss, Gore-Tex, and Ben & Jerry's are exceptions), which requires democratic workplaces with shared governance. And the current political climate suggests that any reform of the labor laws towards more equal distributions of power (e.g. the recommendations of the Dunlop Commission) is highly unlikely.

As Juravich (1985:151) observed:

As we have seen at National [the company Juravich studied], quality and productivity are not by far simple nor superficial issues, but instead are deeply rooted in a management style that continues to grow away from an understanding of or concern with worker's shop-floor knowledge. No program, no matter how innovative or new, will be successful unless it addresses this fundamental relationship between workers and managers.

While management wants workers to become more "empowered" to make decisions and solve problems, they generally still want ultimate control over the content of those decisions and solutions. So, the question they are really asking is: How do you "empower" workers to increase their skills in order to increase corporate profits? Rather than say, how do you "empower" workers to increase their skills to reshape the distributions of power for a more democratic workplace? What kind of "literacy" does the former kind of "empowerment" require? It would seem that the "docility certificate" that Erickson describes (1984) is much more likely to accomplish those ends than say the "critical literacy and civic courage" of Giroux (1984). Thus the notions of "empowerment" and "participation" are limited.

Gee and Lankshear (1994) and Kunda (1992) argue that the current interest in workplace literacy is actually an effort of conversion to a particular set of cultural behaviors and beliefs that workers do not already possess. This is clearly a role that literacy has played across American history and particularly in other workplace literacy programs (Apple, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Fingeret, 1984; Gee, 1989; Gowen, 1992; Graff, 1987; Kazemek, 1988). These behaviors and beliefs define membership in a "corporate community that includes rules for behavior, thought and feeling, all adding up to what appears to be a well-defined and widely shared 'member role'." (Kunda, 1992, p. 7). Thus the concept of workplace literacy does not necessarily refer only to a set of skills, but to a much more complex and tacit set of beliefs that align the worker with the goals of the company and serve to control his or her actions.

As Gee and Lankshear (1994:18) have recently observed:

They [managers] face a paradox in that they want workers to experience in meaningful ways a sense of autonomous decision-making, choice, and self-directedness. At the same time, for organizational goals to be met it is necessary that workers make "the right decisions/choices" and take "the right directions" so far as their workplace learning is concerned.

One sure sign that American business is unwilling to tackle the difficult task of deep-level restructuring is its tendency to blame workers' literacy levels for the problems it encounters competing in the global marketplace. The general argument goes that in order to convert from industrialized models of workplace organization to these "new" workplace structures, fewer workers are needed and most workers do not currently possess the skills to function effectively in these "new" settings. While I clearly recognize the need for and strongly support increased investment in on-going and comprehensive worker education, I believe that many entry-level workers

already possess many of the skills needed in more participatory work organizations, and that management is unable, because of its privileged and isolated position in the hierarchy, to recognize this.

Not surprisingly, most of the research on high performance work organizations draws on case studies from those countries that are most economically successful. Japan, Germany, and Norway are often sighted as three of the most successful countries in reorganizing work and workers. But there is little research that looks at local, small scale examples of effective organizations. Because these organizations often occur in working-class and poor, marginalized groups they are never even considered as models from which we might learn more about what it means to live and work productively in a community. There is little recognition, for example, that the poor and the working class have knowledge and skills that help them survive conditions that the more privileged of us could never withstand.

Moreover, the participatory practices and more equitable distributions of both power and wealth that have worked well in countries such as Norway, for example, do not fit the hierarchical organization of management and the concentration of wealth as they have evolved in the United States. This lies at the heart of the issue with any move towards "high performance" that is mandated on a large scale from the top down. Power that is "given" to workers by management is not real power, but an effort to usurp workers' real autonomy and power to the benefit of the company.

In addition, as Brandau and Collins (1994) have recently observed, work in the formal economy requires standardization of performance. This standardization of performance runs counter to true worker empowerment and autonomy, which would include at least the possibility of variation in performance to achieve new ways to excellence, and explains why many workers have developed a deep mistrust for any movement towards "high performance" or "Total Quality" in the workplace.

The notion of standardization as a characteristic of mainstream work would also help explain the national perception of need for literacy training, which, as it is taught in functional contextual programs, serves to standardize workers' language and textual practices, thereby reducing autonomy, creativity, and community.

## **HIGH PERFORMANCE IN THE HOUSE OF GOD**

With this general background in place, let's visit the House of God Rib Shack and Used Car Lot, a religious organization whose membership includes many marginalized workers perceived by their employers (as well as the broader society) to be illiterate and unskilled. In this visit, we will focus on Edward Stone, who works as a housekeeping aide in a local public hospital.

The House of God is located on the corner of a busy street in the heart of the working class African American community in Bayside, on the gulf coast of the southeastern United States. On sunny days, the well-dressed congregation will gather under the trees to eat ribs, visit, tell tales, talk junk, watch children play and maybe think about buying a car. The House of God, to my mind, exhibits many of the principles of a Total Quality workplace. Table 2 compares these two structures.

There are several aspects of the organization of the House of God that lead me to this interpretation. First, the hierarchy is very flat. There is a minister, of course, and he leads the services. But he has a lot of help. His nine children are all a part of the service as well, as is every adult over the age of about 16. And while he stands in the front and preaches, this does not prevent other members of the congregation from joining in, either by singing, testifying, or speaking in tongues. The service is rarely about one man at a podium speaking to his congregation. Instead, there is action at all levels, participation, autonomy, and creativity.

**Table 2**  
**COMPARISON OF THE STRUCTURES OF A TOTAL QUALITY**  
**WORKPLACE & THE HOUSE OF GOD**

| <b>POST-INDUSTRIAL<br/>WORK ORGANIZATION</b>   | <b>HOUSE OF GOD<br/>RIB SHACK AND USED CAR LOT</b>  |
|--|---|
| <b>PRODUCTION PROCESS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety</li> <li>• Involvement</li> <li>• Elimination of waste by streamlining</li> </ul>   | <b>CHURCH SERVICE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety</li> <li>• Involvement of all for mutual satisfaction</li> <li>• Little or no waste due to limited resources</li> </ul>  |
| <b>WORKPLACE STRUCTURE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory</li> <li>• Management as coach</li> <li>• Workers as "partners in prosperity"</li> <br/> <li>• Worker as whole person</li> <br/> <li>• Worker's job to improve whole process</li> <br/> <li>• Emphasis on problem-solving</li> <li>• Improvement the driving factor</li> </ul> | <b>CHURCH STRUCTURE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory</li> <li>• Little hierarchy</li> <li>• Profits from Rib Shack and used Car Lot go to support Church</li> <li>• All members are respected and all members contribute according to their abilities</li> <li>• Members are whole persons, not just those who tithe</li> <li>• Members contribute on all levels</li> <li>• Members contribute on all levels</li> <li>• Emphasis is on problem solving</li> <li>• Inventive, new ways constantly integrated into the service</li> <li>• Peak spiritual experience is the driving force of the church service</li> </ul> |
| <b>EDUCATION AS ACTION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-training as well as specific roles</li> </ul>  | <b>RELIGION AS ACTION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-participation as well as specific roles</li> </ul>   |

Moreover, each member plays a variety of parts (in the discourse of high performance they are “cross-trained”). They play in the band, sing in the choir, collect the tithe, and help with the Bible reading. They watch the children and clean the bathrooms. While there are deacons and members of the Prayer Board, even these roles are not rigidly defined. For example, the chairwoman of the prayer board also serves refreshments like red velvet cake, coffee, soft drinks, and sausage and biscuits in the basement between Sunday School and church. The pastor’s oldest daughter assists him with the scripture reading. Sometimes he reads and she repeats or answers. Other times she reads and he interprets. Sometimes they read together. Sometimes the whole congregation chimes in, sometimes not.

Within the House of God, Edward Stone is a valued and important member. His skill with video and audio equipment enables him to tape each church service for members who wish to hear or see the performance again at home. Mr. Stone sets up the equipment carefully before each service, and puts it all away each Sunday afternoon. Other members make copies of the tapes and sell them for a small fee to members and guests. Mr. Stone’s skills are an important resource in the small church community.

Many times, Mr. Stone also helps with the cars that the church buys and sells. He is one of a number of men in the congregation who helps repair and market these cars. There is never a very large inventory of cars—usually one is located and repaired for a specific customer (an example of just-in-time [JIT] method of inventory control). When someone from the community needs a car and is short on money, it is possible to barter goods and services with the church in exchange for the car.

Mr. Stone’s wife Sheila and her sisters work in the Rib Shack. They spend a great deal of time arguing and tasting and readjusting—making sure the sauce is just right and the meat is tender. Because many of their customers are also members of their congregation, they are especially invested in the quality of the goods they produce. Because they each take such pride in their work, they become critics and customers themselves, producing fine food for one another as well as for the community. In the language of high performance, these women have organized themselves as a “chain of customers” to insure a superior product.

The House of God sanctuary is located on a corner lot, but it also shares its space with the Rib Shack and the Car Lot. The space taken up by all three enterprises is much smaller than that taken up by most of the other churches in Bayside. This efficient use of space is similar to Whyte’s (1992) analysis of the Japanese use of space in the manufacturing process. He argues that it is their efficient use of both human and material resources that make Japanese industries more economical than American counterparts.

The members of the House of God also have avoided a great deal of administrative procedure, bypassed the need for secretarial staff and technology, and thus kept costs low by not relying on print materials to relay

information. In this setting, print materials would be an added layer of bureaucracy rather than a useful tool for communicating. For example, in the church service, there is no written text to direct the people in the production of the service. There are no hymnals, no bulletins, no print materials to mark the steps or to organize information. The service, rather than a series of segmented pieces, flows from one event to another, with events often overlapping one another.

This obvious lack of text serves to emphasize the presence of the one true text, the Bible. In the House of God, the Bible is the single focal point for reading and discussion. Nearly all members carry one with them to each service. Mr. Stone, for example, carries a full-sized King James version in a rich brown leather case. Inside the case are yellow highlighters, blue ink pens and number 2 pencils to mark and comment on the pieces of text that form the basis of each Sunday School lesson and church service. The efficiency of only one text in the service seems to emphasize its importance and draws the congregation closer together as they read, respond, and mark together the words of God.

Members of the House of Prayer cannot, however, explain to me exactly how they know when to do something or exactly what to do—when to start singing, for example, or which part of the scripture to read aloud. They tell me they just know it. They don't need or want a set of instructions written out for them because this would only serve to detract from their activity. There is no rehearsal, no list of procedures, only performance that shifts in subtle ways to match the mood of the group (see Heath, 1993, for a description of similar "church knowledge" in Trackton). In other words, there is no administratively determined agenda that prescribes the behaviors of the congregation. Rather, the rules of performance are negotiated and re-negotiated by the members of the church community at each church service.

While these behaviors are different from "mainstream" church services, they are clearly not examples of "pre-literate" knowing. Many members of the congregation are quite literate and read a variety of texts for a variety of purposes. Rather than a compensation for low literacy, it is an efficient way of getting the work of the church done — the work of creating a meaningful, artistic product crafted with love and caring — a peak spiritual experience within a community of believers. It is a way of knowing characterized by intuition and creativity rather than by a set of steps. It is also a way of knowing that bears little resemblance to the hierarchical, linear, controlled, segmented, non-participatory, industrial church services I am more accustomed to.

Some of the members of the House of God hold decent jobs as teachers or as supervisors in state and local government or public service organizations. A few own small businesses. But most are part of the soon-to-be 80 per cent of the American workforce, stuck in entry level jobs or temporary work generally in settings that offer little opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge they display consistently within their church community.

In order to understand the disparity between the work environment and other community-based organizations in which marginalized workers like Edward might participate, let us move to Mr. Stone's workplace, the hospital where he is a housekeeping aide. The Housekeeping Department at Bayside Hospital is staffed exclusively by African American women and men. There are a few white supervisors. Here Mr. Stone performs a job that is considered entry-level for wages that place him below the poverty line. While he does have benefits, without a GED or high school diploma, he has no opportunity for promotion or for an increase in pay. His supervisor, a white woman, believes that he is "slow" and cannot make decisions or think critically. She expects him to work for her in silence, never questioning what she says or does. Some of Mr. Stone's co-workers who have spoken out about issues at work have been fired, as have some of those who have successfully passed portions of their GED test. A few of Mr. Stone's co-workers drink or smoke reefer on the job, and live from pay day to day off to pay day. Many others are quite functional on the job, but see no opportunity for better work, and remain in the same positions for years.

In 1989, with the help of a team of university researchers, King Memorial offered literacy classes for these workers. In conceptualizing workplace problems in terms of literacy, hospital management did what Senge (1990) terms "burden shifting". That is, it mistook deep-seated problems with the distribution of power, privilege, and wages for literacy problems, and assumed that some education would improve workers' productivity and performance.

After the workplace literacy classes ended and very few employees had been promoted to higher jobs or had earned any new credentials, workers expressed bitterness and disappointment. Many of the employees in the workplace literacy program resisted the paternalistic forms of management and the glass ceilings inherent in the hospital. The job-based curricula did little to address those issues, but rather encouraged workers to more fully adapt to the organizational structure of the hospital. As a result, workers often acted incompetent or illiterate as their single means of maintaining any control over their work.

The problems at the hospital were not addressed by literacy classes. In fact, in some ways the classes made the problem worse because in defining the problem as literacy, the underlying causes of worker alienation were never addressed. Thus, workers like Mr. Stone did not change their behavior significantly, and management believed that these workers were even more "hopeless" than before.

## MOVING TOWARDS TOTAL QUALITY AT EMERALD MANUFACTURING

Travelling northeast from Bayside and into a bordering state, we come to the small community of Piney Woods at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains. For two years I have conducted participatory action research (Whyte, 1992) at Emerald Manufacturing, a company that describes itself as "moving towards Total Quality". Three graduate students, one in educational psychology, one in applied linguistics, and one in vocational education, and I have assisted Emerald Manufacturing's top management team in its goals of conducting a literacy task analysis, developing an assessment protocol to measure the skills workers actually use on the job, and developing curricula for an education program for the approximately 1,200 employees at its various plants around southeast.

Through the use of participant observation, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and the examination of massive volumes of print materials, our research team has attempted to understand and document the actual literacy skills workers use to perform their jobs and to find out what skills workers are interested in and feel they might benefit from improving.

We have also tried to understand how workers feel about their work and how this effects their performance. We have conducted extensive formal and informal interviews with them about their goals, their schooling and work experiences, and their hopes for the future. While I do not claim that the workers at Emerald Manufacturing are representative of all workers, I do believe that many of the situations these workers encounter, their perceptions of competence, and their skepticism about literacy training and high performance workplaces have relevance for a broader discussion on literacy and the workforce.

The work these men do is the hard physical work of heavy industry. All of the 44 employees we have observed and interviewed are native-born males. Thirty-five per cent are African American; 65 per cent are white. Most of them have worked at the same jobs all their adult lives. Many of them began work right out of high school, others before finishing high school. Few of those who did not finish high school have returned to complete a GED. None of them is currently enrolled in any training or educational program either at the workplace or in the community.

At this workplace, we observed literacy and language use as falling into two distinctly different spheres: 1) those skills needed to perform daily work assignments and 2) those skills needed to understand and interact with the infrastructure that surrounds and supports the work.

In the first sphere, that of the daily job tasks, print is used very rarely, especially for problem solving and communicating. Rather, the first sphere might be what Zuboff (1988:72) has described as "action-centered"; that is "a world in which things were immediately known, comprehensively sensed, and able



to be acted upon directly". (It also strongly resembles the "action-centered" performance I observed at the House of God.) In this domain, there is little need for text. And little text is displayed in this first domain at Emerald. We were struck, in our first visit to the site, at how little print was on display in any of the work areas. In the employee break room, for example, there is the required notice from OSHA concerning health and safety regulations and that is all. The date on the notice is 1982.

In the maintenance shop, the repair manuals for all of the equipment are stored randomly on a set of floor-to-ceiling shelves. The manuals and the shelves are covered with a thick layer of dust, suggesting that these manuals are rarely, if ever, removed from their places. We never observed any of the employees in the shop referring to the manuals as they repaired equipment. The repair manuals that we borrowed initially from the maintenance shop foreman were never missed. We also never observed them using calculators, which were available to each employee, and could be used to perform some of the work tasks. We did, however, observe them talking almost constantly, either face-to-face or over the CB radios and telephones as they work. They talk about problems to be solved, about work to be done, repairs to be made, equipment to be upgraded. The work is performed in a rich mix of informal oral communication that serves to organize time, space, and activity.

When problems occur, workers must communicate and problem-solve quickly, without what they rightly believe is the much slower step of consulting print materials for solutions to problems. The most important resources in emergencies are co-workers and "common sense". When equipment needs repair, which is often, workers rely on their hearing, their vision, their experience, and their creativity to tell them what is wrong and what must be fixed. The more novice workers rely on and respect the knowledge of the older and more experienced workers to know what is wrong and to suggest strategies for repair.

During the work day we also heard funny stories, dirty jokes, inventive swearing, and imaginative gossip. This creative use of language serves other important purposes in the workplace. Trading stories operates as a kind of gift-exchange. It cements relationships and develops intimacy. In addition, much of the work is monotonous and extremely repetitive. Telling jokes and gossiping add interest to what can otherwise become a very dull and tiring routine.

In this workplace, a sense of community (or more accurately communities) runs quite deep. Many of the workers are related to one another, and the jobs have been handed down in the family from father to son. Actually, there are two communities, the African American and the white. There is not, however, a strong sense of loyalty across ethnicity except when outsiders appear. We observed this in response to our initial presence at the plant and even more clearly in a solid, and typically southern, resistance to unionization. Not surprisingly, one of the goals of the company is to remain "union free". But most of the workers also echo these sentiments, believing union organizers to be "outsiders who cause trouble". In this company, intrusion from outsiders

is seen as a threat to the balance of the workplace community. And any introduction of print-based education and training is also seen by many front-line workers as an unnecessary intrusion that would interfere with the rich oral communication they use effectively and with great skill. In summary, in the sphere of performing daily job tasks, workers rely on oral communication, speaking, listening, making jokes, and telling stories to convey information, solve problems, and maintain relationships.

In many other workplaces and communities that have been studied in depth (e.g. Baba, 1991; Darrah, 1992; Herndl, Fennel, & Miller, 1991; Hull, Schultz, Jury, & Ziv, 1993; Jacob, 1986; Kusterer, 1978; Lave, 1986; Mikulecky & Drew, 1991; Robotham, 1992; Scribner, 1985; Scribner & Sachs, 1991; Shaiken, 1984) text is interpreted and negotiated and sometimes simply ignored by workers as they talk about and collaborate in shared problem-solving and in getting work done. Moreover, it is important to note that this collaboration is indigenous rather than imposed by management as part of a shift to "teamwork" and "high performance."

But within the second sphere, those skills needed to understand and interact with the infrastructure that orders and controls the work, the print environment takes a decidedly different turn. This sphere requires skills similar to what Zuboff has termed the "intellective skills" (1988: 76) of abstraction, inference, and procedural reasoning. In this study, we defined the print infrastructure as: 1) record-keeping activities based on the raw data provided from amount of goods produced each day, frequency and duration of down-time, accident reports, scheduling of maintenance and repairs 2) memos, flyers, and brochures from the central office designed to create and enforce rules, relay information about these to each employee, ensure legal protection for the company, and assign responsibility for downtime and accidents.

Most of the infrastructure-related print materials are fed into, stored, analyzed, and regenerated by a computer by the three white women in the office. These three women use "intellective skills" and also serve as border agents, keeping all records of production and sales of materials, time sheets, accident reports, down-time reports, payroll, and benefits claims, and passing this information between employees and the central office. This parallels the family distributions of literacy activities in the community. The male workers who lived with female partners all reported in interviews that their partners did the banking and record keeping and they did the physical labor. Literacy can be women's work when it is not valued as much as physical work.

The culture of Emerald Manufacturing privileges action-centered skills over intellective skills in many ways. One of the four supervisors at the site has only a fourth grade education and has fairly limited print-literacy skills. But he is considered to be the best supervisor of the four. He is considered a competent, intelligent man and is assigned the most difficult areas of the production process to oversee. The other employees respect him as much as management does.

In addition, hourly wages are higher for physical labor than for print labor. Truck drivers make more than office workers. And truck drivers also make more than the maintenance men, who actually need more procedural knowledge and a wider range of problem solving skills to perform their work. The company has not reorganized the pay scale successfully to motivate workers to enhance "intellective skills". And there is very little room for advancement at the plant because the hierarchy is already very flat. One plant manager, four supervisors, three office workers, and 44 front-line workers. After a worker has topped out at the pay level for his or her job, there is nowhere to go and no possibility of making more money, other than the annual across-the-board cost-of-living increases and overtime. In keeping with the privileging of the physical and oral over the print-symbolic, overtime is possible only for front-line workers and foreman, not for office workers.

Print at the upper-level managerial positions is generally used for rule-making, legal protection, and control. Memos, for example, are often used to silence rather than to convey information. Information that needs to be shared, on the other hand, is discussed in meetings, or conveyed over long distances by telephone (all managers have voice mail) or by hand-written Fax; these are the preferred ways for management to communicate. Memos that are word-processed, however, set boundaries, make rules, and reprimand. One important function is to determine the causes of downtime and its relationship to productivity. For example, unscheduled down-time due to a failure to properly maintain equipment is calculated in the plant's productivity measures while down-time due to high winds knocking out the electricity is not. Unlike other workplaces I have studied, however, the volume of memos and rules is relatively small and the reliance on and privileging of oral communication much more wide-spread.

But the quality of oral communication changes dramatically in formal settings such as "presentations" and plant-wide meetings. In these settings, there is very little effective communication up or down the hierarchy. The conversation is generally dominated by superiors from the district office. Workers rarely ask questions, but either stare at or never make eye contact with the person doing the talking, fidgeting just enough to show they would rather be back at work or on a break or anywhere other than in a meeting. During informal gatherings, however, the tenor changes, and the front-line workers, the foremen, and managers can tell jokes and talking-dog stories with amazing ease.

In-depth interviews with front-line workers indicate a solid skepticism about the immediate economic benefits of increasing their print-literacy. Some believe that if the company succeeds in increasing their skills, they will simply be worked harder. More than one employee confided that he currently acts like he knows a lot less than he really does because if he acts too knowledgeable "they'll just try to work me to death". In a workplace that is already physically draining, more work is not an incentive for workers to enhance their skills.

By far the most complex print materials in this workplace are found in the ever-changing benefits package, which has proven difficult if not incomprehensible even for our research team to understand. Readability levels for these materials range from 14th to 16th grade level. In fact, the most pressing need for print-literacy skills in this workplace is not to perform work, but to understand what the employee benefits are and how to utilize them. For example, the company has recently instituted a plan that requires workers to have prescriptions filled by mail and that they enroll in HMO options and/or life insurance over the phone. In the first two months, workers at this plant have made serious errors in doing both of these things, which has resulted in frustrated, angry workers who feel taken advantage of by the company. One worker complained, "This is just some new way to screw us. They save money when they make it so complicated that no one will use it". Not too long ago, one foreman's wife died. The foreman thought that he had enrolled in a life insurance plan for her and himself over the phone. But the task proved too abstract, too decontextualized from concrete reality for him. Right after he buried his wife he discovered that he had not followed the phone instructions properly and had no coverage on either himself or his wife.

## THE DIFFICULTY OF ASSESSMENT

After six months of field research, we reluctantly developed a skills assessment to use with front-line workers. We were reluctant, because we knew that we could not develop any paper and pencil measure that would accurately capture and assess the skills workers were actually using to perform their jobs. Rather than use a decontextualized, standardized test like the TABE, the ABLE, or the CASIS, we based the assessment tasks on actual workplace scenarios and print materials such as time sheets, newsletters from the central office, the Safety Brochure, paychecks, and the benefits package. We assessed oral communication and problem solving skills by using tape-recorded oral interviews and the abstract and symbolic skills of reading, writing, and computation by using a printed assessment. As we conducted the individual assessments (which were kept confidential and only reported as aggregate data to management) of each worker we discovered that while most workers had considerable oral communication and problem-solving skill, 23 per cent of the workers could neither read nor write beyond the most rudimentary of levels and could not perform any more than the simplest of whole number operations. They were also uncomfortable using a calculator. Another 61 per cent could read, write, and perform mathematical operations at the rough equivalent of a fifth grade education and were fairly comfortable using a calculator.

Management was stunned. They strongly believed that increasing literacy skills was a necessary step in reaching their goal of moving towards Total Quality, but they had no idea how "unskilled" their employees actually were.

This is because, as we reminded them, in the execution of their daily tasks, these employees were far from "unskilled". Many of the employees who could neither read nor write well were quite skilled in oral communication and problem-solving, and had high scores in that area. Most (but not all) of them were quite competent at what they did. Moreover, there was little relationship between managerial perceptions of an employee's work-related skill and the employee's actual performance on the skills assessment. There was also no positive correlation between years of schooling and performance on the skills assessment. The data confirm that paper and pencil assessments were not highly correlated to the actual performance of the "same" skills.

Another problem that occurred as a result of the assessment was that management began to see a "crisis" where none had seemed to exist before. Workers previously thought to be competent were now suspected of being "illiterate". As a participatory action-research team we have worked hard to convince management that their original perceptions of competence, in terms of performance of work tasks, were perhaps more accurate than the results of the assessment. Management has begun to realize that improving work performance will not occur as a direct result of enhanced reading, writing, and numeracy skills, but will require a much more comprehensive approach. This approach must include a better understanding on the part of management of the skills and knowledge their workers already possess. It must also include a better understanding of the deeply embedded power relations that drive productivity and commitment much more so than any literacy skills ever will.

## CONCLUSIONS

I do not presume that the people at the House of God or at Emerald Manufacturing represent all American workers, and thus I make no claims for the generalizability of the data. I do, however, believe that these two stories raise important themes that should be considered in any discussion about worker education in the United States. In some ways both the hospital where Mr. Stone works and the Emerald Plant are unique. They are both situated in the southeastern US, in neighboring right-to-work states. Thus unions were weak at the hospital and non-existent at the plant. Neither site employed non-native English speakers, an anomaly when compared to national trends. At both work sites, literacy served as the "mule" for issues of power that management could not (or did not want to) see, and was thus unable (or unwilling) to address. At both work sites, workers developed effective communities of practice that management could not recognize, did not value, and, in the case of Emerald, would undercut with the introduction of technology that takes knowledge away from workers and puts it into machines.

Most troubling is the way that literacy educators can be co-opted into extending the undercutting of worker knowledge by focusing on "functional-

context" workplace literacy programs. When worker education becomes "the hand-maiden of job training" (Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975:141), those who develop curricula seem especially prone to reinforce this technical model of learning. Within this paradigm, competence becomes the ability to perform like a machine and enhance productivity at the cost of creativity. Models of work, literacy, and competence that focus on these rote tasks do little to recognize and celebrate the skills and abilities workers already possess. They do nothing to tap into their rich store of knowledge about performance, about community, and ironically about technical expertise. Mr. Stone cleans the floors because he doesn't have a high school diploma or a GED, and so the skills he does possess are rendered invisible because the hospital will not promote him, or any one else, without the proper credential (docility certificate)? But American educators do not always ask why marginalized (by race, class, or gender) adults who manage to lead productive, rich lives outside of the workplace are relegated to the lowliest of jobs in the labor market.

In blaming the worker for the problems of industry and the consequences of a feral economy, those in positions of power are able to maintain those positions, even at the risk of national decline. This defensive response is all too common in management. While many managers recognize that the workplace needs to change, blaming workers' illiteracy avoids the risk of embracing new workplace structures that decentralize power, eliminate the privilege of rank and status, and redistribute wealth. While it is exactly this process of decentralization that has made Japanese and Scandinavian industry highly efficient, it is a process American industry, with its own cultural codes about technology and work, often resist (Whyte, 1992).

In addition, in blaming workers for being deficient, the reality that there are no longer good jobs available for much of the workforce is not addressed. The reality is that even if workers were to suddenly become highly literate, there would not be jobs enough to match their skill and knowledge. For example, according to statistics recently released from the Labor Department and the Citizens for Tax Justice (Noble, 1994): There are more full-time workers whose salaries do not provide a livable wage than in any other industrialized country (p. F 21). Aside from economic productivity, the social and personal consequences of an absence of decent work are enormous (Schleuning, 1990). Even though the current administration has made job creation a top priority, the jobs created are often without benefits, and are for lower pay than displaced workers received.

Moreover, there is a widening gap in the standard of living between wealthy Americans and the rest of the population. The top one percent has enjoyed a 100+ percent increase in income over the last two decades and the next four percent has experienced a respectable 20+ percent increase. On the other hand, the remaining 95 percent of the population has not been so fortunate. Thirty-five percent have experienced only a slight increase of no more than 10 percent in real income. Most troubling, 60 percent of the population has experienced a reduction of up to 10 percent in real income over the same

time period. While recent research (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins & Kolstad, 1993) suggests a strong correlation between worker literacy as measured by the NALS (National Adult Literacy Survey) and economic productivity, there is no data that supports the conclusion that increasing worker literacy would increase their real earned income.

Troubles in the workplace go much deeper than whether or not a worker can perform SPC<sup>2</sup>, understand how to file an insurance claim by reading the benefits package materials, or draw high-level inferences from job-related print materials. There is much that must be changed about work and wage before even highly literate employees will remain productive, healthy, and committed to their work over the long term. This raises issues about the real aims of education in terms not only of race and gender, but also in class issues that are effectively silenced in a society that teaches its children to believe they live in a democracy.

In casting about for models of effective and satisfying work organizations, we would do well to recognize the skills and knowledge of those groups most often defined as "at risk", "uneducated" or "illiterate".

I am suggesting that literacy practitioners look critically at the public discourse of worker illiteracy and educational failure, and respectfully consider the highly effective organizations that many marginalized people have already developed, out of economic necessity, in order to survive in hostile economic conditions. We have much to learn about distribution of power, about action, about creative problem-solving, and about what it means to be competent.

And we can reject notions of general worker deficiency when we develop workplace literacy programs. Technical approaches to workplace literacy may improve individual performance for the short term, but they will do little to help workplace organizations restructure themselves into more humane and democratic workplaces. And it also appears to do little to improve the quality of life for workers like Edward Stone. What it does accomplish is a maintenance of the status quo, especially in terms of power and privilege. Literacy educators who support technical solutions (e.g. narrowly conceived functional context curricula) to socio-technical problems will probably insure themselves of profitable consulting work, but will do little for those on the bottom, those whose lives seem designed to afford a variety of career opportunities for researchers and practitioners alike.

## Notes

1. JIT is a process whereby large inventories of goods are avoided. Rather, goods are produced "just in time" for delivery.
2. SPC: Statistical Process Control, a statistical tracking system that monitors production.

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# Chapter Two

## LITERACY AND MOTHERWORK

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with Almetta Russell, the A.B.L.A. Homes  
Women's Literacy Group  
and Elio DeArrudah

*In the following I will give a summary report of the work of a women's literacy group in one of Chicago's public housing complexes.<sup>1</sup> The literacy center is open for women, men, and children, and offers a number of services to assist people in obtaining official literacy skills, here I will describe in some detail a special weekly session of the women's literacy group, the Women Empowerment Hour (WEH).<sup>2</sup> I will analyze the group's efforts from the perspective of the work of mothering, and how this work connects to literacy education. While the work of raising children, or motherwork, was not an explicit theme in the discussions of the WEH participants, many different but directly related worries, concerns and responsibilities were always present. By focusing on the theme of motherwork, and by analyzing its close alliance with the sexual division of labor, I will provide a larger framework for rethinking the notion of work. The sexual division of labor underlies fundamental inequalities in the labor market itself, but it is also behind the equally fundamental division between officially recognized paid and unacknowledged unpaid labor. To rethink work as a way to break through these divisions is therefore only a small but necessary step towards rethinking direct material or economic implications.*

*I hope my report will contribute to a reframing of the notion of literacy. By leaving the conventional framework of pre-designed, technical, and measurable skills, vital forms of literacies will be revealed, and how they, or the need for their development, have been neglected. To reframe the notion of literacy also means to struggle against equally invisible illiteracies, and to directly connect them with their social and economic ramifications.*

*The work of the women's literacy group is taking place under particularly harsh circumstances. It is difficult to define "social change" in a world which seems to have been pushed to the very margin of a society. At the same time, it is at the very margins where the essence of the problems with "our" system are unveiled, where the social and moral bankruptcy of the "center" becomes most visible. In the absence of essential material and immaterial cushions, the center has seeped into the very interior of the margin. I will therefore juxtapose the need for fundamental social change with a description of the tremendous effort that goes into the making of small, multi-layered changes affecting day-to-day living, changes which only indirectly affect immediate economic survival needs.*

## THE LARGER SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT AND THE SITUATION IN CHICAGO

A look at recent changes in the economy reveals how sexist and racist ideologies are inextricably linked with factual matters. First, as Zinn points out (1992:78) "major economic trends and patterns, even those that appear race neutral, have significant racial implications." Looking at the decline of the manufacturing sector (and the growth of the service sector) and at the shifts in the geographical location of jobs (from central cities to suburbs, from "rust-belt" to "sunbelt" and to the "cheap labor" countries of the Third World — which now includes Eastern Europe), we see that the cities have become centers of poverty. The originally high concentration of Blacks in blue-collar industries that once comprised their main source of employment and thus provided a certain economic stability is inseparable from geographic segregation and discrimination in terms of access to education and training. Now unemployment is rising, especially among Black people but also among relatively new immigrants like Latinos. In Chicago, which is one of the most segregated cities in the U.S., there is a "residential job opportunity mismatch" of the kind where "Blacks have become, for the most part, superfluous people in cities that once provided them with opportunities" (Zinn 1992:80). As a matter of policy, the environments the "superfluous people" inhabit are neglected, and, predictably, deteriorate. As regards the focus of this report, this also means that "racial domination and economic exploitation profoundly shape the mothering context, not only for racial ethnic women in the United States, but for all women" (Collins 1994: 45).

Chicago is a particularly striking example of the way in which larger (global) economic changes directly feed off and reinforce a version of the entrenched history of racist segregation and exploitation. Chicago's public housing projects are among the worst in the nation. The city has a particularly blatant history of racist segregation, and its projects have developed into a form of devastation and isolation that affects close to one million people imprisoned in them.

And this points to one of the dimensions of the underground economy which is not captured by talking about an "epidemic" of crime and violence. Dill (1994:176-177), for instance, describes how teenage girls who are caught stealing are often stealing to support their poor families. For them stealing, welfare, and poverty are proof that the social system is cruel, that it should/can be violated. Likewise, the fact that "young Black males as a group [are] at extraordinarily high risk for injury and premature death," which is "a consequence of violent behavior most often directed toward them by individuals of the same race and of similar age" (Earls 1991: 628) needs to be put in a social and economic context. As Earls makes clear, it produces no positive results to look at this sub-group simply from a perspective of morally suspect behavioral characteristics. "Rather, we need to concentrate our attention on the social contexts in which these young men grow up, on the quality of housing and public schools available to them, on their access to firearms, and on opportunities for legitimate employment available to them" (628).

While Chicago is a city with one of the deepest concentrations of wealth in the nation (*Chicago Tribune*, March 12, 1994), its public education system is one of the worst, and almost all of the over 400,000 children dependent on it are "non-white."

As reported by *The Chicago Tribune* (June 26, 1994), about 240,000 children live in poverty, the same number as in 1980, but the city's population of children has dropped from 860,000 to 723,000. The (official) overall poverty rate for children in the U.S. is 17.9 percent, for Illinois 16.8 percent, for Chicago 33.3 percent. The total number of people (under and over 18) in poverty is 592,298 (40.7 percent of this population are children under age 18). In terms of health, Funciello (1990: 40), reports that 30 times as many low weight babies die as do normal weight babies, eight times as many poor children die of disease and 12 times as many poor children die in fires than do non-poor children. While the infant mortality rate steadily dropped in Chicago for white babies, it dropped for Black babies from 1973 to 1984, and has since been on the rise (*The Chicago Reporter*, July 1992).

With recent changes in society and the economy, the reform debate on welfare and public aid has shifted away from child welfare to labor force issues. Meanwhile, welfare benefits have dropped to a historical low. Children comprise the majority of welfare dependents, accounting for 10 million out of the 14 million people in households assisted by Aids to Families with

Dependent Children (AFDC, the main welfare program). A 50 page summary of President Clinton's welfare reform plan does not mention what would happen to children in families cut from the dole. For the most part there is no mention of a safety net for the children of adults who don't conform to the new rules (Chicago Tribune, June 26, 1994). This directly opens the question of conventional notions of literacy and illiteracy. For instance, who are the truly illiterate people in our society concerning their ignorance of what it takes to raise children?

This official disregard for the children of the poor is an integral part of the disregard for the poor themselves, most of whom are children and women. As our social-economic system shows, even in the richest country of the world, some children had better not be around. Once they are, all the fault and burden are placed on the mothers. Because most poor children are raised by poor single mothers they are by definition part of a pathological at-risk female population that is either deficient, broken, dysfunctional, and morally suspect, or a menace or threat to society (Polakow 1993). Overall, the concentration of poverty among children and women is explained as a **private** affair, a result of failed individuals and failed families and therefore ultimately as its own cause (Polakow 1993:46, 59). There is a deafening silence about the fact that it is "our economy" with its structural inequalities of access and opportunity which causes poverty, that it is a **public** rather than a private affair.

## Looking at the Essence of our Problems

Where young people grow up with little or no sense of the future, with a dismal public education, with the danger of violence all around them, we are looking at the essence of the problems with "our" system: the increasing harshness of motherwork in a context where housing is dismal, where communities are neglected, where there is little hope for the future, and where children's lives are in constant danger (not to speak of having to endure the humiliation of dependence on a bloated welfare bureaucracy). What can we say about the "progress" of our economic and social system when the last remnant of unwaged life-supporting work, the work of raising children, is reduced to keeping one's ill-fed, traumatized children inside one's dismal apartment because their movement outside the doors endangers their lives?

## HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF THE WOMEN'S LITERACY GROUP

Elio DeArrudah, the director of the Chicago Public Library Literacy Initiative, emphasizes the relative independence of the A.B.L.A. Homes Literacy Training Center, at least in terms of its own identity.<sup>3</sup> The center is located right where the A.B.L.A. Homes begin and where the Chicago

campus of the University of Illinois abruptly ends. It is housed in the Boys & Girls Club, a major social service provider for youth in the area. The center is allowed to occupy a small room on the second floor.

Over 5,000 Black people live in the A.B.L.A. Homes, the third largest public housing project in the City, and less than 10% of them have regular jobs. Public aid, or welfare, is one of the main sources of income for single mothers. While no official data exist on the problem of illiteracy, its seriousness is not disputed.

The Chicago Public Library placed Almetta Russell as the literacy organizer in this community. Almetta Russell and graduate student assistants from UIC put their energies into a number of different efforts, all of which directly draw on the expressed wishes of the participants. These efforts range from teaching the participants the use of books, remedial training in basic reading, writing and math skills, to more specific job-related skills.

## THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT HOUR

Since March 1994 I have been attending the weekly session of the Women Empowerment Hour (WEH). It is usually attended by five to ten women. Some of the women come fairly regularly, others only once in a while. There are, of course, a number of different reasons behind their absences. These range from problems at home to finding a job (in one year about 50% of the participants got jobs or their GED diplomas and left the area). As Elio DeArrudah put it, "that meant having to rebuild the group time and time again, because whoever succeeds leaves the public housing project. Actually, that is precisely why very many of them wish to succeed so badly; they then can find better places to live with their children."

Almetta Russell herself talked to me about the exhausting task of rebuilding the group. However, no matter how the continuity of attendance has been interrupted, it has also been increasing since I first attended the WEH (a few months after it was organized). And I see a strong connection between the growing regularity of participation and the spirit nourished at the literacy center, especially during the WEH. Because participation takes time away from the urgent task of day-to-day survival, it greatly depends on the perseverance of the literacy coordinator. She continuously offers assistance and helps to develop self-esteem and a sense of empowerment in the participants themselves so they can share the task of mutual assistance. And this is precisely what the WEH is trying to accomplish.

While learning how to read and write is fully part of the preparation for obtaining a GED, and ultimately a job, the weekly sessions of the WEH are based on a rather complex vision of "success," a vision that is only tangentially related to equating success with finding a job. The organization of the class is based on the participants' own experience of daily life in the A.B.L.A.

Homes, thus acknowledging extreme hardships but also drawing on and nurturing a sense of self in the midst of a number of social and individual onslaughts. Almetta Russell has captured this dual purpose of WEH by stating that "Women Empowerment Hour is a forum for traumatized, distressed, disempowered and powerless women whose goal is to improve reading and writing skills," and that power "is very useful, important, and can be fun. It is best when it is personal." More importantly, "the Women Empowerment Hour believes that power should be shared and works best when it is multiplied." She writes that Black women can "take part in planning **their** future while improving personal relationships within the family structure."

One of the participants I have observed over the months, and whose devastating details of life circumstances I have learned, was generally silent or talked a lot. Whatever the nature of her response, I could always see a mix of defiance, sorrow, and despair in her eyes. However, while some of the women worked on the rearrangement of materials and the beautification of the space, she was calm and focused, moving things back and forth in a clear, determined manner.

## The Core of the Learning Environment

And this seemingly small detail is at the core of the learning environment: The literacy facilitator not only coordinates various efforts meeting different learning needs, but she also continuously works on providing a structure that draws on and nourishes the women's abilities and sources of strength. At the same time, it is also a structure that acknowledges the layers of pain in the women's lives and that provides a space for sharing the pain, reflecting on its multiple causes, and putting it into a larger context by interpreting its meaning from the different perspectives offered by the participants. And this is the very meaning of developing a sense of power or empowerment.

One of the participants wrote in her testimonial:

WEH is very exciting because you can talk about things that happen in your life and we can learn so much from each other. It also helps us express ourselves. I look forward to the WEH every Thursday. It helps me talk about things going on in my life. And those times when there is nothing to say or you don't feel like writing, you say nothing and you write nothing and that's o.k. too. All the time is not the time to do everything. But WEH capitalizes on the wit, the experience and the dynamics of the group.

## Volunteer Facilitators

Every week one of the women volunteers to facilitate the next WEH. She has to choose a reading, or create her own text, and develop a number of questions which the participants have to answer. The WEH is formally opened with greetings from Almetta Russell, and the women are given a few minutes during which they can share with each other anything that



happened during the past week and that they consider worthy of sharing. The facilitator then reads her text and the questions, and the participants have about 20 minutes to respond in writing. They then share their writings, often accompanied by lengthy discussions of the thoughts and ideas stimulated by the text and various responses to it. Time schedules are closely observed, and the discussions are always brought to closure at the end of the allotted time. After naming the volunteer for the next session, the women then randomly draw a name from a bowl and the winner receives a small present (for instance a notebook). No matter how difficult the topic, the WEH always ends with an appreciation of the participants' contributions and willingness to share. In addition, a variety of pleasantly arranged food and sometimes music or poetry all add to the comfort and stimulation of the participants.

## **ROLE AND PURPOSE OF THE MOTHER**

The issue of mothers, and of mothering, is a motif that is recurring in the participants' own writing and in a variety of topics presented for discussion. Mothering is characterized by a multitude of tasks and responsibilities which touch upon every single aspect of human existence — physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual.

The following quote by one of the participants gives an indication of the multi-layered tasks expected from mothers:

She does her best but because of her low literacy skills she is unable to effectively model and exhibit reading and writing habits that can strengthen and improve her life and the lives of her children. And thus the humiliation, oppression, and deprivation is trans-generational. Nowhere is this situation more devastating than in low income public housing. No offspring suffers more than the offspring of the powerless and impoverished solo parent lacking mainstream literacy skills. She has highs and lows. Her esteem is low and her stress is high. She feels betrayed by the school system, the political system, and the man she loves. This plethora of things overpowers her and renders her disempowered.

And here are the voices of some of the other participants:

I thank God for blessing me with a mother who loves her children. If my mother didn't care about me, I would probably be on drugs, in sin or in jail or dead by now.

My plans for my children are to help them when they need help and to learn all that I can learn so that way when they need me I can help them. I like reading books with my children and helping them with their home work. My children look at me and tell me that they are proud of me and that they love me very much.

I am now the mother of seven, four boys and three girls. It is much easier to raise boys than girls because girls mature faster and get their own minds. You can tell boys no and they obey, whereas girls will disobey. I brought my children up in church. I have been a church-goer since age 23. It helps them to learn responsibility and how to be responsible adults. It teaches them morals, values, manners and how to respect others and work to take care of the family.

In one of the WEH hours the women reported on their mothers' incredibly hard working lives, their persistence and constancy. One woman told me about her mother, and how even when she was ill and lying in bed she instructed her daughter how to make corn bread. In other words, she kept on caring for her family when she should have (and could have) taken care of herself.

Black people in the U.S. have a strong history of extended family relationships in low-income, multigenerational families (Stack and Burton 1994). In many ways, the importance of having grandmothers available to take over much of the caring for children, to "take on a more formal surrogate parent role," is growing as well (41). During one of the WEH discussions one of the women expressed gratitude for other women (like her mother who is living close by) helping her with taking care of the children when she had to leave, and the importance of grandmothers or other kin in helping with the work of raising children was quite apparent.

The issue of not leaving the children alone had two different dimensions: one was the fact that small children could not be left alone anyhow. The other was the overall danger surrounding children, and the constant care and concern required to prevent something happening to them. These dangers, and the overwhelming presence of poverty have a tendency to eat into the kinship networks, so "that sometimes in the face of economic cutbacks and emotional crisis they must however reluctantly 'let go' of family members who cannot pull their weight" (Stack and Burton 1994: 41).

The overall theme was the bottomless caring, need to care, and responsibility for caring displayed by an older generation of mothers. But this tradition of caring now seems to hit these mothers' daughters in the face. What has the caring task accomplished? The outside world has not improved, instead it has worsened. This is just one of the incredibly difficult contradictions working in the A.B.L.A. women's lives: How the caring of their mothers has been a tremendous support for themselves and their children, and how absent, dead, neglectful and abusive mothers have torn apart their children's souls. What is left? This is the area where the particularly troublesome, multi-layered nature of caring is shown to be highly intertwined with social exploitation and self-oppression, often flipping over into the refusal (or inability) to care for one's own children.

The WEH's emphasis on **caring for one's self first**, of attaining a **sense of power** becomes particularly important in this context. Caring is an essential dimension of the spiritual, psychological and physical survival of the individual woman *and* the children. As indicated by one WEH facilitator's remark about her mother's failings, women have to learn to care for themselves first. Without recognizing the importance of their own selves they will not gain the strength and power needed to move on with the overwhelming tasks that confront them (and they would fall into drug addiction or passivity).

And they have to learn to feel powerful by themselves. For instance, Almetta Russell had to tell the men to respect the all-women's group, but the women themselves were not courageous enough to tell the men themselves. Also, there were men sitting downstairs waiting for the women in the WEH, and they also had to be told to leave. And there is the (frequent) story of the woman returning to her abusive male partner. To obtain a sense of power would allow a woman to learn to be on her own, not to permit abuse.

## **Getting to the Bottom of Pain**

The following is an example of the reading and the questions provided by one of the WEH facilitators. I deliberately chose these suggestions as they touch on one of the hardest issues brought before the group. It is also an issue that represents a dense web of pain, fears, anguish, and concerns which lie at the core of motherwork. And before one can see and understand the tremendous amount of work required on many levels in order to inspire sparks of hope it is necessary to go to the bottom of pain. In the case of this particular example, the participant's emphasis on her mother is only partly explained by her own devastating experience, but it is one that opens the most questions. As she wrote (in another context):

When I was 13 my mother had stopped drinking but became very abusive before I left home at age 14 to live with my father. She repeatedly beat me. She burned me with a very hot iron.

Here is the material she provided:

I would like to talk about how young girls go around and walk the streets everyday and how nasty filthy "ole" men mess with them. For example, when girls are on their way to school old men as well as young men honk their horns, flirt and tempt young school age girls with promises, money, drugs and sometimes just simple rides in late model cars. Many times the parents, especially mothers have no idea of the everyday struggles and experiences of their young daughters. Sometimes I wonder if the reason that some mothers don't really, really understand their daughters have to do with lack of understanding of themselves. This is what I really believe about my own mother.

## **Questions Revealing an Array of Experiences**

1. Think about what you've read. Name five things you like about your mother.
2. Name five things you dislike about your mother.
3. What are some things you wish your mother would do for you?
4. What are some things you wish your mother would stop doing?
5. If you had one wish for your mother, what would that wish be?

The responses to these questions brought out an array of experiences. They covered the whole spectrum of motherwork under the harsh circumstances of racism and economic exploitation, from mothers who never stopped caring and working for their families even when they should have spent some time taking care of themselves, to those who let themselves be drowned by the devastations around them.

In many ways, all essential aspects of motherwork were brought up: Constant love, protection, care, attentiveness. What was not talked about are the tremendous physical and emotional demands placed upon women who care for children under extremely harsh circumstances. These demands may be too much taken for granted, but they may also be absorbed by the general worry about children's safety and future. This may therefore also mean that the knowledge about what it takes to attend to a sick child, to take care of its food, health, sleep, rest, play, development, etc. is inserted into "larger" anxieties that cannot be reduced to anxieties about the children alone, but about one's self, one's partner/boyfriend, one's community, etc.

Clearly, what is brought into the empowerment group every week is an overwhelming emotional burden. The temptation of watching soaps, sitting and drinking (or taking drugs) is likewise overwhelming. This is one of the many harsh contradictions in the women's lives. As reported by the facilitator, some of the women cannot keep up the emotional strain of talking about what happened to them (e.g. sexual abuse, violence); sometimes they tell her the truth, wanting her to write about it, other times they cannot face the hurt and paint a rosy picture of their childhood.

## **THE LARGER FRAMEWORK: RETHINKING WORK AND THE "WORK CRISIS"**

Clearly, the life circumstances of the A.B.L.A. women and the fact that they are women and responsible (or held responsible) for certain kinds of work represent a particularly dense knot of economic, social, and political issues. I will try to untangle this knot from a perspective that takes issue with the usual devaluation of the kind of work done almost exclusively by women.

When one looks at work that is mainly performed by women the usual ban on asking any critical or radical questions concerning work literacy becomes especially visible. Vital abilities, forms of knowledge, and skills are disregarded and thereby turned into "hidden literacies." The importance of learning new literacies and unlearning old ones in precisely those areas of knowledge and experience are disregarded as well.

The super-exploitation of women (closely associated with but not reducible to their race, ethnicity, or nationality) shows a particularly strong connection between ideology and economy. For instance, women earn less than men for the same kind of work, and what is called "women's work" and "men's work" divides essential tasks and responsibilities. These divisions and forms of exploitation are justified by the ideological notions of "femininity" and "masculinity." The words of the participants I quoted earlier tell only part of the story about the work of hope and care which becomes an inordinate task in a Chicago public housing environment. Nevertheless, they echo what has been described by one of Chicago's community organizations, Women for Economic Justice, as the meaning of work:

Work is raising and educating children. Work is providing a comfortable, cultured life for us all. Work is teaching youth, healing and caring for the sick, rebuilding neighborhoods, harvesting and distributing the food. Work is organizing for social justice. (A Call for Social Justice, quoted in *off our backs*, October 1994, page 6).

The notion of work proposed in this quote clearly breaks through the entrenched dichotomy between a job in the labor market and work that is not only taking place "somewhere else," but that is also directly oriented towards supporting and sustaining life itself. This includes some **basic** conditions related to life: food, shelter, community, a health-producing and maintaining environment, and hope for the future. The quote does not capture everything that has been experienced, seen and understood by people who do not fit the norm of waged workers within the capitalist-patriarchal market system.

It does not capture the fact that it is this kind of work that has been the most exploited, has been the very foundation of capitalist wage labor production. Depending on the concrete national and social context, it is work that has been looked upon as "pre-capitalist," "pre-modern," or simply "natural" (which in the case of women means a "natural" outcome of their biology). As pointed out and analyzed by many feminist and Third World theoreticians, without access to this work which has been free of charge to the corporate and national economic developers, any development, or any capitalist production would not have been possible. In other words, without the super-exploitation of the "naturalized" workers the "normalized workers," that is, the wage laborers, and thus "progress and development" would not have come about.

The concept that is used to summarize many different forms of unwaged or unremunerated labor is "subsistence work." The term itself has undergone a number of changes in meaning. In close alliance with the ongoing destructiveness of the global market system it has been the focus of many debates (see, for instance, Hart 1992, Mies 1986, Mies and Shiva 1993; for an example of the latest discussions see von Werlhof 1993, 1994). Overall, subsistence work refers to work that is oriented towards the immediate creation and maintenance of life rather than profit, making the work of raising children, or motherwork, a clear example of subsistence work. Under conditions of marginalization, subsistence work is more accurately described as "survival work" (Mies and Shiva 1993), and it can range from the peasant work of growing food for immediate use on the tiny family plot, scraping food from cities' garbage dumps, to protecting children from immediate threats to their lives.

As von Werlhof (1988) pointed out, the history of capitalism shows that the housewife became one of the cheapest forms of modern labor, as she works free of charge. Since today workers need to be as cheap as possible she has become a truly ideal form of labor. This means that workers have to be born and raised free of charge to the corporate world in order to be most economically exploitable. This also underlies the fact that "we" in the industrialized

countries can jog in our expensive Nike or Reebok shoes which have been assembled in militaristically organized, extremely unhealthy production sites in Indonesia, where workers are paid below the abysmally small minimum wage. This adds another dimension to the ideal worker. As von Werlhof (1993a:1023) states very poignantly, once the workers have been raised free of charge, it is the slave and the soldier who are the primary model for the ideal wage laborer. If people cannot be exploited because they do not come close to the possibility of a paid job, they are simply a form of "superfluous over-population" (1994:169). They are hopefully somehow surviving on their own, or, as in Chicago, they can be held in check in a zone that has a convenient history of racist segregation.

### Focusing on Special Aspects

I would like to focus on a few aspects barely hinted at in this abbreviated analysis. First, speaking about a "free market economy," or a capitalist (world) system, means speaking about a number of colonial or imperialist processes that are fully part of this system. Within the context of the city of Chicago, it means that the history of racism, with its strong ties to slavery, and to the big migration of Blacks from the South to the North in the 20's and 30's, and again after World War II, needs to be fully taken into consideration when poverty and unemployment are examined (Jones 1992, Lemann 1992). Secondly, the same system has been extremely dependent on the sexist exploitation of women.

If we look at just a tiny slice of some of the basic capitalist-patriarchal mechanisms, in the U.S., and particularly in Chicago, women are making less for the same kind of work (and with the same level of education) than men (**Two Sides of the Coin 1994**). And, when put into the same context, current proposals for welfare reform (or "workfare" schemes) realize that welfare mothers (who comprise the majority of women in public housing complexes) have placed themselves outside the economic exploitability network with their bad dependency on the government. Thus, they have to be pulled into the workforce in order to become profitable, or, under the latest proposals of the Republican party, they need to be cut off the dole altogether, letting them fend for themselves and for their children among the hungry and, most likely, among the homeless.

Women on welfare, especially Black women in Chicago's public housing complexes, are confronted with the blatant contradictions of what used to be propagated as the best world for children when this was profitable for the (white) fathers and for the corporations, that is, a mother who stays home to take care of them. If there is no income earning husband around, good dependency is turned into bad dependency, and women need to work on the deficiencies of their characters by becoming cheap laborers. According to this scheme, any job, no matter how awful, is better for character-building than staying at home with the children and living off public aid.

## THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR

The issue of motherwork, and the ongoing destruction of its outer and inner survival base, cannot be analyzed without looking at the way it is fully entrenched in the sexual division of labor. In the history of the U.S. it has been played out in a number of variations, and it has taken on at times quite different forms for Black and for white women. As the histories of Southern plantations and later of domestic work in the North so amply show, it pitted Black women against white women (Rollins 1985). At the same time, despite all the profound differences among women of different races or classes, as a primary mechanism for exploiting women the sexual division of labor has never been absent.

Thus, eroding social and economic conditions cannot be expected to contribute to a fundamental change of equally fundamental social norms and mechanisms associated with gender oppression, no matter how much they interact with class and race/ethnicity. As Zinn (1992:86) points out, the gendered division of labor which expects women to nurture and men to provide is reiterated in a highly distorted way under conditions of disenfranchising large numbers of Black men. This disenfranchisement, indicated by the extremely high unemployment rate among Black men in the inner cities, "is a gender phenomenon of enormous magnitude. It affects the meanings and definitions of masculinity for Black men, and it reinforces the public patriarchy that controls Black women through their increased dependence on welfare" (Zinn 1992:87). It is an essential part of this definition of masculinity to "sire" children but not to feel responsible for nurturing and raising them on any consistent basis (Hacker 1992:87, 88). Mullings (1994) likewise describes how African American men and women often accept traditional gender roles. This division directly diminishes the potential for united struggles (277). The women are therefore moving in a "narrow historical space, caught between pressures of racial liberation and gender liberation" (281).

### The Invisibility of Men as Fathers

Since caring has been a "woman's job," the invisibility of men as fathers indicates that the sexual division of labor is showing in a glaring light what can be called the extremes of the general conventional notion of a woman's job. For instance, in essays where the A.B.L.A. women describe their own lives, the children are very present, but the fathers of the children are absent, sometimes not even mentioned, or mentioned as the man who sexually abused the woman:

I left school a freshman, 17 years old and pregnant.

At age 17, I went to a doctor after two missed periods and discovered that I was 3 months pregnant. I went home and told my mother. She said it was nothing she could do about it. Then she asked for the father's name. I told her it was her brother and my uncle. She said I was lying and not telling the truth. We scheduled a blood test and discovered that I was telling the truth. My maternal uncle was the father of my child. After that day my

relationship with my mother deteriorated. She put me out of her home and I slept in cars, under houses and anywhere I could.

I left school due to teenage pregnancy. My mother worked in a factory and was unable to babysit. And my sister ... was also pregnant and could not help me after the birth of ... my daughter.

So far, the theme of absent fathers has hardly ever been explicitly addressed by the A.B.L.A. women but it has been a constant undercurrent. In some ways it seems to have become a "fact of life." Or, in the voice of another participant:

Usually, the woman who is victimized, traumatized and distressed has the man's greatest support during procreation, less during prenatal, and none postnatal. His presence is neither seen nor felt within the family infrastructure because he is not there! He, himself a victim of social injustices, spends more time incarcerated, on cloud nine, or making other sisters fruitful to multiply than nurturing, supporting, and educating his children. Thus, the woman stuck with the difficult task of parenting solo attempts to take on the challenge.

Many children are born to single teenage mothers who cannot count on support by the men who "fathered" their children (Polakow 1993). In Chicago, one of every five firstborn children is born to single teenagers who didn't finish high school. It makes them, and their children, most vulnerable to economic hardship and abuse (*Chicago Tribune*, March 31, 1994). Above all, there is a growing absence of marriage as a path toward personal or family stability, or the partnership with another adult who will help financially and emotionally, especially with the children.

Marriage is less and less an option, and a lot has to do with the fact that job prospects for men, especially Black men in the inner city, are almost nonexistent. This is important to note as it stops putting all the blame simply on the youth of the mother. As two of the women reported, it was not extraordinary for girls to marry and have children at an early age, and the teenage pregnancy rates were therefore much higher in the 70's than they are now. However, today there are hardly any conditions for marriage, which makes teenage mothers particularly vulnerable, socially and economically.

It is therefore not surprising that the A.B.L.A. women did not talk about "fatherhood." Has it become a taken-for-granted fact that fathers, especially teenage fathers do not even think about their responsibility? LaVar Barnes, a 16 year old, said that "a destructive equation is at work among his peers, where it's seen as manly to father a child and unmanly to take care of him afterwards. 'It's the truth,'... 'I got buddies that do their shorties wrong,' yet who are eager to get girls pregnant 'just to say they got a shorty'" (*Chicago Tribune*, March 9, 1994).

During one of the WEH sessions someone pointed out that a large part of treating women as "stupid" is to make them pregnant, and to leave them for the woman in the next house or block. This also brought up the whole issue of what sexual conquest means for women, and I could see that one of the mainstays of a feminine identity (which is also one of the main roots of



women's sense of disempowerment), showing "success" in the sexual arena, was in full operation. In another session the women talked about the difficulty of fostering friendship among women who are often ruled by fierce jealousy. As reported by one of the women: "I told a woman that I had problems with my man. She nodded, showing me support, and the next thing I knew was she was together with him, and now she has five babies by him."

Centuries of modern Western processes of socialization have not bypassed the groups or populations that have been at the center of violent exploitation, be it people in the European colonies, or slaves and their descendants in the U.S. As it is a sign of manliness to make babies but not to do the hard work of daily care, it is also manly to be economically independent. To be financially dependent on a woman therefore goes against the grain of what it means to be a man.

Henry Hardee, who as a homeless person was officially labelled "illiterate" in terms of the institutional definitions of the Chicago Public Library, has worked on the fringes of the Chicago economy and educated himself as a political writer. He writes plays and coordinates a family literacy program at one of the public housing complexes. It is part of his "unofficial" mission to get the fathers involved in these literacy efforts. In his play *It's Rough On a Po' Nigguh Like Me Out Heah*, Chicken Noodle, one of the protagonists, says: "I do take care of my children (when I got the money)." But who is doing the work of taking care of them when he hasn't got the money?

In his play Henry Hardee also describes in vivid terms how joblessness has become a fact of life, and how it cannot be separated from the need to survive which may mean to be financially dependent on a woman:

A Blackman could be unemployed for a lifetime,  
 spend a lifetime on corners  
 in front of Currency Exchanges  
 in front of Liquor Stores  
 askin' for change [as if somebody is going into the Liquor Store]  
 Say can you help me out with something  
 after you take care of your business.

It's bad to be with a woman  
 when you ain't got nothin' of your own.  
 a man has to be responsible  
 for getting his own shit.  
 when you busted and your woman  
 got something you become  
 her recipient and she decides  
 what benefits you can and can't get.

When you layin' up on a woman  
 she thinks you owe her and she  
 thinks she owns you.  
 When you layin' up on a woman  
 you can't think straight  
 cause you scared she gon' leave,  
 scared her money gonna  
 get up and walk.

...  
Don't nevah let no woman become  
your only source of money  
she'll fuck you over every time.

## Boys and Girls are Brought up Differently

The participants of the WEH closely connected the sexual division of labor to the fact that boys and girls are brought up differently. The quote that initiated the discussion was the following: "Who's raising black men in this country? Black women. So if black men are not being very conscious of black women, then it is our fault. I think that black women tend to love our sons and raise our daughters. We tend to not give men responsibility, not hold them accountable the way we hold our daughters" (Gilkey in Summers 1989).

There were several stories told about how girls are taught that they won't be able to keep a man if they don't learn how to cook and bake for him. There was also a lot of laughter when the women recommended sometimes extremely funny ways of taking revenge (e.g. putting laxatives into food) to what was perceived as a form of exploitation. Clearly, a division among women and men which has a long history and tradition in all Western societies has been sharpened and intensified in the inner city. However, the plight of Black men's inability to find employment in the inner city at the same time reinforces this division by making it especially hard for women to resist doing the extra work of serving the men and the children "sired" by them. And this plight also reinforces sex as a prime avenue for men to show their power and superiority.

During one of the sessions the problem of men often trying to prevent women from getting a job, or from working on their education in order to be better prepared, brought out a lot of anger and pain. Likewise, in one of the articles on welfare mothers in Chicago *The New York Times* reported that boyfriends or husbands sometimes keep women from staying in jobs. One of the women even reported that "she once quit a job because her boyfriend 'used to come to the job and threaten me'" (October 24, 1994).

What has had a long tradition, and what is fully part of asserting male power, is violence against women (and it is increasing, see Jones 1994) which takes on additional dimensions when the material power base, money, is absent. The A.B.L.A. women talked a lot about male violence. And violence included the open access to sex/women's bodies. During one the WEH sessions a poem was discussed where the theme of men being "against women" was particularly strong. The women talked about men feeling superior by beating women, where violence gives men a sense of their power.

## **POWER, VIOLENCE AND MASCULINE IDENTITY**

Clearly, the centuries old ideology of true manhood does not get resolved when men are left in the cold of economic superfluousness. The opposite is true. By being thrown to the bottom of the heap in a wealthy, consumer-oriented, and ultimately violent and destructive social order inherent aspects of a masculine identity are laid bare: power, money, self-interest (von Werlhof 1993b). And, as von Werlhof points out, the socialization of men into considering the use of violence as a normal part of their upbringing and their lives as adults is the Western form of male domestication (18-19).

This means to have power over somebody considered weaker or dependent, and to let someone else, recognized as a true male authority, have power over oneself. Lemann (1992) also describes that there is a constant pressure on men to prove masculinity in destructive ways (300), and that there is an "emphasis on exaggerated and misguided versions of masculinity that glorifies gang membership and sexual conquest" (346). It means that committing one's loyalty to a gang involves being ready to sacrifice one's own life for its benefits, or to dismiss the lives of rival members (and whoever else happens to end up in the cross-fire, often children on their way to school or to a friend's house). Especially for boys belonging to a gang is often the only avenue available to satisfy the need of belonging that is not given anywhere else, especially not by the family.

Gang loyalty can therefore take the form of a 10-year old boy doing the required killing, and being killed in return by his own teenage gang members for fear of the police forcing information out of the child (Rodriguez 1994). Gang loyalty feeds off another component of masculine identity: money, in this case obtained through activities in the underground economy. These activities lay bare the foundation of a social-economic system which exploits and plunders people and the earth: violence. In an essentially violent system, violence is a rational answer to a situation of despondency and hopelessness.

### **Raising Children in the Midst of Social Destructiveness**

In terms of motherwork, there is, of course, the issue of raising children in the midst of social (and community) destruction and destructiveness. During the WEH, women kept talking about the presence of gangs in their and their children's lives, and that they never knew who would be hit next. It also became clear that men (and boys) in gangs were not "out there," but were in various ways a more direct part of their lives. And random violence against (and among) children is also spreading, for the most part committed by boys and men. In addition, there is a rise in child abuse cases (involving beatings, shaking or burning the child severely enough to require hospitalization) across the nation, where the abuser "is usually a boyfriend or

stepfather who is around when the mother is not home" (*The New York Times*, April 5, 1994). The child of one of the participants of the women's literacy group was killed by a former boyfriend.

The Chicago newspapers and tv channels give daily reports on child abuse and gang violence. However, they do not spend any time or space reporting on the tremendous effort of mothers and "othermothers" (Collins 1990) to protect and raise children. They also do not examine or investigate the different meanings of child abuse. One of the differences is the neglect of children the burden for whose care has been placed entirely on the shoulders of women who often drown their despair in alcohol or drugs. And there is the slashing, breaking bones, or other directly cruel and violent acts by men against the children who were placed in their care for short amounts of time. *How can men who have no outlook for any decent employment, and who may be financially dependent on the mother of their children, keep their rage in check when they are asked to do the demanding work with children, a responsibility which supposedly is not theirs in the first place?* Clearly, in order to understand the social, cultural, and economic context of child abuse one needs to engage in a fundamental criticism of gender divisions.

## LITERACY AND WORK

In Chicago's inner city the notion of "work and literacy" has been stripped to its bare bones. This turns the industrial-patriarchal society's deafening silence which envelopes the categorization of people into "literate" and "illiterate," "competent" or "deficient" into the screams of people who have been victimized by this society and who turn their own victimization into the victimization of others around them. But the deafening silence is also broken by the cries, sobbings, laughter and calm voices of those people who are struggling to keep or make a connection with the strength of their own sense of ability, knowledge, and power to stem the tide of destruction.

### Learning How to Raise Children — An Essential Literacy

This means that educators (from the inside or the outside, with special roles or simply participating in one of the literacy efforts) need to recognize and build upon invisible literacies, or see where they are missing and need to be learned. For instance, one of the women talked about the importance of "parenting classes" that were (from what I could see) required by the Department of Child and Family Services. Aside from the expression of her own troubles, sorrow, and internal damage she also brought out a dimension that was a running theme in many other WEH sessions: Women with children (their own or those of others) can or need to learn what it means to raise children. This kind of literacy is essential for dignified survival and a

sense of future. It also refers to important work that gets easily shunned or devalued by making it a "woman's issue" rather than an issue of general social (women's *and* men's) concern.

Most men, no matter where they live, need to undergo a tremendous unlearning and relearning process. They need to develop the liking for nurturing abilities which has been squelched by Western notions of masculinity and which, under the current circumstances of destruction and despair in the inner city have also destroyed the strong tradition of black men fulfilling the role of nurturer. However, there are attempts by men to learn what it means to be a father, no matter how dismal the job situation. For instance, the Paternal Involvement Demonstration Project (funded by the Illinois Department of Public Aid and the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc.) is assisting men who "are eager to provide some level of care for their children":

All the men, ranging in age from eighteen to thirty-five, are recipients of some form of public aid or welfare benefits, most have sporadic work histories, some have criminal records, and all regard the ability to find and hold down a job as a prerequisite to being a successful parent. (Parker 1993:3)

One of the men in the program is reported emphasizing that

men — whether they are struggling as he is or not — should surround themselves with people who have positive attitudes about taking responsibility for themselves and their children. Discussing parenthood and life strategies with such people is invaluable for encouraging men to take responsibility, he says; the "friends" and the family members who demean and discourage aspirations do not fit into the goal for healthy relationships. (Parker 1993:4)

This also means that it is necessary to acquire a kind of literacy closely aligned with the **work** of raising children. It is work that is made invisible by placing it under the rubric of "family literacy," a category which does not wrench itself away from traditional notions of femininity and masculinity.

On a more general level, the redefinition of literacy also needs to take into account the traditions of black people's knowledge and abilities that are entirely disregarded or dismissed by white corporate society. Zira Smith (1994), for instance, studied the connection between a strong oral tradition of passing on and acquiring knowledge and skills and the abundance of "micro-businesses" in the Black South Side of Chicago. Those micro-businesses constitute different forms of self-employment, be it in the form of street vendors, yard and garage vendors, or direct sales vendors (12). Some of these micro-businesses are "hustles," intermittent, informal business transactions (39). Smith points out that these self-employed people are labeled as "the disadvantaged, indigent, undereducated, and illiterate" although they are "educated about their environment and themselves," and they are "intelligent, insightful and displayed empathy for others" (37). In other words, they have useful skills and knowledge resources required for *daily life* (47). And she writes that "although overlooked by scholars, educators and African Americans, this group composed of self-employed adults may provide some of the best economic role models for adults with low skills" (49). The result of

Smiths' study makes it clear that people would attend and stay in literacy programs which would take into account the extensive knowledge and skills that have been preserved or developed outside of the official formal labor market *and* outside of corresponding work and literacy training approaches.

### **Highly Developed Language Skills vs. Low Writing Skills**

Within the WEH sessions I was struck again and again by the highly developed language ability that was expressed in a number of ways. I could see that some of the women struggled putting words on paper not only because of their low writing skills, but also because they had to forgo the ability to speak fluently and often poetically about complex issues — an ability which could then be expressed during the following discussions. WEH was organized in a way that led the participants to practice putting their words on paper but also gave them the space to indulge in their highly developed speaking ability.

The importance of acknowledging this ability was brought home to me when I asked one of the women what she meant by the short sentences she had produced as part of her homework assignment. She immediately became apologetic and gave me a number of reasons why they were so short. After I pointed out to her that I simply wanted to hear all her thoughts on the questions she had tried to answer, and that I knew that she had many important thoughts to share even when they were not put down in writing, she first looked puzzled, then relaxed, expressed pride in her own ability, and was highly motivated to put more effort into her homework assignment. In the words of the WEH, she clearly felt "empowered." Again, this small incident speaks volumes about the importance of breaking through the barriers of the conventional education systems. Instead of operating with the usual deficit model which only recognizes certain kinds of "cognitive processes and modes of communication" (Brunetire et al. 1990) space needs to be provided for acknowledging existing but unrecognized experiences and forms of knowledge which are closely linked to learning desires and abilities.

### **RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIAL CHANGE**

As the primary motif of the WEH has shown, the notion of change is closely linked to finding or nurturing a sense of power in one's self. This is a way of focusing on the individual level without reducing change to an individual one (as is the tradition of conventional literacy programs). A personal sense of empowerment must be at the core of self-help but it cannot take place without collective support. It has been one of the main ingredients of the women's literacy initiative to provide space for learning lessons from women whose life circumstances are not different from the ones of the

A.B.L.A. women, who themselves live in one of the public housing projects, but who have served as role models for strength, courage, and perseverance; for caring for one's community and for the children of one's community. It is these examples which go against the grain of falling victim to the despondency all around, teaching children that survival must not come at the expense of self-esteem (Collins 1994:57).

This is one of the hardest tasks confronting women who are experiencing on a daily and nightly basis the onslaught against their own self-esteem, a source of strength that is needed to raise their children in the midst of destruction.

Among the A.B.L.A. women, collective support not only takes the form of listening to and reading about outside/inside examples but comes from the participants themselves. Their many discussions on the relationships among women and men, among women and women, and among women and children, comprise a cluster of themes that show the intricate interplay of connections and contradictions between the personal and the social-cultural, the ideological and the economic. Correspondingly, discussions that took place during the WEH also show an interplay of personal stories, anecdotes, and the development of a general perspective which puts these stories into a larger framework of understanding. This method often reminded me of my own experiences in the consciousness raising groups of the seventies where the personal and the general were highly interrelated (Hart 1990). In addition, among the A.B.L.A. women's literacy group the process of "conscientization" was directly connected with the "craft" of reading and writing (Bhola 1994:47).

Seeing this method work in a context permeated by outer and inner destitution, where economic survival is hardly an inch away from personal survival, it takes on a new importance. And this brings up another contradiction the people in Chicago's public housing must wrestle with: To raise one's consciousness is a slow process, dependent on a lot of consistent support, on the building of trust, and on the courage required to look at the misery or brutality that is part of one's life. Raising consciousness, or conscientization, also requires the inner strength needed to criticize oneself or one's failures, shortcomings, or (self-)destructive coping mechanisms. *In other words, it requires the ability to shed light on one's own personal life by acknowledging its pain but also one's own responsibility in perpetuating parts of the pain.*

## One of the Hardest Tasks: Consciousness Raising

As I could observe on many occasions, this was only possible when the participants managed to gain a reflective distance from their own personal horizon. Sometimes it happened, sometimes the discussions got stuck in the personal, and the group assumed a (however needed) therapeutic rather than consciousness raising function. Consciousness raising is one of the hardest

tasks in a context where fear, pain, anguish, and rage are fed by a multitude of social and individual sources, all laced into each other, and often impossible to disentangle because of their overwhelming emotional power.

Again, this is one of the many contradictions people living in the A.B.L.A. Homes have to wrestle with: to be around their own people, no matter how difficult, problematic, and violent the environment is. But they know each other, the conditions of their lives, their own language and culture. Almetta Russell once told me about the women's fear of the "outside world," and the example she gave was the women's resistance to taking a walk downtown along a street that moved through the middle class University of Illinois neighborhood. But the women's own neighborhood is also the place of so much pain and suffering that the ability to move away, to move into the other world, is a sign of hope, of success. The difficult question here is whether there are ways of learning the language of the outside world as a second language, or wanting to learn it, in a way that does not just promise an "escape" from the neighborhood but other possibilities as well.

As shown by the lives of the A.B.L.A. women, and as shown by the lives of the most marginalized people in this country (and everywhere else), there is an intimate connection between "the economy" and "the superstructure of values" (Bhola 1994:43). However, we cannot simply envision a change of values without also changing the material structures that have been supported or created by current values.

As should have become clear in this report, the issue of motherwork shows particularly well how the ideological and the material (or "economic") are closely aligned. However, "the economy," and "economic activities" generally can no longer be considered as separate or central, and they can no longer be simply a concern for economists (Gerschlager and Heintel 1993:21). Instead, "everything belongs fundamentally together and we can speak only from the perspective of this connection" (von Werlhof 1993a:1051). In fact, what is summarized under the rubric of "the economy" affects every aspect of daily life and living.

Motherwork does require a holistic mindset and a holistic practical approach. It is work that is contextual, situational, collaborative, and inter-generational, and it incorporates the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life. In whatever truncated or tentative form, all of these aspects were present in the women's literacy group. Its participants have shown that there are (still) gaps in the system, and that life-sustaining desires and hopes are alive, in whatever beleaguered form. The women have also shown that their hopes and learning desires are inseparable from the responsibilities and tasks associated with the work of raising children.



## Notes

1. In order to deal with the great northward Black migration after World War II, and in order to maintain the "color line," in 1957 Chicago's mayor channelled federal money to the Chicago Housing Authority for building a massive number of large high-rise public housing projects. They were all concentrated in parts of the city that were (and still are) almost exclusively Black. Aside from reinforcing racial segregation, this also led to overcrowded Black public schools while white schools in adjacent areas were half-empty. In 1962 the Robert Taylor Homes, the largest public housing project in the world, was completed as the "crowning achievement" (Lemann 1991:91-92).
2. My contributions to a collaborative endeavor have been regular participation in the WEH, GED-related volunteer work, and teaching a class which combines reading and writing assignments. GED refers to "general education development," a certificate which is the equivalent of a high school diploma and can be obtained by taking an official GED exam.
3. The A.B.L.A. Homes is a complex of four public housing projects known as Abbot Homes, Brooks Homes, Loomis Homes and Addams Homes in the near West Side of Chicago.

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# Chapter Three

## IS LITERACY, “A GOOD DEAL”? A CRITIQUE OF THE LITERACY DEBATE IN CANADA

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*“The most important lesson we have to learn is that literacy is not a problem that only affects marginal sections of the population but is also a key issue that determines the skill level of the workforce.*

*...In the advanced countries, conditions are ripe for the formation of a wide coalition to press for the expansion of basic education. That is good news.”*

**Adult Illiteracy and Economic Performance**  
Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, OECD, 1992

*“Literacy is the magic word to be used in any funding application.”*  
Trish AHERN, Association for Community Based Education, Washington

### THE OBSESSION WITH LITERACY

One might have expected that after twenty years of struggle against illiteracy in North America, enthusiasm for the enterprise would have dried up. One might have thought that priority would henceforward be given to evaluating adult education and its results, and especially to improving school

programmes. The spectacular polarization seen in the low levels of formal education and functionality among adults seemed to have given way to concentration on preventing school failure among young people, given the increasing evidence of drop-out in schools and the decline in education credits.

This is not the case. Instead, a surprising degree of interest is being devoted to literacy in the economic sphere. By borrowing the language of business, which has largely taken over public debate, greater funding and more powerful arguments have been mobilized. This can be seen in the following example from among many:

...the individuals, corporations, families, communities and governments that make up this society must all find a way to mount this [literacy at work] attack. We do not lack a command and control mechanism for fighting this war effectively - what is missing is decidedly not a Task Force or a Royal Commission to coordinate our efforts. We lack decisiveness and action.<sup>1</sup>

An old song, refurbished with a new image and a more aggressive strategy. This is what this study is about: a consideration of the "obsession" with literacy in the Canadian and North American context. What has changed in the new approach to literacy? How has it come to dominate debate? Why is it used? How is it received? What are its visible and hidden effects?

From our standpoint, that of action research in basic education and community action, which embraces interpretation, ethics (ecosophics) and activism, what are the lessons to be learned from this new major offensive? Should we follow the consensus and become parties to it, hence deriving from it what advantages we can, or should we look for paths that do not require us to fit in — inevitably, it is claimed — with the new world economic order?

It may appear limiting to restrict ourselves to the register of public utterances. This is so. Two other registers merit investigation: the literacy movement<sup>2</sup> which is also known as the "literacy community" in Canada (this has no equivalent in Europe, I believe, except perhaps in Belgium), and the field of literacy activities, which can vary considerably from the local to the provincial and national level. A further register should be added to these two, that of the policies which govern educational activities. These policies would enable us to widen the "literacy community" considerably and to forge links with the public sectors that the professionals tend to see in isolation (education, social security, labour, culture, the economy, etc.).

This article is less ambitious. But while it initially limits itself to public statements about literacy, it may well reflect the whole changing field. One of the characteristics of the new approach is the desire to speak in the name of the whole of society, to present a "social project" addressed to the nation and not just to a section of the population or to a single sector of activity, the economy. The business community has taken the initiative, and its strategy of conquest has far-reaching consequences. Let us see how it tries to dominate through its style of rhetoric. And to what extent it succeeds.

## THE NEW APPROACH

Statements about literacy in Canada can be divided into three registers: the *economy* and labour, *education* and schools, and *citizenship* and democratic life. Each of these can be identified by key words:

- rights, accessibility, equity, participation and languages in statements about citizenship;
- reading, writing and arithmetic, basic education, school failure, handicap, remedial education, reading level, etc., in statements about education; and
- training, skill, communication, employability, mobility and adaptation in statements about the economy.

In the United States, a fourth semantic register might be added: that of private, family literacy, more pompously termed "intergenerational". This last trend, although not unknown in Canada, has not attained the popularity of the others. There are also more circumscribed uses of the notion of literacy, in particular those applied to the new technologies. But reference to computerization is omnipresent in statements about the economy, increasingly explicit in discussion of education, and rather more implicit in statements about citizenship, which only gives communication technologies a subordinate role in social interaction.

This territorial division of the literacy debate may apply particularly to Canada by virtue of the federalist structure of the country that limits federal and provincial competency, and of the importance given to matters of citizenship in a country of immigration which is officially multicultural and multilingual. We shall also see that the tripartite territorial division of the discussion is reproduced in the history of the literacy movement, which can be seen as falling into three stages: the militant era of popular education; the institutionalization of the movement in adult education and the school system; and currently the influence of economics and the priority accorded to labour force training.

## THE FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL AXIS

In the division between federal and provincial competency, the most significant federal share is economic responsibility for employment and labour force training, while the provinces have responsibility for education. Thus, within the Federal Government, the National Literacy Secretariat is under the authority of the Minister of Human Resource Development and Employment, while in Quebec, the literacy portfolio falls under Adult Education within the Ministry of Education. These two tiers of government clearly show differing political orientations. There are, nonetheless, bridges between them, federal-provincial agreements which draw them closer together. There are also joint projects. In some provinces, Ontario for example, where relations between provincial and federal government are more

fluid than in Quebec, the distinction between education and training is less rigid. The Literacy Department, renamed the Training and Employment Department, has passed from the Ministry of Education to the Ontario Training and Adjustment Board, while originally it was under the Ministry of Culture and Immigration.

In terms of the three registers of the literacy debate, while the federal authorities clearly talk in economic terms and Quebec in terms of education, the North-West Territories, where the question of language and culture predominates, speak principally in terms of citizenship. The majority of the population there is autochthonous: besides English and French, six native languages are officially recognized, and literacy is more associated with community development activities than with formal adult education. Ontario is the province where the three registers are mixed, with the economic aspect clearly predominating at present.

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The emergence of the literacy debate in the mid-1970s was associated with two militant popular education movements: the one critical and left-wing, arguing for literacy as consciousness-raising, the other more conservative, voluntary, linking literacy with individual help for the most disadvantaged. The original discussion largely concerned social issues. The literacy struggle was above all a movement against unequal rights and opportunities, the cultural aspect of the fight against poverty.

Ten years later, in the early 1980s, the literacy debate largely moved on to adult education, with the development of the first literacy and basic education policies. Militants and volunteers became increasingly associated with or subsumed in adult education, which set out to spread literacy provision and to professionalize literacy workers. In this new professional field, what was said was a hybrid mixture of popular education and consciousness-raising, educational psychology and remedial education, and "functional" empiricism. In Quebec, the take-over of the debate by formal education was particularly marked by the "harmonization" of adult and juvenile education through educational commissions under an Education Act granting adults the right to free education up to the secondary school leaving certificate, starting with literacy. The quarter of the population with the lowest levels of school education were the target of these literacy measures.

Widely celebrated in Canada, 1990 International Literacy Year, marked another turning point in the literacy debate, which had become "popular" in the English sense. The Prime Minister of Canada made it a national priority issue by creating a Secretariat provided with a five-year budget. The justification was largely economic. The decade 1990-2000 was to be devoted to literacy and continuing training of the labour force in order to guarantee Canada a place in the forefront of international competition: "Business and

labour agree that training and education will be the key to Canadian competitiveness and economic success in the remainder of this century and well into the next."<sup>3</sup>

## THE PREDOMINANCE OF ECONOMICS IN THE DISCUSSION

Canada's economic difficulties are above all attributed to the lack of qualifications among the labour force. The changes in the post-industrial age (technological advances, new forms of industrial organization and international competition) have radically altered the skills required among the labour force. The basic skills associated with literacy have become more complex: they include communication skills as well as the ability to handle information and to use a computer, problem-solving, the ability to learn and to adapt rapidly, etc. "Skilled minds are taking over from the skilled hands of yesterday".<sup>4</sup> The model is Japan, whose economic miracle is attributed to the possession of a qualified labour force (0.5% illiteracy).

Present difficulties will be aggravated by Canada's shortage of population, and it will be unable in the short term to renew its labour force without the help of immigration. "So technology, global trade and the growth of the service sector all lead to the conclusion that the demand for basic skills will increase... If Canada is to weather the skills shortages of the late 1990s, upgrading the skills of adult workers must play a major role in our plans."<sup>5</sup>

In a major publication which surveys national literacy policy, training has become an imperative for the whole of society. Here are some extracts from this categorical statement:

Workers everywhere, and at all levels, are having to learn new skills... Canadians who can't read and write, and those whose skills are only basic, need to improve their abilities... It is time for employers to take on the responsibility for training all employees... Companies must start to train, not only buy, skilled labor... Workers too must be willing to make a commitment to life long learning.<sup>6</sup>

The national mission of basic and continuing education presupposes participation (key word: partnership) by large sections of the socio-economic world, among them the trade unions and the literacy community. In order to achieve this, economic statements need to include certain key themes from the field of education: for example, equality of women, native-language speakers, older workers, quality of life, participation, safety at work, and the professionalism of educators, their skill in adapting to modern life, their capacity for cooperation and innovation, etc. Literacy must be a "good deal" for everyone.

The foregoing provides an overview of the literacy debate. What are the main changes which have taken place in statements about literacy? How can we explain the marginal discussion of fifteen years ago which has evidently now become a popular topic of debate visualizing education as the way out of the crisis?

## SHIFTS IN IDEOLOGY

In order to simplify our analysis, comparisons will be made using a binary model (then and now) and a set of indicators which I regard as the most significant.

### Definitions

Traditionally, to be literate meant being able to read, write and do arithmetic. At what level? Somewhere between a minimum level equivalent to fourth grade and a level considered "functional", which was equivalent to ninth grade. Direct reference was made to the school history of individuals in order to quantify their degree of literacy, and to measurements which equated with progression through school in order to compare "functional" skills in everyday adult life.

This approach is already outmoded. In the technical jargon of human resources and labour force planning, the ability to use written language has been replaced by a range of communication skills, themselves seen as part of a vast gamut of cognitive, technological, psychological and interactive skills. Here is a sample of these basic skills to which reference is frequently made in the United States:

...knowing how to learn, reading, writing and arithmetic, listening and oral communication, creative thinking and problem-solving, self-confidence, motivation, setting of objectives and career planning, inter-personal relationships, negotiation, team work, organizational efficiency, leadership.<sup>7</sup>

These are often supplemented by the psychological facilities expected in a world of work where displacement and destabilization have become the norm: mobility and adaptability.

Functional literacy used to be understood as a minimalist practice of deciphering written language in order to survive, to get by. In the post-modern sense, functional literacy means successful adaptation to the culture of new industrial environments, real or virtual: it is a test of employability rather than an occupational experience or attainable skill.

### Connotations

In the world of the imagination, the above change in the meaning of words becomes a transformation from the binary to the "third type", from the mechanical to the cybernetic, from the natural and manual to the artificially intelligent. There used to be firm ground, a solid base, a telluric density, a force of attraction which provided a sense of reality to values, knowledge and identity. One had the illusion of permanence in a linear perception of time. Literacy then consisted of learning to record this history, to confirm these values and to reproduce and pass on one's inherited identity, by way of the church, school and work.



The new basic education is seen as a replacement for work, a promise of identity, even of wealth, and an investment for a different way of working: "work insurance", an entry ticket, a coronation rite. It lacks substance, basis, everything but change, with no more repetitive forms and no writing by hand. We no longer soil our hands with that. It is a preparation for entry into a changing private world, an intelligent-intelligible environment disconnected from any one place. In order to conceive and create high-quality competitive products/services/information, convertible in the South:

"Countries with the best educated and best trained work forces will prosper in a world that is more reliant on brains than muscle... Our highly skilled work force can and must produce more sophisticated products and services than those which will be made in the newly developing countries."<sup>8</sup>

## **The Negative and the Positive**

The literacy debate was sometimes pathetic, alarmist or dramatic. Illiteracy was mentioned with a mixture of shame, pity and disapproval. It attracted curiosity, compassion and the duty to fill the gap. It was always negative and unbearable in the analogies it made with something evil, lacking or pathological, calling for intervention to reverse or cure the malady, often through self-sacrifice. In the world of business, illiteracy was seen to be the cause of heavy losses and accidents, and on a world scale even of the economic crisis in the most highly industrialized countries. It led to rumours of decline. It mobilized great energy in the campaigns to eradicate it, in the waves of school reform in the United States, and in the coalition literacy movement in Canada.

Nowadays, less is heard of it, as if the danger had been averted. There are those who regret this, as life has become less dramatic for them. The New Age background music is a passionless opiate. It seems that the remedy has been found, the transformation planned, the prescription of joining the New World Order of change universally programmed. In English, this remedy is called "upgrading". (In this field, almost everything is translated or adapted into other languages from English.)

It is therefore above all a psychological effect, looking forward, an antidote to the effect of gravity: a leaven. It is no longer true "literacy" in the literal sense; it is rather a passage from one state to another, an adaptation and a promise of a return to participation, an enhancement of availability. Learning, learning to learn, takes account of destiny. The real risk, all the more dangerous as it is irremediably out-of-date, is not to embark and to condemn oneself to growing old in obsolescence, to losing everything. The order of the day has gone out not to speak of illiteracy any more: it is too demeaning, and outdated.<sup>9</sup>

## **Them and Us**

Popular discussion of literacy had been based on the dichotomy between inferior and superior, or poor-unfortunate-handicapped and well-off; pro-

professionals talked of educators as opposed to learners, or of workers and clients; theoretical debate alluded to the observation of a lack which was referred to as a linguistic or cultural deficit and a psychopathological symptom, or as a stigma among interactionists and oppression among liberationists. In popular discussion, difference had centred on ethnocentrism and its dualism of the self and the other, which had been rendered inferior, and this justified intervention to save the other, or rather to marginalize him or her: It was a dramatic example of inclusion and exclusion.

In present-day utterances, the dichotomy has been replaced by the "continuum", ethnocentric division by the perpetual movement of the new pushing out the old. We have moved from the age of the quantitative to that of the transformative, in which knowledge and skills are less acquired than upgraded. Illiteracy is a threat to those who are disqualified by their outdated skills: more of a metaphysical than a social criterion. The face of inequality has changed: the danger is that of growing old.

It is important for Canada to retrain older workers so that we can compete with developing nations. These countries' birth rates and labour force growth rates tend to be much higher than ours... With continuous learning, Canada can have an older work force with young skills.<sup>10</sup>

## Strategies

The aggressive approach to literacy combined to form mass movements called mobilizations, coalitions and campaigns. The war-like vocabulary of literacy movements has frequently been remarked on, and not only in Marxist or liberationist popular literacy. American conservatives and the liberal business class were just as alarmist and activist. Sheryl Gowen notes that there was a shift, in the 1980s, from the Cold War to the war on illiteracy, the danger no longer being seen as military but economic. "The other is no longer the communist world but the undereducated labor force and the schools which are responsible. From the apocalyptic visions there still emerge unacceptable levels of illiteracy and the war-like metaphors still serve to describe the problem and to prescribe the solutions."<sup>11</sup>

In the 1990s, in both the United States and Canada, the entire literacy movement has been plotting and forming alliances. The aim is no longer to combat illiteracy but to improve skill levels, productivity and the quality of relationships. The brochure describing the activities of the National Literacy Secretariat is entitled "Reading the Future — NLS Partnerships help Canadians meet Challenges of a Changing World" (1993). In the United States, the national programme to subsidize literacy in the workplace obliges applicants to present themselves in partnerships involving at least the business world, the trade unions and public sector education.<sup>12</sup>

The community ideal, which could once be alternative and protesting, is not integrated into the mainstream debate. Literacy and basic education are founded on good community relations and help to improve these in businesses as well as in cities and throughout the country.

## Statistics

Statistics have the power to provide proof, especially if they come from a national statistical agency. One might expect that illiteracy rates in Canada would have fallen in the last twenty years, as was observed between 1961 and 1976.

In 1961, 9% of adults aged 15 years and over (no longer in full-time education) were illiterate (those stating that they had less than five years of school education); in 1971, 7%; and in 1976, 5.5%.<sup>13</sup>

In 1984, the Quebec Ministry of Education, as a result of a public opinion poll, confirmed the fall seen in 1976: 1.8% of the population were reckoned to be totally illiterate, and 4.4% functionally illiterate (admitting having difficulty in reading and writing). The authors of the publications concluded that: "The rate which was wrongly attributed to us [6.7%] is only plausible in countries where the level of development is lower... While it is difficult to expect illiteracy to vanish completely, we can at least hope that the efforts of Quebec will enable her to reach the levels found in the most advanced countries, such as Japan, with 0.8%."<sup>14</sup>

In 1987, the Southam News media group published the results of a Canadian survey, according to which 8% of adults were "basic illiterates" and 16% "functional illiterates". If the indicator of difficulty in reading and writing as tested is accepted globally, the result is 24% (28% in Quebec).<sup>15</sup>

The trend was dramatically reversed. We were not far from reaching Japanese levels of excellence, and suddenly we fell back to the level of the least industrialized countries. A comparable American survey (National Assessment for Educational Progress) had caused national indignation. Shortly afterwards, Statistics Canada launched a similar enquiry, with the distinction that the word illiteracy was not used. Henceforth reference was made to a "continuum of reading, writing and calculation skills" and to literacy as an aptitude for handling information in everyday life.

In 1990, 62% of adults had abilities judged adequate; 22% could read simple texts but had difficulty in reading texts of current complexity; and 16% had difficulty in reading simple texts.<sup>16</sup>

The National Literacy Secretariat recorded that 38% of adult Canadians "had some difficulty with basic reading material... Even more of the 62% of people whom Statistics Canada found were able to handle most everyday reading tasks might not be able to understand training manuals."<sup>17</sup>

As a result, almost one Canadian in two "does not possess the skills which will be needed on the labor market in the '90s". It is the same in the United States: "almost half the adult population cannot manage to read a simple newspaper or to write a short letter."<sup>18</sup>

We have thus progressed from a strange rumour to a fact affecting a small minority, and then to the evidence of a mass phenomenon which affects the majority.<sup>19</sup> Although we can only strictly speak of illiteracy with respect to

some 7% of Canadians (reading level 1, the same figure as 20 years ago), this fact hardly merits attention. The minimalist figure is not quoted in the commentary on the survey.

## THE FUNCTIONS OF THE LITERACY DEBATE

What are the most salient findings if the dominant approach to literacy is set in the total context of Canadian society?

### Interpretation

- The optimistic view of the present and the future is singularly *partial*. It overlooks the major crisis in labour and employment, the growth in poverty, the radicalization of exclusion, the erosion of social security benefits and the disengagement by the state, in short, the darker side of world capitalism which eliminates more than it creates. It is silent in the face of the irreparable losses of human and natural resources. It glosses over the threatened destruction of cultures and population movements. This complacent view of the world would lead to social "apartheid": on the one hand, the spotlight on free trade, skilled activity and competition; on the other, unspoken and unseen, the rubbish heap for the lost and the outdated.
- The topic of literacy has also been singularly *pushed to the top* of the social agenda and diverted towards economic objectives in particular. It has been moved from the non-productive socio-cultural field to become part of the machinery of training in post-industrial skills. In economic terms, the aim is to make it into a profitable investment, a "good deal", rather than a form of social support for the disadvantaged or of social unemployment management. The anticipated consequence was evidently that investment would be attracted to the top of the agenda and diverted from intervention with a social and cultural objective towards the economic sector.
- The salutary argument that training is "employment insurance", a means of social and vocational advancement and of indispensable adaptation to changes in the world of work, is *as reductionist as it is deceptive*. Yes, it should mean that training will be as successful for the individual who pursues it as it will be for larger units. However, training professionals provide evidence for the fact that this is far from the case, especially if the excluded and "at risk" strata are taken into account, or if training is obligatory rather than voluntary, etc.

The part played by skilled human resources in economic success is highly relative. It can be of minor importance, or even unconnected. Or success may be in inverse proportion to the completion of recognized training (in the service sector, for example catering, deliveries or entertainment, which recruits from among the visible minorities).

Moreover, the training provisions in place and the outside programming of the skills required, tend to formalize the acquisition of knowledge often acquired "on the job", through implicit procedures and by reference to "texts" about which training professionals know nothing. Training is rather the formalization of, say, selection procedures or other arrangements, and this is a quite different function.<sup>19</sup>

- Because illiteracy has become a mass phenomenon and turned into continuing training for all, it is now *banal and normal*, whereas not long ago it worried everyone. As a result, emergency measures can no longer be justified, even though there may be a serious effect on equity and social support policies, principally in the linking of all forms of aid to the active population closely with participation in training, and also in the replacement of "passive" social programmes by "active" training programmes.

The leading role in social policy is tending to pass to the economic sector, and responsibility to move from the public sector to the private, with all the possible variants in between called partnership. The consequence is obviously the reinforcement of selection at entry to training and employment, the systemic segregation of the labour force (also known as "feminization") and the exclusion of growing numbers of people.<sup>21</sup>

In the final analysis, by "normalizing" illiteracy and making training universal, the anomie will have been exacerbated. And it will be necessary to return to the social policies of rehabilitation, entry into employment and literacy which are now termed "adaptation" and "prevention". This is what we are now witnessing: a renewal of literacy in the private sphere (families, libraries, etc.), the promotion of reading in school and before school, etc.

- The optimistic approach of the business world speaks from the perspective of *power and authority* which is positive and one-dimensional. It is also linked to the political class and to a visible and influential part of the "literacy community". It has appropriated certain major arguments from parallel, even dissident approaches: links with partners in employment, trade unions and education professionals are significant among these.

It speaks in the name of the whole of society, prescribing a global solution for the entire active population. Its analysis of the future has squashed all debate.

This way of talking, which is now widespread, remains within the orthodoxy of worldwide neo-liberalism but does not reveal its sources of the theoretical and political controversies to which it gives rise<sup>22</sup>. It seeks universal acceptance as something self-evident, with the formal or tacit support of the literacy community, which acknowledges its success in raising their mission to the level of a national priority and in granting them the boon of a huge professional market, that of workplace training.

A recent study on the literacy movement in Canada<sup>23</sup> concludes on the need for that community to develop its own way of talking about the issues of social equity, everyday life and the requirements of particular social groups, in order to encourage a wider and more complex debate. The author observes that authority in the literacy debate has passed to the leaders of trade unions and business, and that the literacy community has been dragged towards economic goals that contradict its original philosophy ("the wisdom of literacy work").

## VISIBLE AND HIDDEN FUNCTIONS

From the above, what can be seen as the main functions of the ongoing debate?

- Obviously, there is an *ideological function* of persuasion, in order to claim that the argument is self-evident and to convince the largest possible number. The approach of the class in power, that of the leaders of the economy, seeks substance in order to gain popular acceptance. By way of various rhetorical tactics and socio-political alliances, the approach of the economic theorists and the labour force planners has been transformed into salvation in the face of what is seen as a crisis in world society.

It may appear surprising that the magic potion should be contained in the very symbol of literacy. Therein lies its whole *force of consensus* and its illusory power: it enables an aggressive, triumphalist approach to be transmogrified into a humanist, even progressive approach. It gives the "literacy community" a more worldwide mission, which is presented as a new universal social project. Above all, it provides politicians and ordinary citizens with a solution to the objective/subjective crisis of our time

which is both moral and technical: learning as the only means of adapting to change and sharing in its benefits, and of escaping from the anguish of exclusion. It is a new version of the "liberationist literacy" from the beginnings of popular education: "read words to read the world" — Paulo Freire's dictum has been well assimilated.<sup>24</sup>

- Though less obvious, an important function of this approach is to *rationalize, disguise and make acceptable controversial practices in the organization of work*. Examples include: exercising greater selectivity in choosing workers according to skills criteria which hide criteria of age, sex and ethnic origin; pursuing policies of human capital substitution and shifting employment to less industrialized countries; replacing permanent jobs by short-term contracts, and moving from the open labour market to the deregulated market of unregistered labour; making change, innovation and mobility routine, causing the loss of local works cultures and trade union cultures in favour of identification with work, collective contracts, and promotion as an aim; deskilling numerous jobs in order to accommodate those who fail or are excluded from training, under conditions of work that have been compared to a return to slavery; etc.

Paradoxically, therefore, the argument in favour of training for all, under cover of equity and progress, is helping to rationalize greater social selection and to make systemic exclusion acceptable: temporary exclusion for the young, inescapable for the old, by way of reabsorption for women, and a long trial period for those with different languages or cultures.

- One general political function of the priority accorded to training is to *justify the replacement of employment policies* by employability measures. This solution appears to suit our partners in the world of business. It enables the search for other solutions to the structural crisis of work to be postponed, and the discussion of citizenship and global ecology, which do not fit with the narrow approach of economic neo-liberalism, to be brushed aside. It is remarkable that in Canada, public utterances on the division of work, on support for alternatives to the social economy and the market economy, and on the new responsibilities of public authorities and civil society in the face of worldwide capitalism, remain subdued.<sup>25</sup> Acknowledgement is given to continuing training for its function of adaptation to the dominant economy, while its dissident critical functions are thrust aside.
- Finally, we have to acknowledge that this vigorous approach to literacy has supported *economic growth in the training services sector* and production of teaching materials, and has *given new value to education*, which is threatened by drop-out among pupils and teachers, by restrictions on funding and staff, etc. In pragmatic terms, workplace training has opened up an expandable market and a bridge to the private sector for adult education professionals and voluntary organizations.

## FROM THE AUTHORITARIAN APPROACH TO ANONYMOUS OPINION

We may wonder to what degree the ideological function of the dominant approach to literacy is actually effective. Has it become incorporated into public opinion, and above all, does it act in accordance with its intended aims, namely to convince those it targets of their insufficient skills and of the usefulness of improving them?

There is a serious ambiguity in the new literacy debate, a key argument which goes against common sense: that half of the adult population is affected, while illiteracy is still thought to be a relatively small, localized phenomenon among certain sections of the population said to be "at risk". This

is what the earlier surveys led people to believe. The essential rhetorical tactics of the new approach consist in taking the symbolic potential of earlier statements and removing its high drama, making it appear banal, turning it from negative to positive, from others to ourselves, and from ourselves in general to each individual. By moving into the economic and employment arena, we also move from the world of those receiving social security assistance to that of honest, competent, respectable workers. There is a risk that the whole argument will be rejected.

Jennifer Horsman noted that "literacy has a stronger moral imperative than most other problems."<sup>26</sup> When it concerns others, there is a consensus; when it concerns oneself and the collective self, it is an insult. We attribute the cause of unemployment, which is today a threat to most workers, to something outside. If it is somebody's "fault", we do not blame ourselves. It lies somewhere else, somewhere difficult to define. Wage-earners who are suffering the "crisis" in their thousands see themselves as victims. The arguments about lack of skills, inadaptability and a fortiori of illiteracy among workers that are invoked to rationalize the crisis and to explain individual sanctions therefore might well be forcefully rejected as inconceivable, immoral, even Machiavellian.

Let us see what public opinion polls say about the dominant approach in the literacy debate.

### **Public Opinion Polls**

According to ABC Canada, in 1990 85% of adults thought it very important to be able to read and write in working life and life in general; a similar number thought literacy an important or very important problem in Canada. However, less than two thirds of the people asked had heard it talked about (62%); a tiny minority admitted that it was the question that most concerned them or that affected them directly or personally.<sup>27</sup>

Three items of information: the first is insignificant and confirms that literacy is an important issue (in the same way as the quality of the environment and health) and is of concern to people. The second measures the extent of public awareness about the subject, which has been popularized by the media: over a third of the public have still not heard about it. The third item of information is important: the problem is somewhere else, not in oneself. As for the consequences of the problem, hardly one person in five realizes that it affects the economy.

These last two items contradict the dominant tone of the debate.

### **Three Hypotheses**

1. People are dishonest or do not recognize a humiliating characteristic in themselves.
2. People are poorly informed and rather ignorant; their replies reflect their functional illiteracy.

3. People are informed and their replies are honest; they do not have a communication problem.

The first hypothesis is often defended by the literacy community. The problem certainly exists, quite widely in fact, but it is sensitive and cannot be addressed openly.<sup>28</sup> The second is typical of the ethnocentric authoritarian approach. A survey by the Conference Board of Canada (1992) conducted among business managers provides confirmation: 70% stated that they had problems with functional literacy, which was responsible for staff turnover, absenteeism, accidents and losses in productivity.<sup>29</sup> The third hypothesis is, in the author's view, the most plausible and the most reasonable. It needs further investigation.

The Quebec poll of 1984 estimated the proportion of the adult population with reading and writing difficulties to be 5%. The 1990 survey by Statistics Canada put at 6% the number of adults who judged their reading ability inadequate. In relation to employment, 8% of adults believed that inadequate reading ability limited employment opportunities; among those in employment, 2% thought their reading ability inadequate for the purposes of their occupation. In the Southam News survey of 1987, only one person in five among those identified as "functional illiterates" thought their reading ability inadequate for the purposes of their employment, some 5% of the total adult population.

All these figures combine in throwing doubt on the rising results of the surveys in which estimates of the skills of those surveyed are made from the outside by experts, and in undoing the correlation posited by economic commentators between supposed underqualification in communication skills at work and training needs.

Or it may be that working environments have not changed as radically as is claimed, and that the skills acquired are not outdated. Or that changes in methods and means of communication have indeed come about, but that employees have adapted and that they have been able to update their literacy skills in a pragmatic way.

In the mass surveys, people are isolated — as in school tests and examinations — from the real ways in which they communicate, cooperate and divide their work. Surveys create a peculiar communication situation, programmed (by others) to be one-way and invalidating any generalization of the results to a whole population or, particularly, to other situations, the work context, for example. Real ways of communicating at work and of solving problems have been documented through ethnographic and participatory observations, and commented on and interpreted by the protagonists. These monographs describe practices that are far more complex than the standardized tests and conventional judgments with academic references would lead us to believe.



## PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION

Sheryl Gowen has been able to show that in the hospital in the southern United States where she carried out her investigation, the literacy programme set up by the management reproduced the power structure of the business, through separation, hierarchy and control, instead of improving communication skills and facilitating vertical exchange. Contrary to the perceptions of their superiors, maintenance staff did carry out their tasks, did communicate and learn effectively, but not in the order laid down in bureaucratic commands, and they resisted the culture that they believed the teachers were handing down. "In this program, there were many employees who resisted a learning style based exclusively on the decontextualization of work ... Their resistance was not only a political act, but also an individual effort to keep control of their own authentic and efficient ways of constructing knowledge and using language."<sup>30</sup>

The assumption of inadequate skills is contradicted, and the burden of a single continuum imposed by the authoritarian approach is undermined, revealing the discontinuity of language, usages and values, which Gowen calls the other "literacies". These other "literacies", black and at the bottom of the social scale, remain hidden also because they are illegitimate, but they oppose the order to white them out by the strength of their identity, their solidarity and resistance.

After assiduously following a group of women enrolled in literacy, Jennifer Horsman confirms that "many women thought their skills adequate while other people thought they had a literacy problem. The other people's description had nothing to do with their own perceptions of what they could and could not do.... In the final analysis, we have to trust to individuals' own judgment of their true performance." Why, then, were these women attending a literacy group? Because "they wanted something from life that was different from what they knew". They gave literacy the power of a lottery ticket, and they remained for as long as the dream was upheld. But they "got out" if they felt demeaned by being thought incompetent by some authority that attributed to them a need they did not have. Drop-out must be seen as an intentional act of resistance, and not as a "want of motivation", as educators frequently interpret it.<sup>31</sup>

Another Canadian study sets out to report on the phenomena of difficult recruitment and easy drop-out that are universally lamented in the literacy community. This is despite the fact that as much energy is invested in awareness and other work (sometimes called pre-literacy) as in educating and retaining "learners". This fact is also alluded to in an OECD study:

The two most serious problems of present-day basic education programmes: the recruitment of learners...and the retention of students...<sup>32</sup>

Audrey Thomas identifies the following causes as being responsible for the non-participation of adults in programmes aimed at them:

- a frequently chaotic life history which hampers any educational project;
- lack of self-confidence: illiteracy remains a secret, an object of shame;
- poorly perceived needs and traumatizing previous experience of schooling;
- loss of heart at the long road to completing secondary education or to finding a job;
- absence of provision, in the countryside for example;
- unsuitability of some programmes in the face of a demand for discreet help in private;
- learning difficulties and various handicaps;
- the priority of vocational training;
- bureaucratic recruitment and frequent changes in policy;
- lack of support services, such as crèches; and
- programmes that are too academic.<sup>33</sup>

There is also the deficit theory which confirms the poor perception of needs and argues for an improvement in provision. While the quality of provision may be called into question, the words of the speakers who have agreed to be interviewed are reinterpreted according to a clinical tradition or a professional register, but are not accepted at face value, despite their weight of experience and the knowledge of the speakers. As Glynda Hull expresses it, "too much confidence placed in the power of literacy and too little credit given to people's skills".<sup>34</sup>

However, the title of the study by Audrey Thomas — *The Reluctant Learner* — might lead us to expect a dialogue between equals with a public which is generally treated as a client or a patient (once captured!). Such a dialogue would have been possible if the author had opted less for reinforcement of the other as a "learner" and more for help and solidarity in resistance: for direct expression, strengthened by the learner's own words. But the barrier remains between the two sides, and the study, which sets out to find ways of overturning it, only succeeds in confirming its existence. It is research at a distance, claimed as objective, in which the expert's words do not encounter the subjects of the expertise, but individualizes them and isolates them in order better to treat them.

So, the surveys agree with the authoritarian approach when they discuss the problem of literacy only in terms of a universal abstraction or, more simply, when they merely confirm the saying that "it is better to be educated, rich and healthy than stupid, poor and sick." But they contradict the dominant approach to the literacy debate when the "problem" is put in context and is contrasted with personal experience and people's familiar world. Not only do people not speak in the prescribed manner (between nought and one person out of ten), but this is also seen as threatening. People then seek to protect themselves from it and to resist the prescription of training as an imposed fate. People's desires, requirements and demands are quite different. That is doubtless the main reason why people participate so little in training programmes and remain for such a short time.

The Southam News survey had shown that only 3% of the people identified as "functional illiterates" were taking part in remedial courses; and that 10% of the same population might enrol in such courses at some time (15% among young adults). A Quebec study on drop-out from the literacy

programme estimated the figure for this to be about 40%.<sup>35</sup> This fact has to be recognized as the opposite pole to the aim of "creating a learning culture", particularly where it should *a priori* be indispensable. Here is Horsman's version from the opposite pole:

The women hope that enrolling in these programmes will help them to escape from the minimum wage and to find a "career" — an adequate wage. They hope to realize the promise of literacy, but at the same time, they doubt whether this promise is real.

[These women] were looking for a way out of dependence and wanted to change their lives. They discovered, on the contrary, that these programmes tied them more firmly into the network of social services and everyday life from which they wanted to escape.<sup>36</sup>

## NEXT STEPS

A critical study of the economic approach which dominates the literacy debate deserves to be completed by investigating at least two other registers: the discussion of self-evaluation among training professionals, and what the "participants" say themselves. What the professionals have to say, sometimes in dialogue with the authoritarian approach (which also determines funding priorities), should be considered in order better to test the reception or ideological impact of the neo-liberal economic approach on training, and hence to place our criticism in context. But it will also enable us to explore the little known experimental workshops, especially in the economic field, which have broken away from productionism and educational activism.

For example, the following extract from a psychiatric evaluation classifies the public as being in an "extreme state" and seeks to find a meeting point, far removed from institutionalized education:

How often have I not felt like them! Are they so different from us? If we content ourselves with regarding these trainees as people who find it difficult to adapt to school or society, we shall not really obtain tangible results, and all the educational theories now and to come will not make much difference .... Knowledge is what is built on an existing gap. We have to give the trainee time to get to know the other, to want the other, time to see the gap. But schools always want to bridge the gap, and that makes any meeting with the other impossible .... We really must create a place which does not have to produce results ....<sup>37</sup>

We may not overlook what participants have to say both explicitly and tacitly (this is usually termed in French their "*témoignage*" rather than discours, which latter supposes a structure, coherence and legitimacy that are not generally seen in a "*témoignage*" of a so-called illiterate person). For research purposes this has to be investigated as an expression of knowledge, experience and plans. It is up to the subjects to define in what they are "participating", and why, or why they are not participating or have ceased to do so in the face of the prescription of literacy, and what are their urgent and absolute needs and wants.

For the purposes of action, it is imperative to talk to those principally involved in training and education, in order jointly to plan the project, to reconcile provision with what is demanded, to decide on a collaborative contract, or to refuse it.

The following, for example, is an extract from an experience of working after a training course which should be quoted in any official pronouncement on the virtues of literacy as a solution to marginalization and poverty:

"After the course at the centre the difficulties began. With that sort of training, it is hard to find a job and, if you find one, the pay is low. In my present job ... our bosses think we're inferior and seem to want to punish us because of our social situation. In future, I'll never again say where I come from, and I hope that'll be better ...."<sup>38</sup>

The question asked was: "What are the lessons to be learned from this new ideological offensive, and what paths can be found around the borders of the new world economic order?" A pragmatic way of answering is to examine other ways of talking about literacy and other types of social action which set out to solve, not the mass problem of basic education (which is only a problem for businesses and business educators), but the radical problems of exclusion which affect all social relationships and a dangerously growing number of individuals. We therefore have to look at specific literacy practices in order to see overall what is being done to improve and transform transactions that cross cultural, economic, social and ecological boundaries.

The references in this text to dissident literacy practices have already hinted at other forms of transaction and education marked by solidarity. Besides the dominant economic model, there are in fact basic education programmes in most Canadian provinces, and programmes for young people adapted for community development and the promotion of citizenship rights.<sup>39</sup> These last objectives are sometimes integrated into trade union demands, which introduce them into places of work.

However, some fields of action are also developing which lead into other social practices. This is a movement opposed to the professionalization and sectoralization of literacy and hence — which is very important — opposed to the enclosing of target populations in "chaotic career paths" and "dead ends".<sup>40</sup> These experiments can be grouped into three or four categories with different orientations:

- That with the most official backing is the "plain language" movement, which brings measures to improve communication within reach of ordinary citizens, in both public services and commercial and community communications.<sup>41</sup>
- The second is part of a tradition of popular education, adapting its ways of working to the main aspects of segregation, especially in urban environments: systemic racism/ageism/sexism. The barriers to communication and exchange between equals (among them illiteracy in the sense of a systemic process of disqualification and sociolinguistic relegation) call for intercultural (antiracist and antisexist) intervention aiming at "bringing down the barriers" and at building bridges between the exclusion zones.<sup>42</sup>
- The third movement brings together a large number of organizations whose aims are the development of the community economy and integrated local development. Social, cultural and educational activities are an integral part of these economic initiatives for the whole community, which are more or less independent of the state and the dominant labour market, and of their goods and services. Literacy can be incorporated as a complementary activity or can be transformed into practical communication.<sup>43</sup>

- There are also traces in Canada of a movement which is more developed in Europe and Latin America: cultural action in certain environments whose structure has been destroyed or which are in search of identity. It takes many forms: theatre, writing, radio, puppets, music, photography, multimedia performance, historical research, oral literature, etc. These traces of reconstruction of cultural identity, which may or may not coincide with traditional literacy practices, are particularly visible among the autochthonous nations of Canada.<sup>44</sup>

The research undertaken in the ALPHA 96 project essentially concerns the second and third categories, in North America and Europe. Cultural experiments should be the subject of a future ALPHA project. As for the first theme, known in North America as “plain language”, this would also merit particular critical attention in the field of literacy proper, in association with the theoretical and sociolinguistic questions of voluntary change in language, and with the linguistic mutations brought about by the new communications technologies and the information market.

While the obsession with literacy urgently needs to move from the “single idea” — which Ignacio Ramonet defines as “the translation into ideological terms with a claim to universality of the interests of a set of economic forces, in particular those of international capitalism”<sup>45</sup> — to a wide range of slogans and deprecated skills, it seems that we are a long way from freeing ourselves from the burden of its consequences. As regards “plain language” in particular, it might well be the utopia which keeps alive the machinery of productionism, the right-thinking members of the communicative citizenry and the humanist educators. Literacy for all in plain language seems to be a new obscurantism which calls forth our ineluctable “obsession” with criticizing it.

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## **SECTION TWO**

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### **Transition from Traditional Literacy & Basic Education Practices to Learner-Workers' Workshops**



# Chapter Four

## ALSO WORKS — EARNING AND LEARNING

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### ALSO WORKS, BASIC EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

ALSO WORKS is an industrial cleaning company that was set up within an Ottawa literacy program, ALSO (Alternative Learning Styles and Outlooks), to give students a chance to “earn while they learn”. In the excitement of the first year, 1986, the group worked together to write this article for a literacy newsletter.

All of us came to ALSO to learn to read and write better, hoping that this would help us get jobs in the future. We were all getting by on welfare, and it’s hard to learn when you are always worrying about not having enough money or enough food, or a place to live. We began to realize that just learning to read and write might not be enough to get jobs, when there aren’t enough jobs to go around. We wanted a better chance in life, and we decided to try to make our own jobs.

We had some meetings to talk about what kinds of work we might do. We looked at the experiences we had among us, and we decided to try cleaning, landscaping, painting, and odd jobs. We wanted to pay ourselves a decent wage, and to work part-time and still go to school.

We needed some money to get started, for advertising and for some of the tools to do our work. We sent out an ALSO newsletter to tell people about us and to ask for donations. We had a carwash and a booksale, and took part in a walkathon. We sent out 300 flyers and only got two telephone calls. Our first job didn’t work out so well. It was a

painting job. One guy was up a 40-foot ladder and another guy was holding the ladder. A neighbor called the man we were working for and said, 'I hope you're not paying those guys by the hour!' We almost gave up.

We decided to do cleaning only. A community group called Housing Help gave us our first cleaning contract. Then the other tenants in our building found out what we were trying to do and gave us a chance cleaning their offices. We were on trial for two months and then we got a contract for the next year. At first we had to borrow the equipment we needed to do the work. It was a great day when we saved up enough money to buy our own buffer.

There were things we had to learn the hard way. ALSO WORKS has no boss. We work out problems and make decisions by talking it over at meetings. Sometimes we didn't know how to tell each other when we were upset about something. A couple of times we worked from 8 in the morning until 12 at night and felt like quitting. The paperwork is hard for most of us. One worker got so frustrated trying to keep his records straight that he wanted to hire another worker to do it for him.

Now we have 8 cleaning contracts and are bringing in \$40,000.00 a year. Our customers seem very happy with our work. People are excited when we tell them about ALSO WORKS, so we think we will be able to get more contracts.

Three of us have gone off welfare. We each work about 25 hours a week, mostly in the evenings. We still go to school during the day. We are learning to talk to customers, order supplies, make work schedules, keep records, make invoices and read instructions on the cleaning products.

We have learned a lot from this experience. We have more money and more confidence in ourselves than we had before. People tell us we should be proud, and we are.

ALSO WORKS was a natural outgrowth of ALSO's philosophy and approach to adult education. ALSO itself was created in 1979 by a group of educators who felt that the structure of the educational institution they worked in oppressed both themselves and their adult basic education students. They envisioned ALSO as a progressive place both to work and learn. They wanted to create an alternative without the drawbacks of the institutions, and to offer a service which they found was missing in the basic education field.

The collective that created ALSO saw a need, marketed their service, and took charge of the conditions of their own work. The ALSO WORKS project was another attempt to create jobs, and to organize a workplace where students could have control, income, dignity, and the chance to continue learning. The outcomes have not been revolutionary, but the issues raised may help shed light on how educators might support the efforts of disadvantaged people and groups to survive in a climate where the odds are against them.

ALSO as an organization was based on an alternative view of the literacy issue: as structural, not personal. The group was anti-hierarchical and critical of social and institutional policies, and wanted to give students control over what and how they learned. It tried to focus on people's strengths, not their weaknesses; considered advocacy to address structural barriers an integral part of its work. It maintained links with other social-change-ori-

ented organizations and worked with them around common social aims, valuing the learning of self-respect, assertiveness, and knowledge about rights above simple literacy skills acquisition. It addressed literacy by addressing students' most pressing life concerns. And it continued to struggle with the challenges of co-operative, non-hierarchical work and learning.

In the seven years before ALSO WORKS was created, most of the hundreds of students who came to ALSO were in two categories with regard to employment. Either they had been labelled as unemployable because of some disability, and had internalized that label; or they came with unrealistic hopes that literacy would lead to a good job and lift them out of poverty.

We started ALSO WORKS because we saw that upgrading their literacy skills was not improving our students' prospects in a tightening labour market. Our students were not even able to access training for the most unskilled jobs. One of our students was interested in a course for health care aides offered by a local industrial training body. We were assured that although the entry requirement was grade 10, the admission test was at about a grade 7 or 8 level. She did not pass the test, which was full of old-fashioned grammar and multiple choice vocabulary questions that confused her and had nothing to do with the course content. This student's literacy skills are more than adequate for the kind of job this course might have led to, and she has other rare skills and qualities for the field. While there are a few job training programs that include literacy and numeracy content, these are for very unskilled occupations, and are usually far too short-term to improve anyone's literacy skills very much.

Many of these men and women had worked all their lives, and in better times they had experienced themselves as full citizens. They came to the literacy program with the hope that it could reopen the door to adult status and pride. Their discovery that it can take a long time just to learn basic reading and writing, along with constant reminders about high unemployment even among well-educated people, was most discouraging. Especially for the men, losing their identity as workers had eroded their confidence and affected their self-esteem. Unemployment is hard on anyone's self esteem, but when it was combined with exposure to increasing publicity blaming illiteracy for all kind of personal and social ills, these people came to accept the blame. Their studies often didn't go well because of their lost self-confidence and the everyday stress and practical struggles of poverty. Turnover in the program was high as these pressures led people to leave school for short-term jobs, become unemployed again, and maybe return to the program to try again. For ourselves and for them we had to find more hope and more movement.

## GETTING STARTED

### Participants

The group that started ALSO WORKS included three ALSO educators, half a dozen students, and several community members interested in coop-

erative work and community development. Since then several other educators and a number of other students have participated to varying degrees. At present the group consists of six workers, three of whom have been there since the beginning. ALSO educators still provide support.

All of the student participants were on social assistance and had limited literacy (ranging from not able to read and write at all to elementary-level skills). The group has included sole support mothers, people who have been in conflict with the law, Native Canadians, new Canadians, and people classified as disabled. They had considerable work experience and skills, but also employment barriers - such as non-standard English, missing front teeth, tattoos, and most of all, lack of educational credentials. But by far the greatest barrier they faced was the increasing competition for fewer and fewer jobs.

## Process

The first months of ALSO WORKS were an exciting time. Everyone was hopeful and energised by the new direction and the practical focus. The learning/work we did together included identifying the group's collective work skills and experience, researching the market for these skills, finding out how social assistance income would be affected, deciding how to advertise, preparing estimates, organizing the actual work, finding out what government "red tape" would be involved. We made use of our connections with other progressive groups in the community to find a market for the services of the company.

We were not experts either in cleaning or in business, but even if we had been, we would not have wanted to set up a linear program. We worked closely with the worker/ learners to identify and find the knowledge and resources we needed as we went along. The skills of participating in meetings, arriving at decisions, resolving conflict, taking responsibility and "ownership" also needed attention. The paperwork involved in choosing and ordering supplies, figuring out payroll deductions, writing cheques and banking, billing customers, and reading notes from customers became a regular part of the week's work.

This is how the educator who co-ordinated the project remembers those times.

Some of the most exciting things about starting ALSO WORKS were the opportunities it opened up and the energy it released for doing literacy and numeracy work. People had gotten disillusioned about literacy work ever leading to a job, but they regained their enthusiasm for learning in the context of running their company.

Most of the participants had never had a bank account. Now they learned to calculate their hours and the government deductions, to write their own paycheques, and to use the bank. People learned how to use the computer to make invoices for the customers. They learned to fill out deposit slips and put the money in the bank. Everyone played a part in keeping the financial records. Comparing prices took on extra significance when we were shopping for expensive cleaning materials in large quantity.

We studied the metric system (most adult Canadians grew up learning the imperial system of measurement) by learning how to properly dilute cleaning products. It was

much more interesting learning about percentage when figuring out how much vacation pay you were going to get. It was less arduous to work on an adding machine when we were finding out how much money the company had in the bank.

As educators, we developed reading materials as needs revealed themselves. When we saw students struggling with a task, we would find or create clearly written instructions or tools to help them do it. For example, one man could not spell out numbers in words, but managed to write his own cheques after we put a chart with the numbers spelled out in the front of the chequebook. We rewrote the government pamphlet 'Your rights as a Worker in Ontario'. We printed clear directions on 'How to figure out your pay'. We used colour-coded files. We kept minutes of our meetings and started the next meeting by reading them together. We looked for ways to make everything as 'shareable' as possible.

Although learning the metric system, interpreting a manual for equipment use, etc. may be hard for people struggling with basic literacy, it is even harder to learn the interpersonal communication and problem solving needed for cooperative work. For adults who have been on the sidelines of their society, learning how to balance your own needs with the group's needs is a slow and often difficult process: learning how to listen, how to stay on topic, how to express yourself clearly, how to resolve conflict when it arises, how to arrive at decisions.

The content of our meetings ranged from "housekeeping" to discussing policy questions: Do new workers get less money? Do they get stuck with the least desirable jobs? Do women get the menial tasks? What kind of seniority policy do we want? What about a travel allowance for people working in more than one location per day? How are we going to train new workers? What about quality control and supervision?

Like many literacy educators, we have long been advocates of plain language. It has been harder for us to live up to those beliefs. Those who use language best (or most easily) often have more influence whether they want it or not. As workers became more confident, they would attend meetings with our customers. Yet they often came away not understanding what had been said. We could "debrief" when we got back from meetings, but we could neither transform the mainstream way of doing business nor successfully teach the learners how to fit in.

One of the ongoing tensions was around the balance of literacy work and cleaning work. A first people agreed to work no more than 20 hours a week so that they would have time for the literacy component of the program but inevitably they found that at only twenty hours a week they were not much further ahead financially that they were when they were on social assistance. So some people began working longer hours but the result was that they had less time for literacy work.

ALSO WORKS had the full time attention of one educator for at least two years. It still requires considerable administrative support. The business could not have survived without staff support and intervention in problem-solving, marketing, and internal and external negotiations. This is long-term work.

## CHALLENGES

### Funding

Although our application to the federal government for full-time training allowances for the participants was turned down, perhaps this was a good thing at the time. The worker/learners could take full credit as their earnings brought in the only revenues, and it might have been discouraging to get used to living on training allowances and then not be able to earn enough to

replace them. About a year after ALSO WORKS began, provincial support became available for literacy program operation and special projects. This funding helped pay for staff time spent building and supporting ALSO WORKS for the first two years.

### **Competitive Market**

On one hand, we faced a competitive market where large cleaning companies keep prices low by exploiting workers who have few options. On the other hand, we had several very supportive customers who approved of what we were doing and wanted to help. One contract was in fact only available to community groups.

There was an understanding that our workers were making an effort to learn, and needed a break. Some of the groups felt like partners in what we were doing. Without this understanding and solidarity we might have lost our contracts. The competition in the mainstream workplace is a very real barrier to groups like ALSO WORKS. Fortunately there is an "alternative" market.

### **Social Class/Culture Barriers**

Although at the beginning staff and students were equally hopeful and enthusiastic, as a group we probably did not have a commonly-understood vision. Even when we began the project, the staff hoped ALSO WORKS would become a workers' co-op, while the students probably just wanted jobs. Of course we talked about it a lot, but maybe "workers' co-op" meant something different from different points of view. This became clear when there was talk of expansion and the participants wanted to become foremen and hire new people to do the cleaning. ALSO staff could not agree to a vision of the enterprise as a typical hierarchical business. This dampened participants' motivation for expanding the company as they did not see any benefit to themselves. The educators would have liked to bring in more students but were not comfortable expanding the company without the full consent and co-operation of the whole group. This kind of impasse recurred at different times with resulting feelings of frustration for all.

I believe that there is a serious social class gap between helping professionals and those who come, willingly or coerced, for their help. I see this as a crucial challenge in helping people get power in their lives. This culture/language gap makes it hard to discuss what we really want, what we believe, how we see things. People who are not middle-class often become unconfident or disinterested if the conversation gets too abstract. If we want to work with people across social class and cultural lines to transform reality, the first step is to develop a common language. It is not easy to truly share knowledge, skills and power.

## Hierarchy, Co-operation, Solidarity

The nature of industrial cleaning is that people work alone, at night. For various reasons — poor health, transportation problems, lack of standards, addictions, etc. our cleaners did not always do good work, or in fact even show up. All our customers at times overlooked substandard work, workers not showing up, workers lacking social skills in dealing with their clientele, even a worker eating all the food from their staff fridge. Sometimes they complained. Whose job was it to monitor the quality of the work? The group did not have the skills for peer supervision. How do you criticise someone's work if you are not their boss? This has been a recurring problem throughout the group's history, and they are still struggling to establish standards, clearer guidelines for each contract, and other methods of quality control.

My observation is that most people have an ambivalent response to the issue of hierarchy, at the same time resenting being low on the ladder and hoping to get a higher position. The idea of doing away with this kind of structure was not part of participants' thinking. I think when in the past they opted for informal economic activity it was partly due to fatalism about hierarchy and their place in it. ALSO WORKS offered them another way to be in control of their work. However, collective self-determination requires great skills in communication, negotiation, problem-solving, etc. which most people have not had a chance to develop.

Many literacy learners have had negative and oppressive social experiences in the past. The prison experience, for example, is not the best training ground for cooperative work. Most have had few opportunities to make decisions and choices. Dependency is a natural result of the traditional concept of taking orders and working 'for' or 'under' someone else. The same is true for the social assistance experience. It was challenging to establish a balance between providing support and training on one hand, and encouraging participants to take responsibility and make choices on the other.

Although the workers seemed to like each other and to have cordial relationships, this was not a deep solidarity. When things went wrong, the workers often did not have the confidence, skills, or maybe even motivation to confront the tasks of problem-solving and negotiating each other and with customers. There were tensions as people felt others were not pulling their weight. They lost their willingness to work hard when they felt their partners weren't doing the same. At this point constructive confrontation is necessary, but this is a skill too few people have. This problem is not unique to disadvantaged and undereducated people — it is also common in community organizations, businesses, university faculties, government departments. As happens even in these more privileged settings, some problems went underground and undermined the collective.

This kind of venture needs participants who understand and value co-operation. Many literacy students' life experience of urban poverty,

alienation and individual survival has not prepared them for this. Even years of trying to work together did not develop this attitude in all participants. Although some feel a strong sense of solidarity, others dropped away without ever communicating their real views or hearing how their participation was seen by their co-workers. Being unwilling to take over, staff were at times unable to help the group expose and resolve interpersonal problems. Even now, not all of the participants have a solid feeling of shared responsibility and ownership.

## RESULTS

There is wide variation in how people used the experience and how it affected their lives. This participant is still enthusiastic:

When I came to ALSO I had no idea of what I could do. I had no self-esteem. I was afraid to try anything and I couldn't even tell anyone how scared I was. All I knew was that I didn't want to do servant jobs anymore.

First I studied for my drivers' test and passed. Then I studied for my citizenship and got that. I joined ALSO's Board of Directors. I got involved with ALSO WORKS.

My first job with ALSO WORKS was cleaning a house once a week. When those people moved away I started to do paperwork to make up the cleaning hours I lost. Those days Mike did the administration and we all used to write our own cheques. Mike's confidence in me gave me the courage to try. I was so tense that I used to reverse the numbers and make lots of mistakes. I was afraid of letting everyone down. One little mistake and the whole financial record is out.

I'm still scared but it doesn't block me anymore. I keep trying new things. I took key-boarding at the adult high school. I took two business courses by correspondence and got very good marks. But I'm not looking for credits, I'm looking for ways to keep learning and doing something. I never dreamed I could have the job I have now. I'm not sitting in a class listening to someone talk about it, I'm learning by actually doing it.

I still have trouble with spelling and grammar. I still can't write a contract good but I draft it and bring it to the teachers to find out how to make it better. I was proud when I finished the bid for the last contract and even prouder when we got it. I wrote a reference (sic) letter for one of the other workers and it felt really good.

I don't think ALSO WORKS needs a boss - I sure don't want the role. I'm a student, a worker, a supervisor, even a teacher sometimes. I have a responsibility that comes with my new job but I don't need to play boss. Everybody still treats me the same, not as a student or a supervisor, just as me. When I had to speak to a co-worker about his work, I told him we'd been friends for years and I didn't want it to come between us, but it was part of my responsibility to speak to him if there were complaints. I asked how he wanted me to approach him. He said "just tell me".

Before, we didn't have anyone supervising. The idea was, the job is there to be done, we're all the boss, you can do it in your own way. We're lucky we had sympathetic customers who understood that we were learning as we went along and gave us a chance to correct our mistakes. Now I've asked the customers to meet with me once a month to talk about how it's going. I work along with a new worker or someone working on a new contract for the first while until we establish what the job is. I also work along with the woman who is taking over my old job just like the teachers work along with me until I'm ready to take over.



I think ALSO WORKS has a chance of surviving, although if ALSO goes down I'm not so sure. ALSO is kind of an umbrella over ALSO WORKS. Things are running pretty smoothly. We're hiring someone to help me look for more contracts. Some of the new students are bringing new enthusiasm and ideas. We're hopeful.

We used to say that if we had more education we wouldn't be here. Now I don't think education is the main thing. Lots of people have education and they still don't have confidence, or a good job. Education is important and it's good to always keep learning. But what it takes is people who care. It wasn't just going to school that helped me - it was that people believed in me and I didn't want to let them down. They saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. It made me want to try. If people hadn't cared for me I wouldn't have achieved anything. Our teachers give a lot of themselves - not for profit or personal gain, but because they want to give people a chance to help themselves. They go beyond what's (sic) their job. They put people before dollars and cents, and that's very rare.

This participant is more resigned:

"I can read better than I used to. I found out that I don't need to know every word to be able to understand what something says. I take a guess and then I check to see if I'm right. I figure I've lived long enough to be pretty good at guessing. Anyway I'm not afraid to try to read something now. But I still mostly get along without reading much. Not being able to read and write doesn't embarrass me as much as it used to. I'll ask someone for help now where before I would just try to cover up. I'd still like to work on my reading and writing more, but I don't think I have the energy to work and go to school.

I don't mind the work. The worst thing is I have no security. I'm starting to have a problem with my knee. What if I can't work? If I don't work, I don't get paid. And what about when I get too old? We have no pension plan.

ALSO WORKS is definitely a good thing, but I thought it all would have happened faster. I thought by now we'd have 20 contracts and 1 or 2 guys would be in charge. I think there's gotta be someone in charge. People screw up - I've done it myself. At the beginning I put everything into it. But I got so mad when I thought another worker was letting the rest of us down. Everyone was complaining to me behind the guy's back, but when I finally blew up and told him off at a meeting, no one backed me up. That really hurt me, and I decided to keep my mouth shut.

My heart's not really in it the same way now. I just do my job. I don't like going to meetings. I get bored, and it drives me crazy. We can talk about something for months without getting down and doing something about it.

I've learned a lot though. I learned a lot just from working with Mike. Like, I've learned not to be so prejudiced. At first I just didn't talk about it because I knew he didn't like it. But I had to think about it, and now I think along different lines."

## **Economic Results**

ALSO WORKS still exists after 8 years. Several workers are partially or fully supported by their work with the company. The business could expand with enough administrative support and committed participants. There will always be a market for services like industrial cleaning, and a certain part of that market will be open to purchasing these services from a group they feel needs an extra break. The group is now investigating the industrial cleaning market, the competition, etc., with a view to expansion.

The participants' economic status has not changed much. Their incomes are still low whether their earnings are supplemented by social assistance or

not. However, their participation in ALSO WORKS has affected their relationship to work by keeping up their hope, confidence, self esteem, connections to the community, and employment skills.

## **Educational Results**

In terms of transferrable job skills, one worker moved progressively into the administrative work of the business and has now undertaken more intensive skills development as a business trainee at ALSO/ALSO WORKS. Others have learned to estimate jobs, keep stock and purchase supplies, participate in developing bids on contracts, meet with customers, and of course they are very competent cleaners and building custodians. Several have used the computer enough that they are not intimidated by it and are open to learning more about it.

All participants made progress with their literacy skills to varying degrees. Some progressed in informal reading and writing skills to a level that is functional and sufficient for their goals, some are still attending the literacy program and some improved only a little but don't seem to mind now that they have a job. These latter have worked out ways of coping with the support of their families, their friends and their teachers at ALSO.

## **Social Results**

It's fair to say that all participants improved their self esteem and gained new awareness and social skills. The interchange of ideas with educators and community activists, and the experience of cooperative control and responsibility probably affected people's idea of what is possible. The work exposed them to other organizations in the community, including minority groups which some had regarded with suspicion and prejudice. Some participants have begun to take more of an interest in politics, and to vote. The skills of democratic participation are not easy to gain for those who have been denied such participation all their lives, but this experience has given people the chance to begin.

At present ALSO WORKS is small but still alive. There are new participants and other ALSO students are talking about using the model to create work for themselves. A new group of ALSO educators and Board members is bringing fresh energy and expertise in community economic development <sup>1</sup>.

## **ANOTHER VISION OF OUR WORK**

Our society is becoming a society with "surplus people". Social, economic and educational disadvantage (marginalization, poverty, illiteracy) are concentrated among the same one quarter of the population. While clearly the basic problem is the shortage of jobs and the barriers to labour market participation, illiteracy is increasingly blamed for the failure of the modern market economy to provide for all citizens. The idea that the larger prob-

lems of poverty, unemployment, global competition, etc. have such a simple and palatable solution as literacy, is seductive. People have told me that while they can't bear to think about poverty because it seems so overwhelming, literacy seems manageable.

But literacy is only the first hurdle for "undereducated" people. Job training is becoming a requirement even for the unskilled occupations that used to employ the less educated, such as the fast-food or cleaning industries. Often these programs have entry requirements of grade 10 or more. The main beneficiaries are employers, who naturally prefer to hire people who have been specially trained, no matter how unskilled the work. Most of the occupations less-educated people are being trained for are physically demanding, poorly paid, and insecure, so training is not going to open the door to the "good life". Worst of all, adults now learning at the basic literacy level may never be able to access any real skills training due to funding priorities and competition for training spaces.

The scenario of an adult learning to read, then going on to upgrading, then to skills training or other higher education, is not generally realistic. Most adults will give up under the pressures of their survival needs, family responsibilities, and loss of hope. Even if they do succeed in getting a decent education, they will have to compete with many others with better credentials and more experience.

Traditionally, basic education for work has involved preparing people for the relatively unskilled jobs that they can realistically access. These are notoriously poor jobs. Not only are workers vulnerable to exploitation and mistreatment, but they will not be able to escape poverty. This is not a good enough goal for us as adult educators. If autonomy and economic independence are our goals for people, we need another vision of our work.

People learn most effectively when they have the chance to tackle each new skill *as they need it for their own purpose*. Work, occupation — whether paid or unpaid (e.g. motherwork or volunteer work), is the foremost concern of most adult students. Learning literacy in the workplace would be ideal, except that in most workplaces there is too much pressure on the employer's goals and on "productivity", for the learner to really be in the driver's seat. And not being in the driver's seat is disempowering and counterproductive in terms of learning.

There's a big difference in doing unskilled but necessary work if you can do it with dignity, with decent pay, or best of all, as your own boss. Community economic projects can allow disadvantaged workers all of these benefits. Therefore the question becomes, *how can adult basic education best contribute to community economic development?* And what else is needed to develop viable cooperative work with people who have become marginalized?

## EDUCATION FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

We can try to create alternative workplaces, where low literacy does not prevent people from participating and where literacy skills will be developed naturally in the process of participation. We should choose products or services that use and build on the group's existing skills and interests. People then start out from a position of dignity and strength, and on a more equal footing with the educator(s). This is very different from the idea of people as "pupils" with everything to learn. Many of the skills people have are actually already marketable, but they may need help with marketing their goods or services.

A cooperative enterprise can't survive without a sense of community. It can help to start with a "natural community". A group of people who share a neighborhood, a culture, or extended family ties may already have a commitment that will help them resolve the problems and rifts that will certainly arise. People who have been brought together in a literacy program may have to work harder to develop the communication and trust they will need for successful cooperative work.

The group needs to build a common "culture of work" - a consensus on values, expectations, rights, rules, ways of communicating. Hidden beliefs and values may be in conflict and could sabotage the group without ever becoming explicit. Important parts of the work are for participants to develop a clear and explicit contract with one another, and to learn the skills of democratic cooperation and conflict resolution.

There is a market that supports coops or community economic development<sup>1</sup> and will give preference to your goods or service. A social network outside the group is important for many reasons. It is both a market and a source of moral support, expertise, exposure to new learning, networks. Workers with disadvantages may need this kind of preferential market, as they may not be able to compete in the cut-throat mainstream market.

It is in the exchange process with the mainstream world that marginalized people and groups need the most support, but they also need to develop their capacity to manage this themselves. Educators should look for opportunities to share responsibility with participants, break tasks down into their parts to make them clear, spell things out, make learning and job contracts. We should share all we know about the market and its customs, without assuming that student/workers must totally accept these. Perhaps they will be able to develop processes truer to their own cultures, and be successful in ways we can't foresee. In order for educators to support this kind of "empowerment", it is necessary for us to give up control and the belief that we have all the answers. The process of people creating solutions in their own lives and in their communities may evolve within ethnic and class cultures that we are not part of. Instead of simply maintaining marginalized people in a state

of dependency, government policies should support community based economic projects to create jobs that use and further develop their skills. The key is to give people and organizations the financial and policy support<sup>2</sup> needed for real community economic development. Projects combining literacy and community economic development should be funded whether in the context of literacy programs or other community based groups. There should be some kind of support for the development of small businesses or co-operatives for people who are not very literate, protected spaces for low-literate people in economic projects, and perhaps a protected market for businesses employing disadvantaged people.

Community based organizations are in a position to help develop strategies to deal with the current economic crisis because they are rooted in their communities and involve people who have a direct stake in their economic and social welfare. They understand the various dimensions of local problems and resources and can offer integrated, creative and flexible approaches to dealing with social and economic problems “from the bottom up”. They often have members committed to social action, and are able to gain community support for initiatives because of their legitimacy and credibility. Most significantly, they focus on the abilities and capacities within the community and its people to solve problems. They provide the most fertile soil for responsible and transformative education.

### Notes

1. Community Economic Development — job creation initiated by the community, focused on community needs and strengths, and intended to benefit the community.
2. In a presentation to the federal government Standing Committee on Human Resources Development in March 1994, the Ontario Community Economic Development Coalition recommended a social policy framework that would support community economic development by: allocating funding and other resources to develop the job creation capacity of communities, directing small scale training to community needs through community based organizations, and adopting policies that support CED in various government departments.

# Chapter Five

## FROM TRAINEE–LEARNER TO ACTOR IN AN ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY

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### BACKGROUND TO THE ASSOCIATION

The *Education et Formation* voluntary association (Education and Training) is located in northwest France in the Haute-Normandie region, in Rouen, 150 km from Paris. Haute-Normandie consists of two *départements*, Eure and Seine-Maritime, with an agricultural and industrial tradition (textiles, engineering, etc.), where it was usual to go into a job that did not always require basic education.

The profound change in the fabric of agriculture and industry has thrown these habits into disarray. People used to be in jobs in which they learned by doing. Jobs passed from father to son in the same works, even at the same workbench. The transformation of industry in the 1970s and '80s had a significant effect on employment sectors in the region. Vocational education provision was not prepared for such an upheaval. It was against this background that our association began its activity.

*Education et Formation* is a vocational training agency which aids integration into social and economic life, and it was founded in 1972 by a group examining the problems of adult basic education within a popular education movement. As a result of the technological revolution, our association developed and modified what it does in order to face up to the modernization of the economy, and the worsening of the economic, social and cultural situation of a slice of population that is consequently increasingly marginalized.

An action research and study group on education for adults with low levels of achievement, especially migrants, also arose out of the work done by the association's militants in the working-class districts of the Rouen conurbation. This group was to develop "unconventional" education work: the teaching of French was integrated into a global approach that took into account all the cultural, social and occupational realities of the people concerned.

The literacy sector used a learning and teaching methodology based on the concerns of the "trainees". These concerns included sub-standard housing, children, hygiene, racism, unemployment and job creation. The work was done where people lived: in housing developments, hostels, shanties, workshops, shops, cafés, etc. The teaching approach thus featured close links between language education, socio-educational activities and culture. Basic education was tied to the way people live and work.

## **FROM TRAINEE LEARNER TO PAID EMPLOYEE IN AN ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY**

### **Education as a Means of Advancement**

Until 1985, education, whether training leading to a qualification, pre-education courses or improvement of general knowledge, was seen as a "way out". The effort required of anyone going back to sitting in front of the blackboard in a group, especially of those who "didn't like school", was rewarded by entry into a course that would lead to success in at least 70% of cases.

The earliest activities in the "fight against illiteracy" and the return to basic education, as we called it latterly, were seen as the first step along a definite path towards employment, and actually resulting in a job. There was agreement over this between what public authorities said, what we said ourselves as "purveyors" of education, and what learners imagined to be their immediate future and the personal advancement they would gain from following an educational course.

Educational advancement and education as the harbinger of personal autonomy, was clearly seen in the local courses attended by women and men for several hours a week without receiving payment. The goal of employment was not essential. Many of the learners were not even thinking of it (mothers, young people wanting to improve inadequate reading skills, those seeking social and personal contacts, etc.).

The written teaching materials, drawn from everyday life (advertising, till receipts, labels and packaging, social security forms and cheques to be filled in) helped people find their way around the "jumble" of paper and actions required to live in society. Being able to do the same things as other people, and increasingly doing it for oneself, leads to a legitimate feeling of personal growth and social advancement.

The association argued to authorities the need for initial education for adults, both French and foreign, by demonstrating that access to a job and keeping a job were linked to the ability to read, write, and calculate, and to pre-technical notions that encouraged adaptability to the development of work, especially in jobs regarded as demanding low levels of qualification.

We were dissatisfied with our results, however, because we did not succeed in ensuring continuity for our activities taking place in circumstances that were far from certain in the housing developments, community centres and workshops. We also wanted basic education to be a type of education that was recognized and identified. In 1980, after many difficulties, we managed to acquire two centres where we could fit out a workshop and two classrooms.

The basic education developed over several years in the various localities was complemented by educational provision in a permanent centre, giving us an interface between trainees' skills and the prerequisites for access to vocational training. Henceforth, we were faced in both urban and rural environments with having to provide basic education for the long-term unemployed who had left manufacturing industry, construction and agriculture.

## FROM EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT TO EDUCATIONAL "ENCRUSTATION"

Some years later, the situation had deteriorated, because of two related factors:

- The first was no doubt the crucial factor: the whole set of policies to handle long-term unemployment continued to be based on the "one-off training" of the target populations, as the essential answer to the problem of unemployment. Generally, *these policies lacked a coherent progressive structure that would enable trainees to achieve real qualification*. As a result, these activities with no real outcomes, led to an increasingly open expression among learners of the feeling that "all of this is leading nowhere", and further exacerbated the global experience of socio-economic uncertainty.

This observation might lead one to think that training does not work; but the *real problem is essentially how it is done*. What we could do ourselves was determined by the programmes of the state, regardless of our recommendations and ways of operating.

- The second factor is associated with the training-course formula itself: the *basic education provided did not prove sufficiently functional and did not fit the needs of some of those*



*receiving training.* The education was too “theoretical”, too static, and inadequately related to the cultural, social and occupational behaviour of the learners.

In fact, we found that the process of education made the trainees dependent, and was almost exclusively using paper and pencil in a classroom. *These training courses, which set out to enable learners to take their destiny back into their own hands, took them further away from the labour market.*

In fact, it appeared less and less likely that they would return to a workshop or a factory because, first, training allowances provided relative material comfort and increasingly became a substitute for a working wage — so that they became ‘encrusted’ with successive training courses — and secondly, they found it difficult to assimilate the training, of which the objectives, metalanguage and ways of operating were frequently far removed from their cultural references.

Indeed, very quickly we were asking our trainees from globally rural cultures to move from an oral culture (which was sufficient for all social transactions) to an inescapably written culture; we were asking trainees with “low levels of qualification” from industrial cultures dating from the beginning of the century to move from copying older workers and foremen to learning based on a constant need for analysis: dissecting processes, making inferences, developing multiple skills and mobility, and all manner of other things besides, in growing measure!

*Training is destabilizing, calls into question received ideas and perceptions of the world, and often changes relationships between members of a community or a group.* It leads to resistance when it demands rejection of earlier convictions and promises compensations: personal, social and financial advancement, the greatest form of which is to acquire status and to find a place in society.

In the 1990s, discussion centres increasingly on disillusionment. The general consensus in what was said (the effects of which are also evident among young people in schools) — “If you work well — or better — you’ll get a good, well-paid job” — is becoming more and more fragile under the pressure of events and the spiralling unemployment figures.

*Thus, while the labour market was rejecting and marginalizing people, and society was generating economic, social and cultural exclusion, training courses often had the same effect and in consequence appeared in the guise of tools of exclusion.*

*To give some purpose to education, we are increasingly basing our activities on what is real, on the jobs people do, and on the true situation in workshops, so that people can recover their identity and find their way back into society.*

## FROM THE WORKPLACE AS AN EDUCATIONAL SETTING TO A RETURN TO ACTIVE LIFE

The association is evolving an educational approach to training based on the concept of imaginary businesses. The training enterprise is even tied to a learning-workshop formula, in which everyone is called upon, according to his or her previous experience of work, to play a part in carrying out a project.

This has two aims:

- to enable trainees to be the workers in a working situation, to rediscover social rhythms and working habits forgotten because they have been out of work for five or ten years; and
- to identify and reveal needs from activities that develop the learning of useful basic skills, in both the general and the vocational arena.

This experience has proved constructive. It is based on a collective project to which everyone is required to make a “personal” contribution. We are sketching the first outline of a training mechanism in learning workshops which attempts to involve participants in defining the goals of training, working out the content, and taking part in the evaluation process.

### **“NICE LITTLE JOBS” — OR HOW TO PROCEED FROM FICTION TO REALITY**

These new experiences are leading the association to locally and nationally, search for new ways of integrating people into society that are better suited to the ever worsening situation of people removed from the labour market. We are taking the initiative in helping to create intermediate associations whose aim is to enable people who have long been placed on the margins of the labour market to start working again by doing “nice little jobs”.

An intermediate association has the twofold aim of putting people back in work by providing work, and of providing social support to those under contract; they have a voluntary, non-profit status. They therefore make it possible to hire people without work who are finding it difficult to start again by making them available to individuals and bodies, in return for payment, for activities not covered under local economic conditions by private initiative or public agencies.

Intermediate associations offer short-term employment contracts. They therefore keep people in a situation of *uncertainty*. Nonetheless, the work done by intermediate associations does provide a foothold in employment and can be seen as a stage in the return to active life.

The educational direction of our team, has been devoted to the issue of developing *transverse abilities*, the lack of which appears so crucial among our learners. Regular contact with learners enables us to identify employability deficits, which are assessed particularly in the context of dual system training in enterprises. This is seen as difficulty in solving a simple problem, in realizing the relationship between cause and effect, in putting problems in hierarchical order, in understanding how to proceed, and also in becoming part of a group.

The use of remedial cognitive tools, coupled with practical implementation, allows us to strengthen preparation for employment. In the context of fierce competition for work, finding opportunities for a job implies the possession of a set of skills in both the working and living environment:

- knowledge of *how to behave* in a business, which is itself made up of a whole mass of adaptability criteria; and
- knowledge of *how to think*, which means particularly applying the mechanisms mentioned above; and
- knowledge of *how to do things*, which means technical competence.

We therefore used educational settings and combined scenarios to develop these three aspects jointly by giving people activities to restore their self-worth through their vocational and social abilities.

The “objects” produced are economically useful (making goods for common use like restoring a community hall, rehabilitating the natural environment with footpaths, rivers, clearing rubbish; collectively building a float for a local festival; producing a play; cabarets, etc.).

The quality of the work and the performances in turn provokes the local community, families, etc., to adopt a different view of the participants. The business itself also “views” the work of these men and women in a different light, which helps them to reintegrate into traditional employment. Moreover, the activities which take place within local development programmes encourage the growth of tourism, for example, or the development of personal care services.

## FROM OPERATIONS TRAINING TO A COMMUNITY ECONOMY

The rise in the scale and duration of unemployment in France produced an exponential growth in instability and exclusion, socially, culturally and occupationally. The training solution, which had seemed to be a means of reintegrating and rediscovering the key to re-entering the world of work, became *invalid* for the most marginalized sections of the population. A place on a training course no longer had sufficient productive social value. It was therefore necessary to find an activity that would bring such social recognition.

At the same time, it was indispensable to give people responsibility once more for their own ability to be economic and social actors, similarly to give new value to activity and employment, and to think of measures which could offer both these things. This was the aim of the tools of economic integration (intermediate associations, placement agencies, etc.).

Economic integration is an “educational” tool on two levels:

1. for the sections of the population which it puts back in touch with the constraints of the market by means of paid activity and who rebuild their individual, social and family worth, and their occupational status; and
2. for the decision-makers and politicians whom it addresses by offering a different approach to the social treatment of unemployment and exclusion.

Whatever may be their status and the priorities that they set for themselves, economic reintegration mechanisms in both the market and the non-market sector play a mixed part at the point where the market and

community solidarity meet. They cannot of course claim to be able to eradicate unemployment by themselves. They are only one approach among others, for people who have a different experience of life.

## **A LOCAL COURSE IN A “DISADVANTAGED” SUBURB OF ROUEN**

This activity is organized within a social and cultural centre in two half-days a week throughout the year. It is primarily aimed at immigrant women, but not exclusively.

The local course has been running for nearly 20 years in an area of very run-down rented apartment blocks. The development served to rehouse particularly the poorest people who were expelled from sub-standard housing in the city centre. It is still a “sensitive” locality, with a high rate of unemployment, where delinquency has grown up among the young because they are idle and lack prospects, and where ethnic communities tolerate each other but do not mix.

Besides the “reading, writing and arithmetic” based on everyday situations and texts, our practice quickly became based on community projects with a double aim:

1. firm anchorage in local life so that people could lead better lives there, feel that they belonged and find their bearings; and
2. development of community relationships so that people could get to know and like each other and do something together.

Together with the participants, we therefore designed and organized:

- visits to explore the local heritage, in the city and the surrounding countryside;
- an exhibition about bread and how it had been made over the years in different cultures; and
- an exhibition about the human body and costume, using particularly the traditional festive dress worn by women.

The work on bread and costume used the elements of culture relating to clothes and the techniques of bread-making of the groups to which the women taking part in the local courses belonged.

These exhibitions, accompanied by tasting of products from the various regions, and planned, made and brought by the participants, were visited by the Mayor, were covered by the press and became above all, places where local people could meet. The latent hostility between people who previously viewed each other as “different” was overcome.

This activity was an opportunity to see knowledge, skills and cultural values as worthwhile. It helped to establish social links and support for learning. Literacy thus reached a community dimension which changed the life of the area.

## A COLLECTIVE PROJECT IN THE GUISE OF A TRAINING COURSE: THE MAKING OF A DECORATED FLOAT

This was a "young people's" training course, aimed at making society more dynamic and building up a vocational project. The training course lasted 700 hours, through day release. Half of the time was spent at work in enterprises.

The young people who were enrolled, largely came from an area that had seen "disastrous" unemployment for 20 years. In fact, the naval dockyards had closed, then the spinning mills and other textile works. Few businesses had taken their place. The young people on this training course had experienced and were still experiencing the long-term unemployment (five or ten years) of their fathers, mothers and brothers.

Against such a background of general disillusionment, the idea of a collective project which could attach people more firmly to their society acquired significant importance. The idea arose out of a video showing how a town had come to life through a floral procession made up of a number of decorated floral floats. Some 20 of the young trainees appeared interested. At the end of the video showing, questions were fired off: "Is it difficult to do that?" "How do you make the flowers?" "Who did the designs?"

Among the answers, the one that took them most by surprise was: "You'd be quite capable of building one too!" From that moment on, everyone felt involved and interested in the challenge it posed. The president of the organizing committee was invited to explain in broad terms how to set about such a project: "Where do you get the money?" "How do you go about building the float?" "Will they trust us?" "Will they let us take part?"

The young people became members of the next floral procession project. They decided to depict New Year's Eve, the general theme being public holidays. Everyone became involved in the many tasks to be done: finding a factory willing to let them use a press to cut the 200,000 flowers, rolling them, making the supports, cutting, sawing and fixing them, choosing the decoration and sticking the flowers on to the designs.

For two and a half months, teams of ten took turns to work two or three half-days a week. The carnival was planned for 15th August. Since the centre closed for holidays on 31st July, everything had to be ready by then. On 31st July, all the finishing touches remained still to be done, but the young people were finally able to complete their float.

On the day of the procession they were so proud and found it so rewarding to be there in the streets of the city in the midst of the other floats of the local political parties, the shopkeepers and other associations, with the applause of the 10,000 people along the route. They heard their names broad-

cast on the city public address system and saw themselves recognized by all as belonging to those who had participated in the success of the festival.

It was a very positive outcome, given their general lack of involvement in local life. It was a first step towards social integration for the young people and a rehabilitation of the values of work by means of a collective project benefitting all members of the groups. The activity allowed us to bring together much-needed new motivation for the young people, the designing of a realistic project, experience in a business and useful basic education which truly involved the young people, who became actors in a project that they took over.

## **BUSINESSES AS EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS**

In the context of a social and vocational integration programme for young people with major problems, we invited two groups of young people to run a training course as though it were a business in which each would play an effective role in production, maintenance and management.

Our aims were, in the most realistic way possible, to come close to the actual practices of business and of the market, to the constraints associated with the proper functioning of the various services between them, and to take advantage of the difficulties the young people encountered, as well as their desire to overcome these in order to make plain the need for knowledge.

Two "imaginary" businesses were created: a construction company and a sandwich bar. In each, the group of trainees was split into the different occupations required for the proper functioning of the business, and the trainer became for the time the head of the business. His job was essentially to encourage the trainees to think in order to carry out the joint project and to meet the intentions of the businesses created, to achieve their commercial goals and to help participants to join real businesses.

Works meetings every morning laid down the work to be planned for the day or for the next two days. The work done was assessed in groups at the end of the day. Successes and possible improvements were discussed, with the reasons for these. Here again the trainer led discussion, helped the group to define goals to pursue and teased out the problems.

In one case, it would be the knowledge of how to behave that was wanting. The wrong arguments were used to a potential client in order to sell him sandwiches, and the deal was lost. In selling, arguments are the key. The "communication" workshop would take up the theme and develop the missing knowledge of how to behave.

In another case, it was basic skills that were lacking. The areas to be painted were poorly estimated, so that too little paint was ordered by the buying department. As a result, the painting group had nothing to work with, and the order had to be remade. In a real business, a lot of money would have been lost. The general skills workshop would take up the

question to look again at estimating height and surface areas, unless it was just a matter of a minor operational error.

In this type of "construction", learners are seen increasingly to become involved in the game (as if it were a real role play) and to become more responsible by reminding others also of their responsibilities for the common well-being.

Overall, we reversed the classic educational order — theoretical presentation followed by practical application — by suggesting that no person should work on a theory or a vocational technique for which he had not felt the need because of a specific lack. Moreover, all the educational activities were serving the collective project, in which everyone found where he belonged by virtue of his wishes or personal aims.

## IN HAUTE-NORMANDIE, A TREE NURSERY THAT LETS PEOPLE PUT DOWN ROOTS

There are a dozen men in the green team of the Pays-de-Bray. Under a contract of employment and solidarity, they are cleaning up river banks, hedges and footpaths. An additional day is devoted to a basic education workshop.

The (re)learning of basic skills is matched to motivation in the creation of a tree nursery. Under the guidance of a trainer who is a forester, they draw up a programme of work, which is transferred to sheets according to a calendar showing the likely effects of the weather; they prepare the soil, select their tools, write their names, take willow cuttings "by cutting the branches with a bevelled edge so that the water does not get in and by spacing the cuts 10 cms apart", as one of them has explained to us. In addition, we are preparing to launch a market garden for impoverished people.

Beyond individual updating and technical training, participants are re-acquiring techniques and the local traditional culture. This team work allows us to recreate links and to re-acustom people receiving social security benefits to work, many of whom have known long-term unemployment and a period of "complete break". This activity, which is based on the educational principle of learning-workshops, provides training for occupations associated with the soil and the environment. From the point of view of job creation, the nursery will enable hedges to be replanted in districts that have become aware of the ecological problems of deforestation.

Our work in rural areas has brought us to the following conclusion: that we must invent *different approaches to training* if we are to have a chance of interesting participants. They come from rural families, are former agricultural or building workers, and have been "wheelbarrow-pushers", always "at the bottom of the cement mixer", as they put it.

The acquisition of general skills must necessarily be closely tied to practical application. It is through analysis of daily practice that skills are gradually transferred and generalized. Trainees are not content with cleaning part of a

river, but they also mark where they have been on a map and talk about what they have done. Each person's own work is thus seen as part of the whole group, and a certain distance is achieved by learning to see oneself within the larger scale of things.

In another order of ideas, alcohol dependency will only be controlled and gradually overcome through occupational activities linked to useful learning and team participation in useful work, and not just through "lessons" in food hygiene.

Didier, aged 43, had been unemployed for five years and was taking part in restoring the old building in the Pont du Thil dockyard. He took two years to regain his self-confidence and to redevelop the art of roofing which he now masters completely. The team's aim is for him to pass on his skill and creativity to younger men, and for him to further strengthen the social "weight" that he is re-acquiring.

## **WHAT WILL TOMORROW BRING?**

We have to plan training and think about other ways of approaching the issue of integration so that we are effective, while safeguarding our philosophy and respecting individuals. Work as a value remains a factor for unity and social integration in industrial societies. That said, what will be the place of occupational activity in post-industrial societies? We cannot avoid thinking globally about the economic system and its ability to produce wealth that is accessible to the greatest number.

What will be the place of adaptability training (which is always running after events) in a production system which is rationalizing manufacturing and production processes at an ever faster rate, and making them more complex? In all of that, what will be the place of educational advancement, in the sense of permitting individuals to develop their own personal and social well-being? What, moreover, is the place of an alternative economy in a system demanding higher performance and excluding those who are not in the right place at the right time?

Since 1972, we have been trying to create conditions under which sections of the population in difficult situations can learn and relearn. Adult education, seen principally as a means of social, cultural and occupational advancement, is increasingly becoming a means by which learners themselves can reconstruct their situation.

Technological society makes demands that have profoundly changed social organizations. The disappearance of work breaks the frame, and leads to isolation and marginalization. Individuals find themselves desocialized, cast aside and excluded from membership of any group. They lose all their contractual relationships. Their rights and obligations dissolve.

Our work only makes sense if it allows people to remake their social, occupational and cultural existence through activities that are useful in



themselves, and linked to a process of re-acquisition, or in other words, learning. Developing a return to work together with basic education allows individuals to reconstruct themselves within a group to which they belong. Excluded sections of the population need to be brought into the local development of social structures that respect the pace and level of what they can do.

# **Chapter Six**

## **LEARNING TO MAKE CHOICES**

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### **WOMEN IN THE CURRENT ROMANIAN CRISIS**

For the people, the Romanian revolution opened up new horizons. It ushered in the possibility of a profound political transformation and the prospect of economic change. It also meant an inevitable change in ways of thinking. A new pattern of individual behaviour in public life and in an economy based on free trade, and the conscious assumption of personal responsibility, are part of the destiny of our society as we resume with dignity the place in Europe which is ours.

Over the last 50 years, the spirit of initiative, the capacity for invention and the creativity of the Romanian people were suppressed by methods of varying brutality that have left deep traces in the behaviour of the generations born and brought up during that period. The democratic political parties and the voluntary organizations and associations in civil society have the duty today to help individuals to remake their identities and to learn how to rebuild them for themselves.

The programme which confronted the Romanians in the winter of 1989 took the vast majority by surprise. The chronic lack of information about reality in western Europe, the total absence of democratic basic education, the

need for active political pluralism, the requirement that those elected should be answerable to their electors, and the obligation on the state to guarantee private property, brought about the reaction which is typical of a community which has long suffered oppression: resistance to change, defiance, hesitation and confusion.

We believe that the critical activities of the democratic political parties and voluntary organizations and associations are part of a wide-ranging social and educational reform of society. The adult generations of the former communist bloc have to learn the new codes of everyday life in every sphere as they go along, and above all they have to learn the freedom to choose.

The Romanian political scene after 1989 is still marked by the existence of two antagonistic sectors. On one side are the members of the Romanian-speaking *nomenklatura*, who formed a number of political parties with similar programmes stressing either the restoration of economic centralism or extreme nationalism. These parties have formed a parliamentary and governmental alliance because the electorate is unaware, is wholly preoccupied with economic instability, and is apathetic and afraid.

On the other side of the political divide are the democratic parties that have their roots in Romanian parliamentary life of the 1930s, which saw a diversity of political doctrines (liberal, Christian democrat and social democrat). In order to fight for a moral cleansing of society and for the establishment of a state based on democratic laws, these parties have allied themselves with voluntary organizations in civil society so as to provide a political alternative to those currently in power.

The economy of the country still protects the centralized, **dirigiste** system that has proved a failure. The effects of this policy are: a fall in gross national income, galloping inflation and rising unemployment. International loans have been granted on condition that measures are introduced to reduce the public deficit. These conditions are often cited by the government and the parliamentary majority to keep public expenditure on social services at very low levels: in health, social security, education and culture.

For most of the adult population — wage-earners in state and private companies, the unemployed and peasants — the daily quality of life has deteriorated to an alarming degree in recent years. Purchasing power has halved since 1990, 40% of families live below the minimum subsistence level, and 60% below the minimum social wage. Our industries used to market large quantities of products of inferior quality which were absorbed by the closed market of the former allies. The dismantling of that market caused a decline in economic indicators in our country, including the fall in wages.

Under social pressure from the trade unions, and without the support of a growing economy, the introduction of an artificial rise in nominal wages has had the effect of a reduction in real wages, a fall in social demand and inhibition of economic reform. One cause of economic backwardness is the maintenance of huge loss-making enterprises and the lack of political will to

privatize small and medium companies. To date, 915 out of 6,500 state enterprises that existed in 1989 have been privatized.

## **Romanian Women Suffering the Worst**

The section of the population suffering the worst effects from the incompetent management of the economy and the disruption to family life is Romanian women. According to the last census of 1992, over half of the 22.8 million Romanians were women, of whom 4.6 million were economically active, comprising one of the social groups most vulnerable to unemployment. Unemployment among women (13.5%) is above the national unemployment rate (11%). The worst affected are, regardless of their education and vocational training, women under 40 years of age. Those aged 25-29 account for 62% of unemployed women. There are three times as many young women among the unemployed as men of the same age and the same average level of education.

Small private businesses, services and agriculture are sectors which can attract women who have lost their jobs. But government organizations have not opened enough vocational training courses. And, with no clear direction in the development of certain economic sectors, these courses lead to nothing for the unemployed (less than 30% of participants re-enter employment).

For women throughout the world, families, children and the home are the primary responsibility. But a wage and a job are more than material help to the family: they are a symbol of freedom, of deliverance from paternal and conjugal tutelage. In the old Romanian society, women always made up a significant portion of the intellectual elite, as in the major European models. Unfortunately, during the communist period, with the exception of names that were already well known, women became, regardless of their intellectual and occupational capacities, a pool of mass labour.

The revolution brought a new breath of wind. Many women, especially intellectuals with democratic ideas, became active in developing an authentic feminist movement, based on voluntary work and with the aim of offering genuine protection to the rights of Romanian women. There are 30 or so organizations, associations and women's leagues, each with between five and 20 thousand members, which set out to protect and support women and their occupational rights (as lawyers, doctors, journalists and businesswomen), social rights (mothers' associations and assistance for abandoned children and women who have suffered violent abuse), and rights of political participation (the Organization of Women Members of the National Christian Democratic Peasant Party and the Organization of Women Members and Supporters of the Romanian Social Democratic Party).

The women who have joined the Romanian Social Democratic Party (RSDP) have created their own organization to make the status of Romanian women known publicly, to improve it and to help their members to reach decision-making positions in the party. The members of this organization

believe that men and women must have equal rights and obligations in family life as in public life.

For example, legislation on parental leave refers exclusively to mothers; violence against women within families is not yet a criminal offence; women still find it difficult to rise within professional hierarchies; the first employees to be made redundant are always women, etc. After five years of activity by the organization, local branches have developed in every district in which the party is represented, with a total of 2000 members and sympathizers.

Our organization has made its priority a revival of traditional values of women's solidarity in contemporary life, and a quest for new means by which women may participate in the development of their communities. Modernization means reintroducing ideas, methods and traditional strategies, in new socio-economic forms, which can, in the light of historical criticism and with suitable changes in rigour, help us to escape from the impasse at a time of crisis.

Women's everyday life in Romania is affected by the worst aspects of the serious socio-economic crisis: unemployment, inadequate social security, income in free fall, biological degradation of the environment, and indeed breakdown among a large number of individuals. Young people who are made unemployed are more resistant to physical shock, but they suffer a decline in morale, a lack of confidence in social structures, and a loss of faith in their own strengths. In urban as well as rural environments, unemployment among women has to be tackled using a differentiated approach based on a refined knowledge of group psychology if it is to stimulate interest in new jobs and to restore confidence and the desire to succeed. Women, overwhelmed by their current problems, may adopt a passive attitude. They may try to avoid all risk factors and all chances of being rejected once again.

The Women's Organization of the RSDP has launched a programme, so far on a very small scale, of social reintegration for unemployed women and unemployment prevention for girls completing secondary education. By creating an increasing number of small nuclei of work scattered throughout the country, and larger, more concentrated circles of organized productive activities, we have been attempting to put up some resistance in a situation of extreme economic collapse, and to find appropriate solutions.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF BUZAU

Up to 1989, the district of Buzau was subjected to a process of forcible, intensive industrialization that produced profound changes in the life of its inhabitants. The planned economy left negative traces in people's psychology, but they knew no other.

At the present time, the district, like the rest of the country, is going through a difficult period of transition from a centralized to a market economy. This transition is borne with difficulty by the population. In the district

of Buzau, there are 44,076 people out of work, of whom 23,935 are women (16.4% of the active population). The district occupies sixth place in the country in terms of unemployment. However, the most worrying aspect is that most of those who are unemployed are young people.

Why should young people, and particularly girls and young women, be the worst affected? Besides the economic factor (a particular imbalance between the supply of labour and the demand), there are other disturbing causes. Young people are frequently encountered who did not attend a school that suited their personality. They were admitted on the basis of an examination, and on the advice of their parents, without being consulted themselves. The majority of such people do their work superficially, with little skill or enthusiasm. They have been, or will be, the first candidates for unemployment.

During adolescence, it is a simple matter to discover an individual's aptitudes and capabilities. The best possible vocational preparation has to be provided for people, taking into account their aptitudes, in order to make it easier for them to adapt to life, and to match their skills and preferences to economic structures.

The Buzau branch of the Women's Organization of the RSDP has therefore taken the initiative in mobilizing existing resources. Teachers experienced in the guidance and vocational education of young people, girls wishing to become qualified and to practise a trade, and a recent graduate in textile sciences and the art and technique of dressmaking, started a pilot project as a way out of the crisis. These women initially organized an introductory course in the art of dressmaking, with the young specialist as instructor. The participants — nine in number at first — were girls who had found no work after finishing secondary education, and pupils in their final years.

Since 1992, vocational activities have been undertaken outside school, after the manner of clubs, and these activities have been seen by the young people as a pool of knowledge, a dowry that widens the range of future options, and a starting point for experiences to come. All the girls who took part in the Buzau experiment attended these meetings, which are designed in stages.

The first stage, entitled "The future begins today", took the form of theoretical discussions. Meetings were arranged between the participants and people pursuing differing occupations, including the unemployed. Questions such as the following were asked: "Can I do such and such a job?" "How did you arrive at your choice of career?" "How did you discover what you wanted to do?" "Why do you like your job?" These interviews and discussions were led by volunteers, young people and adults, unemployed and those in work. They shared their experiences, highlighting the successes and failures which they had gone through and the solutions they had found to overcome the latter. Open discussions were organized after each talk. During this first stage, the girls were invited to explore their affinities with an

occupation and to reach an informal assessment and impression, thus confirming their personalities and, above all, learning to make choices.

Although these discussions were essentially theoretical, they gave the girls a chance to think about their future, to analyse their aptitudes, their inclinations and their wishes. At the end of the series, they were able to decide what direction they might take in their careers.

The project included a practical activity: "The imagination workshop". Under the guidance of a volunteer instructor, the girls were introduced to a job about which they knew very little. The job was suggested in line with what they chose themselves, but also in accordance with their affinities and inclinations. They thereby discovered aptitudes which they could not otherwise have known about. They knitted, crocheted or sewed small items in wool, silk, cotton and straw which were greatly admired and quickly sold. At the end of the two years, it was satisfying to see that the effort had not been in vain.

"The imagination workshop" was followed, in 1994, by the creation of a small dressmaking workshop in StÓlpu, a village close to Buzau, in which unemployed girls and women took part. This second stage proved extremely useful in getting initiatives off the ground. The workshop was led by the young graduate, who had not found work when she completed her studies. She did not despair. She undertook to initiate the other village girls and women who had not found work into the art of dressmaking. To start with, only four girls came, then two more. The young graduate taught the girls the techniques of cutting and making children's clothes, and then adults'. They produced clothes for themselves and their children, thus making savings in their own budgets.

After three months, four of the participants and the instructor opened a small private dressmaking business in their village. One of them let the group use a room in her house, and work began with two old sewing machines, using patterns designed by the young graduate. The workers were very soon making money. The first clothes for teenage girls were sold successfully, in small runs. And as the word got around, many village mothers and teenagers took advantage of the opportunity to buy nice clothes more cheaply than in the shops.

A private business, however small, runs the risk of closing if it confines itself to the village market. The girls then found other private and state enterprises which needed overalls for their workers. To date, these overalls, together with school uniforms for children, are the principal products of this small business.

After a year and a half, the workshop has developed. There are now more sewing machines, and they are new. Other girls have joined the mini-workshop as waged staff. Although the young graduate has found a job in a college, she continues to direct the activities of the mini-workshop on a voluntary basis.<sup>1</sup>

This "microproduction" has had to overcome many difficulties, particularly external: contacts with an inflexible bureaucracy in order to obtain the documents necessary to make the business legal, the difficulty of finding supplies of equipment and raw materials, late payment by customers in the state sector, etc. But the young women unanimously agree that they have been successful and, despite all the obstacles, have decided to continue.

At the outset, they also experienced the internal difficulties inherent in setting up any group which is based on common economic interests but made up of people with differing personalities and aspirations. The existence of a leader (the instructor) who was accepted by the group provided an element of stability that helped to maintain relationships of mutual esteem and respect. Another problem was learning while working, and in consequence a redistribution of work in accordance with the skills available. The problem was resolved amicably, and swiftly, by the intervention of the leader. The members were able to form a group thanks to their mutual acceptance of their obligations towards one another, and the conviction that their own skills would evolve in amicable competition. The girls learned to accept the discipline of well-finished work, to meet commitments to customers and, essentially, to recover their dignity and self-confidence.

This local initiative, as a microproject for survival against a background of advanced socio-economic decay, is naturally only a drop in the ocean. But, even on a limited scale, it has created the capacity to reintegrate into active life a social group who are faced with a destructive phenomenon: female unemployment. It is destructive since it helps to destroy the social structure of the family and the identity of the individual, and it is more than harmful as it means once again a brutal return by women, in hostile conditions, to the status of "crypto-domestics".<sup>2</sup>

## THE CONDITIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

Let us try to apply to an eastern European society in "transition" the socio-economic concepts developed by Bertrand Schneider in a Report of the Club of Rome<sup>3</sup>: "microproduction", "local initiatives", "small-scale operations" and "microenterprises", generically termed "projects", which are already up and running or are now being established, rather than future activities that are still on the drawing board.

In Romania, impoverishment does not mean poverty, or chronic poverty. Stagnation in a process of successive changes, and even a return to earlier stages of social and political history, is not always an involution. The communist regime was a serious disaster for the Romanian people, but it was exogenous. Five years have passed since the revolution, and impoverishment continues to rise: everyday life has become an act of survival for wider and wider groups of society, who are obliged to live in isolation, leading a life of withdrawal, privation and apathy.



Bertrand Schneider's concepts apply to crisis situations. In order to escape from "impoverishment" by one's own abilities and using one's own individual resources, these concepts give rise to "projects" which are inevitably small-scale in nature. *Learning to make choices* within a very narrow sector of socio-economic development, in a world of inequalities, disorder and instability, can have unexpected repercussions not only on the social group which is running a project to allow its members to survive, but also on the concept of a "microproject" itself.

## From Transitional Solutions to Living Seeds

Let us continue with a theoretical consideration of these "transitional solutions" offered by the institution of "microprojects" in the Romanian situation. Under the conditions currently created by the phenomenon of impoverishment, microprojects are necessarily prefaced by the qualification mini, which expresses the (dangerously) "minimal" nature of their scope, both in coverage and duration, which is restricted to confined circles that are bound to remain isolated and ephemeral. Mini-microprojects may nonetheless prove robust, like living seeds ready at any moment to send out shoots, because not only are they a possibility, indeed a marginal possibility — and certainly a paradoxical solution to impoverishment — but they also prove to be without any doubt the only possibility for a large number of unemployed women.

We should stress the paradoxical nature of these mini-formations, which prevent the material and moral ruin of a social group by giving some protection to women who are unemployed. Moreover, there are significant psychological consequences: an end to the state of apathy, the will to overcome defeat, the vanquishing of fear and a miserable sense of inferiority, the rejection of humility, a reaction against domestic stereotypes, the discovery of moral strength, awareness and a sense of dignity regardless of educational and social status, the awakening of the imagination, and the reconquest of joy.

Beyond these obvious gains, we should take note of what J. K. Galbraith suggests by way of future prospects, a just proposal that seeks to re-establish a balance that has long been lost:

What is less evident, given the former discrimination against women, is the fact that educational establishments, and particularly universities and vocational education centers, have the obligation for a certain length of time to discriminate in favor of women. To do otherwise is to perpetuate the discrimination of the past.<sup>4</sup>

Does the enthusiasm invested in mini-microprojects composed of bits and pieces, with only a hope of becoming more than temporary, lead to prejudice against women and girls who might be called to other occupations and destinies by virtue of their intelligence and intellectual education? The unemployed women engaged in this type of enterprise come from all backgrounds and have varying gifts; some are too old to consider taking new qualifications or pursuing other occupations demanding further study, and others have

limited ability to develop to the limits of their job. But the rest are at risk of being held back and postponing a viable decision. The danger is that of a type of self-discrimination through the sapping of young strength, confined within small-scale, improvised and temporary activities designed to meet a crisis, and hence short-term but with immediate effect. The threat hiding behind the beneficial aspect of these transitional solutions is the abandonment of higher education, of an intellectual career and the future prospects advocated by J. K. Galbraith.

The social paradox of these mini-micro business projects is that they offer salvation to many unemployed women, but at the same time, drag down the most gifted of them. However, the probable short-term nature of such microprojects and their limited coverage can also be seen as factors which preserve strength, protecting the unemployed against idleness, psychic and moral exploitation, and keeping them fit for broader and more complex activities while they wait for better times.

### **The Practical Effect of Mini-Microprojects**

Having made these theoretical observations, let us turn to the practical effects of the mini-microprojects. Rural and urban microenterprises provide an alternative to the severe crisis of employment affecting women's lives in our country, an alternative which starts from almost zero, relying on its own resources rather than external aid, foreign capital or state investment. But while it is easy to start in this way, it is far from certain that enterprises will develop similarly in the future. When the time comes to ask for bank loans and investment at preferential rates, can these improvised businesses designed to suit unemployed women transform themselves into organized private workshops which both produce goods and provide a promise of lasting activity?

We should not deceive ourselves. As shock solutions which bring some productive activity back to life, rural and urban microenterprises cannot long function without additional input: possible "sponsors", selected suppliers, experienced book-keepers, a feel for the market, advertising, marketing, research into the tourist industry and export outlets, and all the other humdrum but necessary aspects of running a business. We should not forget pension contributions, which will be forcefully demanded and cannot be dismissed by emotional appeals. Under these circumstances, when competitiveness and competence are absolute requirements, the playful insouciance of dilettantes who think they can do things without knowing how quickly vanishes and is always the loser.

### **CONTINUING THE CHOSEN PATH**

It is not a matter of finding reasons for some form of social grouping to continue at any price. We try to give women who have formed a group a

range of knowledge that will enable them to continue on a chosen path, and allow microenterprises some future chance. We believe that only one view of the future will enable them to develop: to transform these modest businesses, which have proved so useful for a time, into workshops producing goods which are of exceptional quality, but which above all excite the imagination, reflect their own times and draw on the myths and symbols of the domestic world. "Mini-microformations" which started as ephemera will be devoted to creating items that are luxurious, not in their opulence or extravagance but in the calm and noble beauty that comes from distant history: "pictorial objects" inspired by an ancient culture, traditionally authentic and imaginatively original. Such workshops cannot be founded on the work of non-specialists.

Everyone involved must feel sympathy with the women who will strive to be the creators of these items. More importantly, the "teachers" who will carry out the documentation in museums and libraries and the research into ways of teaching, should feel an empathetic commitment. It must be stressed that the learning to learn formula has a double meaning and requires the application and development of the concept of action research.

In our circumstances, there may be both a historical and a contemporary relationship between action and research, which may change perspective, research being included in simultaneous and subsequent action. Left to chance, mini-microenterprises will quickly disintegrate. If they are designed as an activity that is continually supported by research which assesses the strength of its internal capabilities and suggests ways forward, however, they will resist all the upheavals of the present day.

## Our Three Areas of Action-Research

There are three areas in which women's "science" remains a traditional occupation. These customary areas are still closed to large-scale industrial exploitation. They require not only a love of rigour and diligence, but also the ability to distinguish the true from the false, and the gift of discovery and of adding subtle nuances, minor inventions that will influence the savour of our times.

The volunteers of the Women's Organization of the RSDP have developed an action programme in three areas which might be attractive to all women. These are in the field of minor arts. The first requires a gift for shapes and colours. The second demands good taste, in the figurative and the literal sense. The third demands common sense and good humour.

### 1. Dressmaking

The art of dressmaking belongs in the first area. Dressmaking, which has been practised in rural parts of our country in the maternal line for centuries, to embellish the everyday and festive clothing of family members, old and

young, and to make magnificent ceremonial clothes, was learned by all the girls who dreamed of filling their linen chests as young wives. The ornamentation of clothes and cloth will still be dominated by the sense of proportion, the harmonization of colours, and the linking of geometric shapes with rare designs of flowers and animals.

## 2. Culinary Art

The second area, of extremely ancient traditional usage, and in which good taste was passed from mother to daughter, learned and cultivated in the vast kitchens of yesteryear, is the culinary art. For centuries, it was women's pride and joy, from princesses to peasants, to be able to hold open house and to honour their guests by offering them the dishes of traditional Romanian cooking, which are unique, refined and well-seasoned, and a marvellous combination of the four basic flavours of taste.

## 3. Elegance of objects

The third area rests in the closed elegance of objects, an art perpetuated throughout the centuries by the ornamental scribes, painters and sculptors of Romanian villages and later taken up by town-dwellers. There was a sort of school for everyone, a continuation of the former boarding schools of the Romanian 18th century, leading to the grace and good manners which ruled in the minuscule workshops of the 19th century up until the years of the Belle Époque. These were places where everyone went to buy and offer presents, romantic and ingenious accessories, remembering the words of La Bruyère: "Manners are often what decides whether men think well of you or ill."

# Research to Rediscover the Past

## Fabrics and Embroidery

The *action* of restoring a social status to unemployed women is linked to the research undertaken in the areas mentioned. Twill overalls with fine lace collars of embroidered silk, school uniforms embroidered with gold and silver thread, "wild and desolate places" with sumptuous dishes, and the wit and seamliness of choice gifts — there is a long road ahead. But it will be a yet longer road to reach original shapes and designs, by way of painstaking research to rediscover the past, and ending in the distant "enchanted places" of Romanian tradition, both noble and peasant. We shall again take up the ancient craft of weaving on hand-loom, and our workshops will provide woollen, linen, hempen and natural silk cloth, raw, bleached and dyed, with the fabric matched to the vegetable colours extracted from leaves and bark, herbs and petals: madder root for red, alder bark for black, meadow saffron for yellow, and red cabbage leaves for a soft grey-mauve. The shades of the cloth and of the silk and woollen embroidery threads will harmonize with the

colours of the countryside, with antique wood, and old rustic terracotta pottery in ochre, brown and black, according to the unwritten laws of old peasant traditions. We believe in a resurgence of archaic technology. Thus, the women of our country will once again want small-clothes of bobbin guipure, "spider's web" lace, black and white petit-point embroidery on a linen or natural silk ground, fine soft sheets of woven white lambswool decorated with wide red, brown and black borders. Nowhere else in the world did the art of dressmaking experience such a flowering, which was due to an imaginary return to the past of the Thousand and One Nights in the era of excessive luxury termed "Byzantium after Byzantium" by the historian Nicolae Iorga, when an extremely refined form of Byzantine art was the predominant style in our palaces. The works of art of medieval public buildings are to be found on the walls of our monasteries. Artistic embroideries in gold, pearls and silver on cloth of peacock velvet and satin, brocade and taffeta, and fine hand-worked tapestries with the canvas entirely covered by scenes in wool and silk, gold and silver thread, shall once again see the light of day. Tapestry and embroidery are no longer "lost arts".

## Culinary Arts and Cuisine

It would be a delectable adventure to put ancient recipes back into use, and to revive old culinary habits. It could be extremely attractive to carry out thorough research into all the fabulous recipes that Romanian writers noted in their works between the 16th and the 19th century, unexpected gems in old almanacs, cookery books, family archives and among hand-written letters and manuscripts. And into extremely old indigenous recipes such as marinades of game, served up with the great pomp of solemn feasts. This is a learned gastronomy, in which the strong spices and aromas of the Orient meet the fresher and finer flavours and savours of the region: thus the cuisine of monastic origins which can be found in nunneries, vegetarian cuisine of great refinement in which aubergines, mushrooms, cauliflower and tender courgettes ("priest's bonnet") are allied with wild thyme, tarragon and the piquant savour of the red berries of the alkegenji ("love in a cage").

Romanian cuisine is full of theatricality. Let us imagine the true spectacle of the "lamb of the *hayduks*" (bandits), which used to be cooked whole, in a clearing, in burning ashes, or a royal dish such as trout or salmon trout grilled or smoked over a slow fire of pine needles, among the trees, in a "scenic setting", and taking the place of honour at open-air feasts in the mountains. Or again, the secret, forgotten recipes, and those kept with care and handed down from generation to generation, recipes of noble families and once prepared at the courts of the *voyvods* and princes, such as "*cozonac*", which is as ancient as the great Breton cake, the *Gâteau des rois*, and is an enormous sweet loaf like a giant opera hat with raisins and crushed hazel nuts, the preparation of which proceeded like a sacred rite; or, of course, the very special recipe

for “*doulchaz*”, a unique confection of flowers and fruits, white acacia flowers and wild strawberries, so beloved of all the foreigners who crossed through our land; the bitter “*doulchaz*” of black wild cherries or fresh green walnuts; and again, that of white Baragan melon, flavoured with heliotrope and peppered mint water.

## The Productions of Small Workshops

We now come to the small workshops of the 19th century. We note with some astonishment that such a shop still existed in the 1940s in Buzau, perhaps the last, run by two gentle maidens who were well advanced in years and very discreet. In the previous century, these “places of presents”, as they were called, offered a wide range of rare objects in every town, and we intend to take some ideas from among them.

For example: hand-painted miniatures, agreeable water-colour scenes, pen colour-wash drawings, pastel landscapes and figures, silhouette pictures in black, grey and pink, cut like lace and all made to order from sittings and accompanied by a few specially composed “souvenir” verses, artistically written by hand in Romanian, French, Italian and German, or by old adages, witty sayings or prayers. Or, calendars and picture frames, painted cards and bookmarks, lace fans, silk, velvet and glass-bead flowers, sachets of lavender and jasmin, delicate and evocative little objects in profusion. And finally, love letters, letters of condolence, declarations of friendship, congratulations and invitations to baptisms, engagements and weddings, written to order with a hint of irony or solemn piety, sometimes in verse, real poems also written by hand on fine white, pink and blue paper, decorated with gilt letters or even stylised illumination inspired by originals in religious books, chronicals, old manuscripts and bedside books. Research in libraries and museums is only just beginning.

So, by rediscovering the past and by letting the imagination wander where it will, useful, sensible items that are simple and elegant may become almost art forms and be transformed into pictorial objects. Even though the results will vary and be unforeseeable, such attempts must be made if only to overcome apathy, uncertainty and mistrust.

## Reviving Cultural Heritage: The Concept of Action Culture

After the void in our traditional cultural history ushered in and maintained by communism, after the degeneration and cultural distortions perpetrated by a totalitarian policy towards images and words, towards the symbols of art, and towards the noesis and concepts of the conscience, and after the pretence of creating a blithely innovative substitute culture, it is of the greatest importance for us at the present time in our history to institute

the reverse process of regeneration: a process of fundamental rebirth, through the regeneration of the broken links with the past which will restore to us our roots, so that we do not walk forward into the future in a void, and do not come crashing down or walk on air like puppets.

The substance of our cultural heritage, in part destroyed, ruined or lost, in part damaged or rendered mysterious, has still been preserved in very varied social milieux, from the simplest peasant community to the elites. In any society, "culture is both conservative and creative".<sup>5</sup> The concept of "action culture" formulated by P. H. Chombart de Lauwe is abstracted from a phenomenon that takes place in the life of every society, from a series of processes occurring in visible transformations and in turn actively affecting those transformations of personalities, social groups and life. But in a society which has had to suffer the inexorable destruction of a totalitarian regime, the phenomenon of "action culture" means slowing down and stopping for long periods. In these circumstances, the transformation and invention of forms and visions in what is done at present must pursue the renaissance of cultural models of the past.

### **Strengthening Bridges to the Past**

From now on, we have to strengthen the bridges we have already built to the past and bring alive the continuity of a spiritual tradition which still relies too much on mental processes and not enough on pictorial objects made by women's hands, naive perhaps, but concealing life as if by magic and keeping a continuity in their substance. The unchanging cultural models, contained in and given meaning by the ancient symbols, images, visions and the tiniest details of the minor arts of domestic family and community life, sacred and profane, are the living roots that will allow us to put our traditional culture back together.

For us, in our current rural and urban microenterprise projects, the concept of "action culture" will for a time mean recovering and selecting motifs, themes, models and designs that have long been known and kept in the memory, the subconscious, the shade. It is not a question of going backwards or of an exaggerated taste for all the things of the past, but of once again taking possession of an ancestral inheritance by returning to the true and beautiful sources of our spiritual identity.

However salutary it may be, the first step is to learn to choose what is right at the moment in a state of crisis. We have to learn to abandon stop-gap measures because of the danger of a new immobility built on modesty and even humility (there is so much to learn!). The time has come to learn to conduct action research, to find the culture of the past once more through action research and, after the years of communion with our own dazzling spiritual culture of old which lie ahead of us, to learn finally to operate an *action culture*. Then, *we shall learn to make choices for the long term.*

### Notes

1. The Buzau experiment was designed and implemented by the senior teachers Nicolina Stoian and Zenovia Dudu, members of the Romanian Social Democratic Party, to whom we offer our sincere thanks for the report they wrote on the subject.
2. Galbraith, John Kenneth. *Economics and the Public Purpose* (Romanian edition, *Stiinta economică si interesul public*, p. 300), Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.
3. Schneider, Bertrand. Report of the Club of Rome: *La Révolution aux pieds nus* (Romanian edition, *Revoluția desculților*, pp. 41-42), Arthème Fayard, 1985.
4. Galbraith, John Kenneth. *Economics and the Public Purpose* (Romanian edition, *Stiinta economică si interesul public*, p. 306), Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.
5. Chombart de Lauwe, Paul-Henry. *La culture et le pouvoir* (Romanian edition, *Cultura si puterea*, p. 117), Editions Stock, 1975. (See also chapter 5: "Les ruptures de la civilisation et la culture-action (Contre le matérialisme élémentaire et l'idéalisme naïf)").



## **SECTION THREE**

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### **Four Global Basic Education Experiences with Differing Intervention Strategies**

# **Chapter Seven**

## **A COMMUNITY APPROACH TO BASIC EDUCATION**

Patricia Ahern  
Association for Community Based Education  
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### **THE ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY BASED EDUCATION**

The Association for Community Based Education (ACBE) was founded in 1976 as a national network of community based educational institutions. These institutions are independent, non-profit organizations that have evolved within low-income communities and operate outside the publicly supported education system. They are locally controlled, with community people on their governing boards. They are committed to offering education and development programs that benefit both the individual learner and the community as a whole.

Like its members, ACBE was created through the collective action of its constituency. During 1974-1976, representatives of 25 community based educational institutions met to share their concerns about conditions in their communities and to discuss their desire for strong leadership to support local development. They represented mostly low-income people from around the United States including the farming and coal mining communities of the Southeast and Appalachia, farmworker labour camps and the barrios of the West, rural New England, and inner city neighbourhoods in the East.

These organizations were working toward a common goal: To develop indigenous leadership and to empower their communities to determine their own futures. A common agenda was soon developed based on their needs. At the time, issues of recognition and legitimacy were important, and the articulation of a conceptual framework of community based educational practice was emphasized. There were also clear needs for greater interaction among the groups and for financial and technical support, including training for professional development and capacity building.

Since its formation in 1976, ACBE has brought together over 100 member organizations, including two and four year colleges, adult education and literacy programs, economic development organizations, multi-service agencies, and a wide variety of community action programs. Its members serve over 225,000 individuals annually, in 40 states and the District of Columbia. ACBE's programs reflect both the diversity of interests and common needs of its members.

## **THE COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH TO EDUCATION AND WORK**

Community based education, whether practised in basic literacy training, at the community college level, or in conjunction with economic development programs at the grass-roots level, is an effective and powerful means of both individual and community development. In the communities where ACBE members live and work, the community based educational organization is often the catalyst for local action to improve community life and bring about social change. Participants in ACBE member educational programs are increasingly visible in positions of leadership in these communities.

## **LITERACY INITIATIVES**

Over the last 15 years there has been a major transformation in this nation's understanding of and commitment to adult literacy. For community based providers, it has produced both recognition and legitimacy, but also tremendous demands to meet expectations as the most effective organizations reaching and teaching those most in need. At the same time, the needs of the field have changed rapidly. The burden on educators and practitioners to develop new and innovative ways to support community based programs has grown.<sup>1</sup>

As the dimensions of this nation's illiteracy problem have become more apparent, the level of concern and activity in the field has increased. Policies and programs have been launched, studies have been done, state and national level commissions have been appointed, and a public awareness

campaign designed to recruit volunteers and channel people into literacy training programs has been undertaken.

These efforts are guided by the premise that illiteracy is a major handicap that affects both the individual, the community and the society in which we live. Correcting it will open new vistas and opportunities, and facilitate moving toward a more self-reliant and productive life. In reality, in poor communities where joblessness, lack of services, inadequate housing, discrimination and lack of access to education create a climate of powerlessness and despair, illiteracy is only one of many problems facing the individual and the community. Learning to read and write may produce personal pride and satisfaction, but it alone will do little to break the cycle of poverty.

Community based programs approach literacy training as part of a larger effort to empower individuals and their communities to improve their economic condition and quality of life. Literacy has social, economic, political, as well as educational dimensions. Literacy, self-esteem, self-determination, and the ability to affect educational change in the community are bound together. Community based literacy programs take place in action-oriented settings that allow literacy to develop in the context of the learners' whole lives.

Several factors have contributed to the success of these efforts in particular to serve the "hardest-to-reach".<sup>2</sup> Community based institutions themselves have learned to do a lot with little. They channel limited resources to priority needs and focus on attainable objectives. They have been able to experiment with innovative techniques and methodologies in their education work, establish exemplary programs, and develop strategies and models that have made significant contributions to the field of adult literacy.<sup>3</sup>

## LITERACY AND WORK

Among the primary economic strategies of the current U.S. administration are job creation, worker training and retraining, welfare-to-work and school-to-work initiatives. Existing job training programs are being restructured and expanded, and greater coordination among federal departments (e.g. Education, Labour, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development) and state agencies is taking place. At the same time, there is a strong interest in the work of community based programs and, for the first time in a long while, a greater understanding of their capacity and potential to lead some of the new national priorities for education, skill training and job creation.

In this context, it is important that community based organizations who are at the forefront of working with those populations most in need, be prepared to demonstrate and promote effective programs and practices, particularly alternative programs that not only enhance employability, but empower workers to shape their own destinies in their own communities and in a new U.S. workplace.

These programs also tend to incorporate, in addition to basic job skills development, subjects such as worker rights, occupational safety and health issues, understanding of the economic and social forces affecting employment and job creation, the global economy, and new options for job creation. They operate in the belief that effective restructuring of the U.S. economy can only take place with the full participation of the work force. Community based programs are developing creative strategies that will strengthen the capacity of grass-roots, community based organizations to design their own socio-economic initiatives as alternatives to the existing employment market.

A major challenge for community based organizations in the United States is how to effectively prepare low-income and educationally disadvantaged youth and adults for employment in communities where there are limited career and employment opportunities. The conditions programs face in trying to create jobs and prepare people for meaningful work are complex and require a particular response on the part of practitioners, educators and development planners.

## **The Community Based Approach**

Community based organizations are developing new ways of linking education and employment. Adult learners are involved in researching local job training systems and labour markets and assessing ways of changing local policies and programs. Some organizations are adding components to existing job training programs that will enable participants to develop new knowledge and skills so they can be stronger advocates for themselves and their co-workers in work environments which may not be unionized. Several groups are designing educational programs which prepare adults to enter and successfully complete training for entry-level employment in the health and medical fields. Others are looking for ways to strengthen their control and effective participation in the parallel labour market.

Community organizations have sought to develop stronger links between employment training and adult literacy for people on public assistance, women, out-of-school youth, older workers, immigrant workers and people with disabilities. They have developed models for utilizing the resources of various federal programs such as the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and the Job Training and Basic Skills programs of the Department of Labour, welfare reform programs at the Department of Health and Human Services, and the public housing and homeless programs at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. More importantly, they are creating action-oriented ways of combining these and other similar programs with new strategies that promote community empowerment and long term development.

Traditional job training and/or workplace literacy programs assume that employers know what skills people need. Programs are then geared to provide the technical training and/or skills acquisition that will meet these needs. In contrast, the community based organizations involved in this

project have looked specifically at what it means to prepare people for work in our communities. They are concerned with addressing additional kinds of issues in their programs, such as getting people to identify their own skills and abilities, finding out what technical skills people need and providing opportunities for people to develop them. Community based programs deal with issues related to what is holding them back from getting a job, the need for increased self-esteem, eliminating their fear of the workplace, and developing the technical tools needed to do job searches, interviewing and other job related tasks.

A community based approach to preparing people for work is based on a set of assumptions. These assumptions have helped focus the work of these organizations in developing alternative educational initiatives that realistically respond to the needs of their communities.

- **Community groups** have begun to identify how the practice of work has changed and what alternative educational approaches and practices need to be created in order to effectively respond to the needs of grass-roots, community based organizations;
- **Organizations** are using participatory action research to identify the work related needs in the community and encouraging people to get involved in the process of developing their own meaningful productive work;
- Practitioners in these organizations have begun to identify alternative educational policies, goals and corresponding ways of preparing people for long-term employability, not just a single job. This involves looking at participatory educational strategies and methodologies that deal with literacy, program improvement, continuing education and training opportunities within the community itself; and
- Programs have begun to respond with strategies that build capacity in low income communities and allow participants to develop socio-economic initiatives that more directly meet their employment needs.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In 1993 ACBE began supporting a group of 12 community based member organizations whose primary focus was developing literacy and education as a tool for responding in alternative ways to the work and employment crisis in their communities.

The ACBE study was based on the principles of **Participatory Action Research (PAR)**. Participatory which assume that participants play a role in setting the agenda of inquiry, participate in data collection as well as the analysis of that data, and have control over the use of outcomes from the process. The shape of the knowledge base available to community based organizations for decision-making is determined by the questions that are asked to develop that knowledge base. Since the questions asked are a direct expression of the values, assumptions and beliefs of those posing the questions, the knowledge base will also reflect those values, only answering questions that are consistent with those values. Therefore, being actively

involved in creating that knowledge base through asking questions based on our own values and beliefs gives participants greater power to shape their future.

Community based programs are seeking to develop strategies that address the following **key issues**:

1. What happens when basic skills education is connected to employment and broader issues of self actualization and empowerment?
2. How do we create economic development strategies which promote economic self-sufficiency and not just create minimum wage jobs?
3. How do we create employment that uses the experience, knowledge and skills of local residents?
4. What should literacy education and training programs include to prepare people for long term employability?
5. How do we build programs that provide group and individual support to participants so they are more confident about leaving the "security" of community based programs and making the transition to the workplace when necessary?
6. How can our communities provide education that enhances employability or leads to training and employment at a living wage, while strengthening the ability of people to defend their rights and dignity as workers and to participate fully in shaping the workplace so that it meets their needs?
7. How can community based education programs strengthen their own capacity to effectively use participatory and collaborative learning strategies to effect change in relation to education for work?
8. What alternative methodologies can be developed to insure the participation of workers as learners and decision-makers in designing their own learning process?
9. How can we collect information (participatory action research) that will document and assess this process, reflecting in particular on the benefits of long-term education over short-term skills training? How can we document these approaches in ways which can contribute to the development of program models, educational materials, and training curricula for the field?

Discussed below are profiles of two of the twelve organizations and the specific areas in relation to education and work they have focused on during the course of this project. Both organizations have been implementing some particular aspect of participant action research in regard to issues of literacy and work. It is their cumulative knowledge and experience in the field that serves as a basis for examining the changes which occur at the local level in the culture, environment and organization of work. Our objective in this process is to determine what is successful and why, what does not work, what changes need to be made, and what further research needs to be done in developing meaningful strategies and alternatives for linking education and work in the context of community based program goals and needs.<sup>4</sup>

## **INTERNATIONAL LADIES' GARMENT WORKERS UNION WORKER-FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM, NEW YORK**

The Worker-Family Education Program began in 1985 when the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), along with 6 other unions, formed the Consortium for Worker Education (CWE). Recognizing the failure of existing adult education services to provide access to working people of New York City, especially immigrants, the CWE took up the challenge to create an alternative. The CWE has grown to include the adult education programs of 22 unions. The ILGWU is a national union with a long history of involvement in worker education.

Students in the ILGWU's program are immigrants and garment workers. The U.S. garment industry has always attracted immigrant workers. Early immigrants in the industry came from Eastern Europe, but now the majority are from China, South and Central America, and the Caribbean. Most are union members. Some are the families of union members. Their ages range from 16 to 65 years. Some of the students have been living in the New York area for some time, but have limited exposure to English at home or at work. Most work in garment factories as machine operators. Their educational backgrounds vary, ranging from early elementary school to college.

The goal of the Worker-Family Education Program is to build leadership skills so that workers can better address their problems and create alternative ways of responding to the crisis of work in their communities. Classes are rooted in the context of work, even though the vast majority of the classes are not within the workplace. The pedagogy used is participatory and student-centred and tries to foster critical thinking by using problem-posing techniques. Issues that emerge within the classes centre around the workplace because students are garment workers, many of whom are union members. Many of the students are recently arrived immigrants who are entering a precarious work climate, one where shop closings are on the increase as factories move to places with cheaper labour costs.

Sixty different classes are offered. Except for a GED and a College Preparation class, all the programming is English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL). Eight of the classes combine the learning of language with the learning of garment skills - such as patternmaking and the operation of special sewing machines. While most classes take place in the community centres, there are two ESL classes that take place within a knitting factory, Mademoiselle, in Brooklyn, NY. Mademoiselle has a multicultural and multilingual work force, mostly Latino and Chinese, and is in the process of reorganizing and restructuring production processes. English is taught using a curriculum that attempts to assure that workers participate and advocate for themselves in this reorganizing process.



## Program Activities

The Worker-Family Education Program curriculum is centred around the issues that students consistently bring to class: worker and immigrant rights, shop closings and layoffs, union and industry structure, the global economy, as well as cultural and linguistic conflicts. English is viewed as a tool to enable workers to advocate for themselves in the workplace, in the union and in the community.<sup>5</sup>

The project proposed to do so in the following ways:

- **Leadership Development:** includes the formation of leadership groups, developing advocacy and organizing skills; improving communication and public speaking abilities; organizational skills such as running a meeting, organizing a student council; group dynamics, cultural diversity, and understanding various leadership styles appropriate to their situations.
- **Consciousness Raising:** regarding the ILGWU Union and union workers: learning about needs of garment workers and how the union addresses them, discussing, analysing and learning about union issues and campaigns, contracts and constitution, developing union political action strategies and methods, developing strategies that lead to building a democratic and active union program, educating teachers about the union, organizing and workers' rights as content in the classroom, understanding the history of the union and union organizing in the U.S. and analysing the role of workers in the context of the global economy and the economy of their local community.
- **English Skills Acquisition:** including reading, writing and grammar, vocabulary building skills, pronunciation and conversation enhancement for use in the context of both work and life skills.

Six full time teachers have been using a collaborative model for program development. Students participate in decision-making by providing input into the curriculum building process. Student elected student councils work with teachers to collect data and develop a curriculum by going out into the community and conducting action research. Teachers and students have been able to visit garment shops, attend community events, discuss union and industry structures and their place in the global economy.

The strength of this educational process lies in the staff development that the project provides. The teacher training component consists of developing models for problem-posing techniques, designing ways to explore workplace issues within the classroom, all with the goal of developing and implementing a learner centred pedagogy, which brings a much needed participatory workplace perspective to educational programs for immigrant workers in New York City. The staff has developed a guide, set within a Friirian methodological framework, to help teachers facilitate classroom discussions that identify workplace problems and experiences, analyze those problems within a larger context, and develop strategies that lead to action for change.

Students and teachers together have formed an education committee that meets regularly to debate and clarify pedagogical issues. Many of the students who initiated this project now participate in classes within the

program that focus on preparing people to work in the field of education. Three were recently hired to work as student-teachers in the program. They work closely with teachers in the classroom and participate in staff development meetings and planning sessions. Their work has helped to break down the traditional student-teacher role in the classroom and the barriers to learning that are frequently present in formal educational settings. Their contribution to the program planning, implementation and evaluation process has been invaluable.

## **Results**

The program has successfully implemented a learner centred approach to education, one which places major emphasis on maximum student participation in the decision-making, development, and implementation of the class, including defining the curriculum to be used. The participatory classroom practices used in this setting have enabled students to become involved in other areas of union activity, further preparing them to advocate on their own behalf. This model is unique in the context of a U.S. union.

The process of the ILGWU Worker-Family Education program sought to help build a collaboration between union activists and student/workers who are active volunteers at the ILGWU workers' centres located in three communities in the New York city area. This "change agent curriculum" has helped to shape the workplace. By using a participatory action research process, students played an active role in providing empowering education that enabled them to take part in building a more democratic and active union in their communities.

Student workers went out into the community and into workplaces in the garment district. They interviewed workers, organizers, factory managers and owners. In the process they gathered relevant information via written interviews, recorded oral testimony, and case studies; produced a video of a skit workers wrote and performed, and collected photographs and drawings. Striking workers were interviewed and photographed on the picket line. Student/worker interviewers spoke at various community events and celebrations, student council meetings, staff meetings, and union organizing membership meetings where they continually gathered documentation that was used to further develop their educational language program.<sup>6</sup>

Those student workers who participated in the program became critically aware of the larger context of their ESL classes, for example the union, the garment industry, the community in which they live and work, and the global economy of which they are a part. They became more aware of and skilled in the methodology of a participatory action research effort that helped them learn to improve their skills at working in groups, interviewing and public speaking, and becoming involved in a collective problem-solving process around the crisis of work in their community.

In doing so, they learned most from the ideas and actions of their co-workers. Participants who went to the picket lines to interview other workers were not only changed by this experience, but in the process demonstrated their solidarity with the striking workers. The presence of project interviewers on the streets in the garment district of New York made a strong impression on unorganized garment workers, many of whom asked for more information and, as a result, later joined the union.

More importantly, the participants were empowered by participating in defining the objectives of their own learning. They achieved greater autonomy in response to the crisis of work in their communities.

When the project's coordinator, Maureen La Mar, was asked what she learned from conducting this project, she responded:

I was reminded again of the good sense of some basic elements of the kind of education we are aiming for: involving learners in program design, learning by doing, collective problem solving among peers, the value of using materials from real life rather than from a textbook. I was reminded also of the many creative forms "labour action" can take and that the most powerful resource the labour movement has in a path towards justice and growth in our communities is the workers themselves.<sup>7</sup>

## COMMUNITY WOMEN'S EDUCATION PROJECT (CWEP) PHILADELPHIA

Since 1977 the Community Women's Education Project (CWEP) has been providing a continuum of quality education programs, from literacy through college courses, for low-income women in the Kensington community of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While this traditionally blue collar community was previously supported by manufacturing and industry, economic recession brought high unemployment and other socio-economic difficulties that have produced acute conditions of poverty.

CWEP's participants are single heads of households, primarily mothers who are recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and reflect the multicultural environment of the community: 48 percent African American, 42 percent White, 8 percent Latina and 2 percent Asian. CWEP is dedicated to providing adult education for women whose needs were not being met by traditional schooling.

The average CWEP student has no high school diploma, few job qualifications, and little knowledge of how the academic or business world works. When they first come to CWEP, some cannot fill out an application form. Others struggle along at a fifth grade reading level. Most have a history of work, but in a series of low skill, low wage jobs that have kept them trapped in poverty. The majority have enrolled in training programs that are authoritarian and "top down", job oriented rather than focused on careers, and have failed to give them useful long term skills. Many have defaulted on student loans, having been taken in by these kinds of training programs. Most face

family and community resistance to education and pressure to drop out and “just get a job”, which they find difficult to resist.<sup>8</sup>

In the *ideal* world of job training, both the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and the Family Support Act through Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) provide the route and pave the way to self-sufficiency by providing the education and training that supposedly will move low-income individuals into jobs. In the *real* world, determining the path to economic self-determination is complex and difficult.

Most programs in Philadelphia and other U.S. cities offer short term job training, no long range goal setting, and no analysis of the available jobs that will pay real wages. The irony is that welfare recipients are faulted for not wanting jobs, and not wanting training. They are stereotyped as lazy because the system does not track their efforts through time. The basic assumption underlying job training of this sort and the new so-called welfare reforms is that the poor have not worked and that training will result in a job, both of which are false assumptions.

CWEP is responding to this situation by providing an alternative perspective in their belief that long term education and comprehensive support services will best prepare disadvantaged women to successfully meet the challenges they face in determining the appropriate route for self-determination. CWEP not only gives students training which helps them get jobs, but has developed a participatory process that builds their commitment to more long term education. Participants who begin with the need for basic literacy skills go on to continue their education, often ending up with a college degree. The organization accomplishes these results by adhering to a unique mission which states that the path to self-sufficiency for low-income, disadvantaged women does not lead through short term “quick fix” job training. Rather, it is through long term education that true self-sufficiency and real empowerment can be achieved.

Motivating students to set their sights on long term goals in the face of so many immediate needs and disadvantages requires a unique kind of organizational culture. The key to CWEP’s success is a highly participatory and articulated organizational culture that is shared at all levels, including board, staff and students. CWEP encourages students to take control of their own learning, become active participants in designing their own educational program, develop a strong sense of community and build leadership skills through their education. CWEP provides access for these women to educational opportunities in a culturally familiar, community based setting with the goal of increasing their employability as well as enabling them to improve the conditions of their lives and shape their own future.

## Program Activities

CWEP offers a number of specific educational programs. The **Workstart Program** is the “soul” of the organization. In this “welfare to work” program,

women develop their own learning in the context of working on reading, writing, communications or maths skills, find out about the world of work and engage in meaningful career planning. The program enrolls 175 students each year, and provides basic skills acquisition, computer literacy, and career exploration through an interdisciplinary, student centred curriculum. Student outcomes in this program have been consistently positive. Retention rate averages 75 percent. Eighty-two percent of those who completed the program were single parents with two to three children, and all had incomes below \$10,000.

CWEP's **College Program** is a fully accredited first year college program linked with the Community College of Philadelphia. Students who qualify take their first community college courses on site at CWEP. Approximately 350 students annually attend these classes, either during the day or in the evening program. The Program is much more than a site for community college classes. CWEP has worked to integrate college courses into their organizational goals, objectives and approach to adult education. The availability of college classes on site encourages women who have never considered going to college to envision this as a possibility for themselves. This is most strikingly apparent in the large number of Workstart students who begin simply wanting to develop basic skills, who then continue on and enrol in college classes.

CWEP's **Computer Enhanced Evening Literacy Program** gives students an opportunity to further strengthen basic skills and provides job training in microcomputer skills application programs, with a concentration on vocational skills training. A student operated computer service bureau has in the past provided computer services such as word processing to small businesses in the area. The program encountered difficulties due to staffing and management problems. CWEP offers a summer computer camp for over 100 hardest to reach youth and provides various on-site support services to students including childcare, counselling and family literacy.

## **Challenging Welfare Myths: Demonstrating Welfare to Work**

CWEP programs have always sought to redefine traditional welfare to work programs that provide short term training and quickly move participants off welfare, with little regard for their chances at finding meaningful permanent employment at a living wage. Since 1986, CWEP has been collecting anonymous surveys about the education, training and employment backgrounds of its learners. With this information CWEP began to acquire the tools needed to challenge the familiar myths that women on welfare don't work and that they do not want training.

One of CWEP's activities that successfully demonstrates this process is a participatory research project entitled "Demonstrating Welfare to Work". It

was begun in 1993 by 34 CWEP JOBS participants who were self-selected into a process designed to allow students to analyze the relationship between short term job training, public assistance and employment history. Twenty of the women interviewed were African-American, seven were white, six were Latina, and one was Asian-American. The average age of the participants was 30, and the women had, on average, 2.5 children each.

Students began collecting data on their own history regarding public assistance, job training and employment by creating a timeline of their life experiences. They performed a cost-benefit analysis on their previous training and welfare histories to determine the true amount of dollars spent in "reducing the welfare rolls". They then contrasted this data with similar cost-benefit data of successful participants who have gained employment through long term training. This action on the part of the participants has served to inform and strengthen CWEP's advocacy efforts as part of a local campaign to change Pennsylvania welfare policy as it relates to the JOBS program.

The results of the survey done by the participants, became the basis for analysis and discussion in class about welfare reform and the effect of short term job training on creating self sufficiency in relation to work. The survey showed that of the 34 women participants:

- 33 had previously worked a cumulative total of 106 jobs.
- Only 27 percent of the jobs offered benefits, and only two paid between \$8 and \$9 per hour which was the highest wage recorded.
- Of the 33 women working, 28 worked at such low wages that they were still eligible for and were receiving public assistance.
- Of the 34 women surveyed, 21 of them had previously attended 35 training programs, yet only three were able to gain employment in the field they were trained in without continuing to receive welfare subsidies.
- Of the 21 women who had attended training programs, 17 of them had financed their training with student loans and 16 of them were in default on those loans. One woman paid \$34,463 in tuition and still owes \$32,437. Student loans are designed to increase access to meaningful post-secondary training; however, most of the CWEP population are forced to acquire loans for training that essentially resulted in worthless skills training rather than meaningful education."

The study found that these 34 students showed a sincere desire to take advantage of employment and training opportunities available to them. Despite having worked at a total of 106 jobs and attended 35 training programs, all but four women were on welfare at the time of the study. Results showed that many of the women had worked while receiving welfare. The women were unable to free themselves from reliance on welfare because the jobs they were able to obtain paid inadequate wages.

As mentioned, of the 106 jobs held by the women, only two were paid between \$8 and \$9 per hour. The most frequently reported wage was \$4.00-\$4.80 per hour. Full time employment at this wage would offer an income of only \$7,680 to \$9,580 a year, insufficient to support even a small family. All

but one of the students surveyed had at least one child. Additionally, less than one third (27%) of the jobs provided benefits. Those students who are mothers have a very difficult time giving up Medicaid coverage to pursue employment that does not provide health insurance.

In addition to extensive work and training experiences, the women had a history of entering the labour market early, which counters the idea that welfare recipients choose not to work. Many of the women had taken advantage of opportunities to work during their high school years, in summer youth employment programs and/or after school employment. Based on the analysis of their own situations, CWEP students realized that the failure was not necessarily their own, but rather a failure of the system. The result of training and education for the short term, of jobs that don't pay real wages or benefits and an approach to job training that defines the path to self sufficiency is an ever moving treadmill leading nowhere.

## Outcomes

This participatory research process, combined with the women's desire for training and education leading to long term sustainable employment, resulted in students becoming more involved and more articulate as advocates for job training reform in Philadelphia. In Pennsylvania, students enrolled in JOBS and JTPA programs may not receive funding to attend community colleges. However, CWEP and its program participants believe that college is the best option for women seeking full-time, long term employment. The kinds of jobs that these women desire increasingly require high skill levels in reading, writing and maths that can be acquired only through higher levels of education.

In their struggle to make college an option under JOBS and JTPA funding, students have begun telling their stories with more authority and confidence. Several students formed a Speakers' Bureau to inform the press and others interested in their story, the results of the survey project and the state of the welfare training and education system. Students spoke to reporters, legislative representatives and social service workers from the community. They received news coverage and testified at hearings on the new JTPA regulations, taking CWEP's advocacy efforts to the national level.

The awareness gained by the students has led to additional outcomes. A student/ staff written proposal is pending for a grant to support peer counselling and training-of-trainers activities, in partnership with Community Legal Services. Students plan to train other students in the community about issues involving defaulted student loans. The experience of the survey project provided a forum for enhanced confidence and self esteem on the part of students. CWEP has incorporated a new course called Leadership in Community Development into the offered program electives in which students choose issues important to them and learn the tools necessary to organize around those issues.

## Evaluation

We have learned from this process that the road to self determination and employment success is complex and needs to incorporate a variety of options and choices. The CWEP experience demonstrates that it is important to consider the following critical program elements:

- *flexibility* to provide options including services through postsecondary education. College may not be for everyone, but this option may enable some to deal more realistically with the changing requirements of our workforce;
- *future orientation*, taking a hard look at what is possible and at what participants need and want. If nurse's aide is the choice, then additional support is needed to make work pay and access to lifelong learning for future skill upgrades;
- *encouragement* of long-term education and career planning provides a more positive impact on participants' lives. Education programs with curriculums centred around critical thinking and basic skills more effectively move adults into economic self-sufficiency.<sup>10</sup>

Training and education programs that limit choices, training systems that view students as "clients" and that determine what jobs are socially appropriate for them are not training at all, but narrow focus tracking. Job training that blindly tracks low income people into short term "quick fix" programs and even shorter term employment are not viable alternatives. They only succeed in straining the welfare system, stalling the hope of economic self-determination and pushing participants into deeper dependency, hopelessness and despair.

Contrary to public opinion, the women surveyed in the CWEP project demonstrated extensive work and short term job skills training histories and still have been unable to support themselves and their families. It is obvious that they take advantage of the opportunities available to them. Unfortunately, these options are insufficient to meet their needs. What is clear from this research is that programs that encourage long-term education and career planning have a more positive impact on participant's lives and, as a result, lead to greater economic self-sufficiency.

The women at CWEP have not necessarily reshaped their workplace, but have successfully taken that needed first step by committing themselves to a process through which they have acquired new knowledge and skills, enhanced their self-confidence and broadened their sense of future employment possibilities. They have begun to do this by redefining the training they receive for specific jobs and rejecting certain training options because of the lack of job opportunities offered in those areas. They have taken an active role in the process of reforming regulations regarding their job training/education program of choice and have acquired new knowledge and gained valuable confidence in their ability to organize themselves.

CWEP's action research process demonstrates how a community based organization has successfully taken the initiative in response to the need for improving access to training and education programs that enhance



participants' capacity to respond to the labour and employment crisis in their communities. The results of this project strengthened CWEP's position as advocates for access to post secondary education and longer term, meaningful vocational training programs.

CWEP's efforts have played a critical role in the campaign to change current welfare policy in the state of Pennsylvania. Results from these efforts have enhanced CWEP's advocacy work around easing the restrictions of JOBS and JTPA funding regulations and the inclusion of community based organizations in the development of state funding and state programmatic objectives. CWEP's educational program demonstrates that there must be changes in our understanding of good educational policy and practice if we are to support the continuing development of socio-economic alternatives in our communities.

## **USING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TO BUILD ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE**

The major goal of ACBE's Education for Work initiative was to engage twelve community based organizations in efforts to develop innovative and empowering educational strategies for responding to the crisis of unemployment and underemployment in both urban and rural low-income communities in the United States.

The ACBE initiative, as a whole, was a critical response to the growing functionalist perspective about what is being termed a "literacy crisis" and a corresponding decline in U.S. productivity. According to that perspective, the decline in workforce productivity can be attributed to the lack of basic skills among current and more recent entry-level workers. A more critical perspective maintains that the chief cause of U.S. productivity decline is that the workplace has reorganized and U.S. companies have failed to adequately invest in the education and training of hourly workers in the same way they have done with mid and upper level management.

The response to the crisis has been a clarion call to U.S. business and industry to partner with labour, educational institutions, and community based organizations to solve the crisis and "attack illiteracy". The result has been a deluge of "partnership" programs for job training, school-to-work, and workplace literacy, as well as various other community based initiatives that have attempted to link education and employment. Everyone agrees about the importance of linking basic skills education to job training or workforce preparation. But, too often, these programs are narrowly prescribed, defining "literacy" in functional terms, teaching discrete skills and knowledge, and preparing people for short-term jobs. In contrast, what is critically needed are strategies that seek to strengthen communities so people have broader choices about work, including jobs generated by self-initiated economic development projects.

## Strategies That Work

The two case studies of ILGWU and CWEP are illustrative of a process developed and implemented by the other participating organizations. This process is best described as developing the basic educational skills of participants in the context of encouraging people to reflect more critically on their own relationship to work. Each program sought alternative ways of developing strategies related to production, organization, education and communication appropriate to the culture and context of the populations they serve. As a result, organizations began to:

- **Develop strategies** for job creation through participation in non traditional basic skills education and training programs that shape the workplace to meet their educational and employment needs;
- **provide support** for specific populations of need — women who are single heads of households and on public assistance, people with disabilities, at risk youth, immigrant workers, and people from culturally diverse backgrounds seeking employment in the U.S.;
- **empower learners** to speak up for their rights, develop self-esteem, realize their potential for self-employment, acquire leadership and life skills that are transferable in the workplace and in their communities;
- **involve participants** in a participatory action process of researching employment training and education systems that seek to provide alternative options for creating their own jobs and gaining economic independence through self-employment, cooperative ventures or alternative income-generating projects;
- **engage learners** in a process of critical pedagogy based on principles of collaborative learning and participatory education, while developing a critical consciousness that encourages participants to reflect on the nature of the global economy, the organization of the workplace in their community, and the need for greater access to long term training and education;
- **create models** for linking literacy and basic skills needs in an industrialized society to capacity building strategies in marginalized communities undeserved by traditional education efforts; and
- **discover creative ways** to develop new knowledge and skills that enhanced the capacity of community based organizations and communities to create new alternatives in dealing with the crisis of work and employment.

## BARRIERS

Community based organizations that participated in this study were limited in their ability to affect any major socio-economic changes in their local labour markets. Some organizations are engaged in small income-generating enterprises that are part of a larger community based economic development strategy. For example, at CWEP, participants conducted research on their own employment training and welfare experiences and the local labour market, and decided to form their own computer program cooperatives as a means of creating some form of economic alternative. Conflicts

and difficulties often exist in situations such as this, as local people are forced to deal with the realities of the labour market and the conflicting values sometimes present within community based organizations. New patterns of work need to be created in order to confront the difficulties in competing within a capitalist economy. On the whole, participants involved in these programs are not yet at the stage of being able to create their own jobs.

Working people are often forced to leave the community in search of viable alternatives for income generation. In the same way, people living on the edge of poverty are forced to forsake longer term educational options in order to accept short term, low wage employment. Conditions such as lack of access to capital, gender and race discrimination, employment discrimination, and other obstacles continue to exist within the economy and labour market that exclude marginalized groups from fully participating in job creation and economic development efforts. The capacity of community based organizations to support alternative efforts more fully depends on the need for broader changes in the socio-economic structures of the society.

Despite these obstacles, the efforts of community based organizations reflect a strong commitment to reaching those populations most in need and to defending the rights of workers for a democratic workplace that respects multiculturalism. Marginalized low-income groups will be in a stronger position to secure their jobs and participate in developing a more democratic workplace if they have engaged in a more critical investigation of their relationship to work prior to entering the labour market.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The ACBE projects engaged participants in a wide range of diverse educational initiatives. Through participant action research, both youth and adults became involved in a systematic process of creating the knowledge base necessary for developing alternative strategies for responding to the crisis of work. Participatory methodologies such as the student survey and a reflection-action interview process have facilitated the collective creation of new knowledge. With this newly acquired knowledge, participants have gained the confidence needed to pursue action strategies in support of grass-roots initiatives within their communities.

The ACBE project demonstrates that community based organizations can play a leading role in removing some of the educational barriers that exclude marginalized social groups from participating in socio-economic development efforts. Community based organizations can facilitate the development of critical thinking that leads people to take action at the local level to transform their personal and collective situation regarding education and work. But these efforts have not yet gone far enough. What is needed is a broader social commitment to creating and sustaining alternative options that deal with the critical issues of poverty in our communities. Options that develop

from the bottom up rather than from the top down are needed to build local capacity and strengthen local initiatives.

The current debate on welfare reform best illustrates the dilemma faced by these programs. As states are given more control of welfare, growing numbers of women will no longer have the basic material support to participate in programs such as those offered by CWEP. Mandates that welfare recipients find employment in 90 days or lose their grant, mean that faced with a choice of participating in a program like CWEP's or taking a low paying job with no benefits, many women may be forced to give up their opportunity to pursue the type of education which in the long run gives them at least a fair chance at economic independence. Now more than ever, community based organizations need to be involved in developing viable alternatives.

Changes in our understanding of the culture and organization of work have led to new initiatives and a more critical view of the kind of educational policies that are necessary to support these initiatives. However, without the existence of a broader policy that keeps in place a safety net and policies that support human needs — universal health care, affordable quality child care, housing and access to quality education — the possibilities for grassroots participation in developing viable socio-economic alternatives for low-income communities may be totally eclipsed.

While significant efforts have been made on the part of community based organizations to change the nature of the workplace in their respective communities, structures continue to exist within the economy and the labour market that exclude marginalized social groups from participating in socio-economic development efforts. Community based organizations have taken important first steps toward building capacity, organizing and providing opportunities that successfully link education and work, therefore enabling people to participate in the process of determining their own futures.

## **QUESTIONS THAT REMAIN**

As the debate continues in the field of literacy and work, there are key questions that further research efforts must take into account. What ways can research be conducted that will tie job creation to solving community problems, and at the same time engage community residents themselves in the process? Meaningful participant action research strategies involve looking at the experience of local communities and building on that experience. People in community based programs need to be involved in helping shape the research design, as a way of building the knowledge base of the field and improving literacy education. A more in depth understanding of how and why literacy practices vary according to context would help shape the direction of a more authentic literacy education practice.

Community based organizations need to look at ways they come together with organized labour, the business sector, academics and others to look at

the “credentialing” of so many jobs and issues of “employability”, factors that in some ways have kept poor people who lack formal education out of the job market and away from jobs they could in fact do. How can universities forge partnerships with community based organizations to research local labour markets from the point of view of residents — what knowledge, skills, work experience do people have that could be utilized in creating alternative work possibilities?

Given that literacy is defined as a means to important social ends, national policies relating to effective practice need to be based on a clearer determination of what is meant by “literacy”, and how literacy growth can more effectively contribute to meeting human needs.

### Notes

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# **Chapter Eight**

## **A HOLISTIC EDUCATION PROJECT FOR THE GYPSY COMMUNITY OF ARANYOSÁPTI**

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### **ABOUT THE HUNGARIAN GYPSIES (by Agnès Daroczi)**

The Hungarian Gypsy community is in a critical situation today. In every respect the community is extremely influenced by Hungary's economic situation, concerning either the unemployment, social situation, education or the changing values.

During the 1970s, 75 percent of the Gypsies were permanently employed<sup>1</sup>. They tried to catch up with other groups, whose employment rate was close to 90 per cent during the same period of time. By the beginning of the 1990s, 50 percent of Gypsies who were employed had lost their jobs. This figure among the non-Gypsy population is 25 percent.

Educational backwardness, living far from the place of work, and similar sociological aspects can only partially explain the significant divergence. Prejudices again play a determinative factor in this process. The chance of

getting employed as a Gypsy is much slimmer than that among the majority population. Half of Gypsy unemployment cases can be attributed to discrimination. One-third of the inequalities in income between employees with the same qualification also reveals discrimination.

The unemployment rate among the Hungarian Gypsies is 48 percent, while the nation-wide average can be put at 12-13 percent. Romas who had lost their jobs a long time ago think that it is hopeless to find employment again. Fifty-seven percent of Gypsies live under the poverty level, and one-third of the able-bodied Gypsy population has no income at all.

Seventy percent of Roma youth finishes the Hungarian public elementary school obtaining basic education, but less than five percent is admitted to the Hungarian industrial schools thereafter; and less than one percent continues his or her studies in grammar or specialised secondary schools. Meanwhile, secondary education can be said to be common in today's Hungarian society (Ministry of Education Data, 1992/93).

While half of the country's population lives in cities, 70 percent of Gypsies live in rural areas. Thirty percent of these Romas live in small villages, with no opportunity to work, and where the level of the infrastructure, health care facilities and public transportation is underdeveloped. As Istvan Kemeny put it about the Gypsies in 1971: *"Not their mentality but their conditions should be changed. However, the way of thinking that puts the blame on the losers for their defeat should also be changed."*

The above-mentioned figures also describe the situation of Gypsies living in Aranyosapáti. That is why the work of the opera singer, music instructor and educator Attila Böcs carries special importance.

## A CONSTRUCTIVE PLAN FOR THE GYPSY POPULATION

After 20 years of exile in Western-Europe I have returned to Hungary and settled down in a small village named Aranyosapáti having a population of 2400 and located close to the Hungarian-Romanian-Ukrainian border. This ancient Hungarian settlement was united from two separate villages called Kopòcsapáti and Révaranyos. One third of the population of this united village is of Gypsy origin. I have decided to establish a non-profit company focusing on arts and health education, sacrificing my savings of 20 years.

In Aranyosapáti, practically without any moral or financial support, I started a five-room school of music, capable of admitting 76 children. I was shocked to discover that even though the majority of students in the elementary school were Gypsy children, almost none of them enrolled in the school of music, although playing music is elementary in the Gypsy way of life. This shocking discovery and the social welfare of the village's Gypsy population aroused my interest in getting acquainted with their problems.

For this reason, I have immediately put together a constructive plan which I am trying to carry out step by step, practically without any financial or moral support. The county and district authorities are watching my pursuit with total indifference, the local municipality and the local school's directorate are following my work with the greatest repugnance, and on top of it all they are doing everything within their power to block my efforts. The only institution to give me maximum support was the Hungarian Television editors of the Gypsy Magazine, who were also covering my various activities in their programs<sup>2</sup>.

The characteristics of this village's Gypsy population are typical to all villages along the Ukrainian border in the county of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg which is considered to be the most underdeveloped region of the country. This, together with the fact that Hungary's Gypsy population is represented here in significant proportions, explains the reasons for the highest unemployment ratio in the country. Seeing this shocking social and cultural state of underdevelopment I have decided to initiate my pursuit of music in many directions.

I realized that for different age groups a different theme had to be created and carried out, but most importantly, where I see a need arising I am providing a quick-aid of used clothing along with food stuffs for the neediest.

## **THE PREPARATORY MUSIC COURSE FOR CHILDREN OF KINDERGARTEN AGE**

My 20 years of teaching music in Western-Europe made me realize that intense instructions on musical instruments may be started even with children of kindergarten age if it is preceded by a year long preparatory music course. During this course the four to five- year old children in the kindergarten, in groups of 10-12, twice a week, are learning to read and write music with the help of a music instructor's show created by me. As a result of this, after the conclusion of the preparatory course, they could begin learning the instruments when beginning their first class or even simultaneously with kindergarten.

I have implemented this instrumental music preparatory course in two of Aranyosapáti's kindergartens where 80% of the children are of Gypsy origin. In the two weekly classes, held by myself and my associates, every five minutes we conduct different activities, taking into consideration the results of Russian pediatric psychology and music psychology research by Tyeplov, according to which children of this age are very perceptive providing that objectives are presented in short intervals. Furthermore, in contradiction with the Hungarian Kodály method for small children, instead of clear voice intonation the emphasis should be put on improving their sense of rhythm in order to support their developing conceptual system. Every five minutes, the



teacher conducting the class switches in the most playful ways between the following activities: sound-formation in groups, reading and singing of tests, and metrical tapping by touching figures on the test pages with a tapping motion.

Following this, students colour a new test page while listening to music, then do rhythm exercises, rhythm writing after hearing rhythmical plays, rhythm-domino, and after this relative solmization singing based on hand movements, music writing after hearing with geometrical shapes, followed by playing with the solfeggio-domino. Then putting together a child's play combined with dance and finally drawing and painting of musical themes on a given subject of a musical piece played several times before. This latter together with other activities is meant to combine music and art education. Based on my many years of experience, I can verify that when listening to music, a colour experience identical with the keynote will arise in each person listening to music including small children. The music motives will take shape in the children's drawing in definite geometrical forms, while in orchestrating, the same will appear as a structural experience.

The two year old instrumental music preparatory course is well liked, especially by the Gypsy children. Their rhythm and musical sense of hearing is developing at a faster rate than the ethnic Hungarian children of the same age; their sense of colour and form aroused by music confirms their high level of musical experiences even at a very young age. They loosen up in their body movements and in their singing, faster than ethnic Hungarian children of similar age. Their rhythm and tune writing can be developed quickly after hearing music, and the foundation of their music reading and writing talent could be laid down easily. In my opinion, this is a great achievement considering that a large number of Hungarian Gypsy musicians are playing music by ear throughout their lives, because they did not have the opportunity to learn the basics of music reading and writing.

I intended to introduce this music preparatory course in other villages and towns in the vicinity, and it seems that all kindergartens in the city of Csenger will adopt my education method. All the domino games, animation tools and tests necessary for teaching are made. Therefore there is opportunity for the introduction of this method on the national and international stage in a broader range.

The essence of this kindergarten education is that the kindergarten teachers and nannies at every possible time during the week, are practising with the kids the little blocks in groups played in those two weekly classes. This way, the kindergarten teachers, together with the music teacher, are able to decide which musical instrument is most favourable for the musical improvement of the child.

Since this preparatory course is practically free of charge, it does not impose a heavy financial burden on the Gypsy parents, and the activities take place within the frame of kindergarten activities. Now we have the chance

to succeed in convincing an ever increasing number of Gypsy youngsters who previously could not even dream about such opportunities, to begin their education on musical instruments.

## **SPECIAL DAY-CARE CENTRE FOR KIDS IN FIRST CLASS**

For Gypsy children going on to their first class, I have organized a special day-care centre. From my experience with the instrumental music preparatory course, I will only be able to begin teaching Gypsy children on instruments effectively, if they are continuing their studies in a special day-care set up in the afternoons. After attending the mixed first class in our day-care centre, the teachers in my employment finish the home work during alternating activities with the Gypsy children every half hour. They are dancing, drawing, receiving a half hour of flute lessons in groups, practising for half an hour on the piano furnished especially for them, and once a week, they participate in a 45 minute individual piano lesson.

With this special day-care centre the Gypsy children, besides finishing their school work, are also getting an opportunity to improve their rhythm, hearing, drawing and movement and at the same time, are being familiarized with various basic hygiene. These include wearing slippers in the classroom, washing their hands, cleaning their teeth, brushing their hair, eating at set tables, taking care of the various valuable toys, appreciating their own school material, using the lavatories, learning home decoration, preparing for the holidays, (that is to celebrate Santa Claus Day, Easter, Christmas, Mother's Day and Birthdays) and also developing a collective spirit and learning valuable behaviour patterns.

The goal we would like to achieve with this special day-care centre is that the Gypsy children finishing the preparatory course in kindergarten, begin the learning process on two musical instruments in our day-care, and by this, increase their ability to concentrate. With our training we have them catch up with the ethnic Hungarian children. From the start of the second class they will return to the school's day-care centre, only coming back to our music training to practice for the instrumental classes and for other activities provided for them. Therefore they will not lag behind.

In our experimental first year we wanted to get started with eight children. The parents of the Gypsy children submitted a signed petition to the Ministry of Culture and Public Education and also to the principal of the local school to obtain permission for the day-care centre. The Ministry gave its blessing to our enterprise and even gave us financial aid to acquire school materials, but they were not able to give us any contribution for our expenditures for the entire year. This day-care centre is absolutely free of charge, the children are only paying a symbolic amount of the instrumental education.

Because of this, I had no choice but to have my company finance the first school year. The directorate and teachers of the local school were harassing the parents, putting pressure on them not to let their children into the "Gypsy ghetto". During morning school hours, the teacher of the first class had imposed the most humiliating situations on the Gypsy children attending our day-care centre, not shying away even from physical abuse to deter them.

During the year, four of the eight children dropped out because the parents and kids could not bear the humiliations any longer. A father of one of the children, under the influence of alcohol and through the instigation of the woman teaching the first class, came to the day-care centre and beat up my associate in front of the children. His sense of shame would not allow his child to continue coming to us. The four children remaining to the end of the year, gave testimony of outstanding musical and schooling knowledge, but to no avail. The teacher of the first class gave them the worst grades, although in the neighbouring town she gave an account of our accomplishment with amazement. But the directorate of the school forced her to under-evaluate the children attending our day-care centre.

## INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC EDUCATION FOR GYPSY CHILDREN

Only a few Gypsy children joined the instrumental education program of our school of music, despite the fact that they were practically exempt from school-fees.

In our practice rooms we provide them with practice opportunities. Unfortunately there are only a few utilizing this because teachers of the local school are under-grading the Gypsy children in such measures that they are not only scared away from thinking about further education, but are prevented by the teachers from studying music in their free time, with the teachers citing their poor grades as a reason.

For those children who met the requirements and were allowed to study at our school, besides the instrumental and practice sessions, we were providing solfeggio, choir, puppet and drawing-painting lessons. But during the school year we had no choice but to give up these activities one by one because the local principal had disciplined those teachers who dared to undertake these activities in the form of a study circle.

At this time, we are trying to reestablish these methods of education by having the services of teachers from the surrounding villages. We have also plan to initiate guitar lessons and form a little dance band with Gypsy youngsters, but we do not have the financial means to purchase the necessary instruments.

## **FUND FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF ARANYOSAPÁTI**

In March 1992 I set up a fund myself under the name of "Foundation for the Improvement of Aranyosapáti" for the purposes of providing aid for the cultural improvement of the village's inhabitants, for the introduction of the sophisticated biological elevated-bed cultivation method, and for the introduction of the basics of reformative dietetics. The foundation's board of trustees would have liked to refurbish a neoclassic mansion located in the village and in very poor condition, to serve as a centre for the above mentioned pursuits, since it was donated to the foundation by the municipality by contract.

We were encouraged by the municipality to initiate our investments, then in November 1993, we were told to leave because the building had been returned to the former Count. The foundation is now engaged in litigation against the municipality. The mayor had started legal actions against the foundation because if the foundation would be shut down during the inquiry proceedings, our right of legitimacy would cease to exist. All this despite the fact that I have invested a large sum of money in the foundation, and have already started my biological gardening activities in the court-yard of the mansion. I am compelled to hold my various lectures on my own property. We also intended to organize various Gypsy courses and to provide a cultural centre for the Gypsy population.

## **TRAINING OF THE AGE GROUP OVER 16**

Within the Gypsy population numbering 800 in the village of Aranyosapáti, because of the demographic wave in Hungary, there are many youngsters between the ages of 16 and 22, and most of them have successfully finished the eight grades of elementary school.

In the vicinity's institutes for vocational training it is hard to find youngsters of Gypsy origin, but even if they were to finish these schools, they would not find employment. For this reason, most of them stay home after graduating from elementary school and pass time by working in the household farming or occasionally getting hired for daily work such as corn snapping, apple or vine harvesting or goose feather plucking. In the surrounding areas the pay for daily work, which lasts from sun-up to sun-down, is an average HUF 600 a day without board (6 US dollars).

These youngsters are not registered anywhere as unemployed, no social welfare network knows about them, and they are not receiving any kind of aid whatsoever.

In the course of their school education they get the customary Hungarian education but do not receive information about their native language, their ancient past, their traditions and customs, or about their ancient crafts. The older generations had provided for themselves through these crafts 30-40

years ago, but now this knowledge is taken to the grave. In fact this old knowledge and crafts are considered something to be ashamed of, and therefore they spend their days doing nothing.

For the Gypsy population of Aranyosapáti and its vicinity, the only possibility left is to be assimilated. In a sense they have already become poor Hungarians because they have entirely forgotten their language and traditions. In order to consider integration, they would have to learn their native language, their customs and traditions and relearn their ancient crafts and activities such as basket weaving, hutch hollowing, lath-work, husk weaving, horse trading, and fixing pots and pans, etc.

This generation between 16 and 22 years, with fashionable dressing habits within their reach, with their scope of interest and because of what they expect from life could hardly be considered gypsies anymore. The saying goes for us too, that only the one who considers oneself a Gypsy is a real Gypsy. Some better off Gypsy families are anxious to move out of Gypsy row. They all but broke off contacts with their poorer relatives, and they belittle and disparage them. They strive to become a part of the ethnic Hungarian circles and adopt the expected behaviour and character patterns.

At the same time, it is also true the other way around. Declassed ethnic Hungarian individuals are welcomed in Gypsy circles and become like Gypsies. Alcoholism is taking its toll in astounding proportions within the ranks of the de-classed and within Gypsy families with several children, and nobody is trying to help. The depraved, cast off and lonely ethnic Hungarians and the Gypsy mothers and fathers, drinking heavily because of the lack of their family's well being, in one of the four pubs or in one of the many illegal wine or booze shops in the village.

The other ruthless epidemic, mostly for the village's Gypsy population is smoking. Practically every Gypsy smokes, starting at the age of ten, perhaps with the exception of some of the higher esteemed girls. The family allowance, the seldom received social aid and the occasional income from daily work is hardly enough to cover the cost of the family's cigarette provisions and the drinkers' alcohol consumption. There is almost nothing left for electricity, water and school lunches. They will not even consider their cultural needs. No one from the Gypsy area had requested the natural gas deployment program that had recently reached the village because of financial reasons.

For the men, the mandatory military service from the age of 20, imposed dramatic effects on their personality because of the severe punishment they receive for desertions and for their performance in the military usually leaving its mark for life. They often resort to stealing and trading with stolen goods compelled by their long standing misery. Of course the punishment for these crimes is causing further moral crises for the Gypsies .

The apparent political changes of the 1990's did not provide or propose possibilities of any kind to the gypsies because they were hit the hardest by

the transformation and collapse of the economy. This is because every privatized establishment got rid of the gypsies first. Under the present situation, 10-15 people out of the 800 have a steady and registered job.

The economy turned for the worse for the village's ethnic Hungarian population, dragging with it their relationship to the Gypsies. They blame the unemployed Gypsies for their decline, even those who are trying to support themselves by the various family allowances, social aids and the occasional welfare money. The Gypsy families, because of hygienic reasons, their sexual under-education and their strong family ties are much more populous than the ethnic Hungarian families. While the average ethnic Hungarian family is assumed to raise two children, the average Gypsy family has four, although it is not rare to see ten children in a Gypsy family either.

The Geruda Reform Studio Ltd. has set its objective to initiate a vocational training course for unemployed adult individuals combining its resources, and also independently, with the Regional Employment Improvement and Training Centre of Northern-Hungary. One of these intense, 800 hour training programs takes five months, with 40 hours of training weekly.

This training course has the following advantages:

- The youngsters stagnating at home will once again be associated with a collective group.
- In addition to the different vocational training, they also receive generally useful information.
- They will be registered in the nationwide unemployment registration and also in the social network.
- During the training course, they receive HUF 8,000,00 (80 US dollars) a month as education aid.
- The five month training allows for the following: at their incidental first place of employment, the employer will receive, in case of 3-12 month employment, a 100% wage assistance from the Labour Centre. In addition, those employers showing a positive result during the months of wage assistance, will be able to apply for a refund of 170% of the Social Security contribution paid in.

## **The Weaving Course**

The first of our training courses of this type was focused on making woven baskets and other woven goods of wicker. The number of people participating at the start was 28, and 18 of them have successfully finished the course. Several excellent basket weaving craftsmen were alternating to teach students the basics, taking them into the secrets of the trade at the same time. Even with their first finished products it was easy to see their inherited manual talent. They were struggling to finish the eight classes of the school, but when weaving baskets, they surpassed that level by far.

During this course, they have not only made baskets and other household items in large numbers, but they also learned to make wicker furniture and human-sized woven marionettes too. Furthermore, they learned the techniques of growing, selecting, preparing, cleaning and slicing of withe.

The 18 graduated youngsters would immediately be qualified for establishing a woven furniture company if they could find an adequate supervisor to organize production and increase their productivity. Naturally, the only way to make it profitable would be to produce the wite themselves and have someone else market it.

The local municipality belittled this training course. They did not see any possibility for success and voiced this opinion several times in the press. Actually, the opposite is true. Because of the catastrophic condition of the European forests we should count on having a wood processing embargo imposed in the very near future. Therefore, furniture and other decorative items made of wicker would enjoy a tremendous advantage and could only be made manually. Because of these reasons, we believe the knowledge of this craft will be sought after and well paid for within a very short time.

### **A Waste Processing Course**

The basket weaving training course was held between November 1993 and April 1994. It was followed by the second 800 hour, five month training course planned to be held between the months of May and October. This second course will be executed by the Geruda Company alone. The company has won the tender of the County Labour Centre to acquire the financing necessary for the project. Those participating will enjoy the same benefits mentioned above.

This training course, besides the general catching up program, will also teach students about composting organic waste accumulated around the house and garden, and building an elevated bed in the garden out of this compost and other wastes. We also teach the preparation of dried and fresh flower arrangements using meadow and other wild flowers, and the collecting, drying and packing of various herbs. The students are also being familiarized with the weaving and other uses of straw, bulrush and corn husk.

The aim of this course is to teach the participants the following:

- How one can and must sustain life in a self-dependent way by utilizing various disposable waste materials, and perhaps even make a living by it.
- How to develop an eye for the beauty of nature even in the most miserable way of life, and to have this esthetic sense built in our home culture and during the catching-up lessons, by singing, by dancing, by instructing basic drawing and painting, by making pictures out of seeds and by learning various meditation techniques to make their miserable and boring everyday life more colourful.

In the previous group the gypsies participated in the second course after finishing the first. From the eight who applied, once again we gave the chance to four to become students in the second course too. In this course we have included 100 hours of German language instruction, and with the up-to-date results of structural language teaching, we hold daily practice lessons to increase their vocabulary by five words each day. Their surprising rate of improvement is living proof of the gypsies' gift for languages.

Throughout the catching-up course we are also teaching the fundamentals of music. This filled the students with such enthusiasm that 12 of them enrolled in guitar lessons at the beginning. We have given the group the opportunity to gather for practice sessions as a choir outside of the course.

From the second month, the group — on their own accord — would like to form a folk dance ensemble where they would rehearse and perform different Hungarian and Gypsy folk plays and ballads with the woven marionettes made during the previous course. The idea is that after finishing the course with these activities, they could stay together in small collectives.

Despite the fact that there are several churches in our village, since it was united from two villages and the ethnic Hungarian population is of Roman or Greek Catholic or Presbyterian religion, the local priests and spiritual leaders have absolutely no desire to include the gypsies into the religious activities. Only the small Baptist congregation in our village has decided to embrace the gypsies in their religious life and regardless of their Christianity, Gypsy youth in ever increasing numbers are visiting this collective. We too are recommending to our students to joint this Baptist community and the result of their intensive efforts is already perceptible.

Following the completion of these two courses, we have become acquainted with 45 elementary school graduate Gypsy youngsters from our village over the age of 16, who have never had a job and have not been registered as unemployed either. But as we have noticed, there are at least 150 unregistered unemployed gypsies living on Gypsy row today.

The situation is similar in all villages of this region within the Gypsy population. The obvious consequence of this is that the unemployment statistics in our county are absolutely false. The young people attending our courses have shown such delight in other people's company that every day, after the classes are over they have no inclination to go home and they would all but demand these organized collective activities for Saturdays and Sundays too. Therefore together we have decided that in addition to the choir and folk dance activities, they could also participate in the guitar lessons about to be started. Furthermore, from their request, we have fixed up a body-building room where in addition to the students, other Gypsy youngsters are allowed to train as well.

Naturally, we would welcome ethnic Hungarians too. At the request of the students, outside of the course's classes we are going to start up a preliminary high-school course, because several have already started attending high-school in one of the neighbouring cities. But because of the insufficient education they had received in our village, they dropped out after the first half year. Therefore, we are planning to hold preliminary classes of biology, chemistry, mathematics and physics for those wishing to attend. Naturally ethnic Hungarians may also attend these classes.



## A Broom Making Course

After the waste processing course to be finished in October, we have already won the tender for a household and industrial broom-making course, by which we could provide for another 20-25 youngsters from our village to learn the trade in a 500 hour intensive course.

Because the broomcorn in Hungary is very expensive and also very scarce, in the spring we planted broomcorn seeds over an area of two hectares, enabling us to teach the harvesting, storage and processing methods of the broomcorn throughout the course to be started in October. It is also the objective of the course to separate and package the seeds that are found on the broomcorn and to market it as bird-feed.

Since our course is being conducted during winter time and the only alternative we have to heat the premises is by oil-burning heaters — due to the fact that we do not have the financial means to have natural gas installed and we are unable to get financial help from any place so that we may purchase less expensive heating fuel — we have no choice but to buy heating oil for HUF 62.00 per litre, whereas other public institutions are able to buy this very same heating oil for HUF 40.00 per litre.

## Giving Assistance for the Adults with the Elevated-Bed Growing Method

My studies in Western Europe in the field of reformative dietetics and of different biological growing methods have prompted me to pass on this knowledge to the village's Gypsy population. This growing method has saved the People's Republic of China from starvation. Such a garden bed, built of various household and garden organic wastes over an area of 3x8 metres, is capable of yielding crop three times a year, provided it is watered sufficiently, and therefore provides the entire vegetable supply for a family of six.

Gypsies with small parcels have tried to request land in the vicinity, but to no avail, practically nobody got any, thus for the future decades their only possibility to survive is limited to their small garden of a few square metres. On this few square metres, they will have to learn to provide for their family's needs with high quality vegetables. The essence of this gardening method is that the accumulated organic wastes, considered garbage and overflowing the Gypsy settlements, with expertise, would now have to be laid on the soil in different layers, thus providing crop for eight to ten years. And an added benefit is that it will have to be built only once.

Because of the natural gas pipes under installation in the surrounding areas, a lot of organic waste that was used for heating purposes, will become available. This is an excellent material to build elevated-beds. If we are able to get the materials built from an adequately clean source, and if during the

growing procedure we refrain from using any chemical substances, then we may consider this growing method as a biological one because the use of artificial fertilizers is unnecessary.

The students of our waste processing course have learned how to build these beds and have planted them with mixed produce. Now, in small groups, they have taken the task of hauling the waste over, building and planting the elevated beds, anywhere the space requirements are given and is requested or allowed by a Gypsy family.

The elevated bed, besides its high moisture demand, will only function well if we teach them which plants may be planted next to each other, in what distance and also which part is most desirable for certain plants. The neighbouring village's Gypsy population have also taken notice of our activities. Thus we were given the opportunity, by the Agricultural Vocational Training Institute of Baktalórántháza, to build two of these elevated beds in their garden, and to introduce this growing method to experts from different parts of the country.

Because there are only a limited number of Gypsy students in attendance in the agricultural trade schools, they would only be able to obtain modern agricultural and horticultural knowledge in various trade courses, that is if we want to change over to independent agricultural activities from their present inactive and unemployed lives. The other important factor is the wide-spread introduction of a healthier diet to the Gypsy population based on their own produce. The present, rather expensive meat-centred and vegetable and salad-lacking Gypsy diet, is the leading cause of diseases of the vascular, skeletal and nervous system even at a young age. Metabolic disturbances resulting from an unhealthy diet could be noticed even in the younger generations, which may also be enhanced because of poor medical care. The situation of their medical care leaves much to be desired because of: the knowledge of their ancient medicine, the undesirable herb culture, curing with questionable materials, and the use of medicines made of animal products considered to be quackery, and the treatment of the ill Gypsy at village doctors is treated as an unwanted phenomenon.

Throughout our courses we encourage the students to gather up that old Gypsy medical knowledge from the world of traditions of those still living, and turn their attention towards the rightness and the usefulness of those medicines. This is how we try to encourage them to become self-dependent in this area.

Their protein rich diet, which is not typical of the closely related people living in India, or for the gypsies living in Hungary, is only an adopted way of diet, and is very damaging and expensive. They feel they have no choice but to steal poultry, to fish illegally and to kill game from an ever decreasing stock, without permit in the neighbouring forests. Through these activities they are always in violation of the law. The livestock keeping started by various state subsidies and the allowances received for hog and cattle does not

represent any real help because they are not able to provide the conditions feed, and veterinary care necessary for those animals, and/or they are forced to eat them because of starvation.

The troublesome public health conditions of the gypsies could only be improved by a purposeful dietetics reform. Therefore, in our courses, we are trying to turn their attention towards the importance of a healthy diet with lectures and our published periodicals. The one-sidedness of their diet is not only the result of their poverty, but also of their limited knowledge. Medicine is not the only thing provided by nature, throughout thousands of years many things from nature were utilized as basic food stuff. The civilized world rejects all that. Unfortunately the gypsies have also forgotten this knowledge, though to utilize it would be great help in reestablishing a healthy way of life, and a free lifestyle.

## AN ALCOHOL AND NICOTINE REHABILITATION CENTRE

Our objective is to establish an alcohol and nicotine rehabilitation centre for 10-15 people in the empty lakeshore farm located about two kilometres from our village, provided we get some support from the authorities, and the guidance of psychotherapy experts and trained assistants. We would offer treatment for alcoholics and compulsive smokers from our village and also to those from neighbouring towns, who wish to get rid of this painful epidemic either for their own good or upon the request of family. During this half year occupational therapy, under the guidance of the experts of communal life, the conditions are given for recovery by different types of activities such as gardening, fruit grove, reed, sedge, mushroom, wild plants, empty sheep-folds. Hopefully the extraordinary natural environment along with the help of therapeutic experts bringing the results desired.

We also have to face the increasing fact that children of Gypsy families can not and do not want to support their aging parents. These lonely old people isolate themselves, and because of their malnourishment and their nervous disorders even at minimal alcohol consumption — they can hardly afford that even — they give the impression of a miserable alcoholic. The next big assignment would be to get these old people to a social home.

Smoking that usually starts at a very young age can reach the quantity of 60-70 a day in some gypsies. They could only satisfy this need with goods of poor quality — filled with radioactive and chemical remains — that is available in different markets of smuggled goods, mostly from the Ukraine. They can only afford to buy these contaminated cigarettes, which in the following years could lead to shocking health conditions. Not to mention the nicotine dependency that follows their lives from childhood, and the vascular and respiratory problems caused by smoking cigarettes. We will attempt to free our

patients in this rehabilitation centre from all these stimulants by various meditative self-control methods and to give them the knowledge that besides living in a material and consumer society, other human goals and possibilities can come into view.

## POST-SCRIPT

Taking the situation, namely the unemployment and the handicraft traditions of the Gypsies into account, Attila Böcs formulated a new adaptable way of thinking and organising courses, which aim to prepare participants to manage their life successfully. In the beginning he received assistance from the County Labour Centre, and he managed to provide retraining aid to the participants, creating the opportunity for them to study full-time with safe subsistence for two semesters. Inspired by the success, twelve pupils registered at the correspondence department of the grammar school determined to work as assistant teachers after their graduation. There is a great need for them since they would be able to improve the condition of the under-educated Gypsies and their personal example would impress the Roma youth.

Attila Böcs also launched a school of music in Aranyosapáti, where 48 out of the 82 pupils are Gypsy children. Most of them learn to play on two instruments without being charged for the education. What is more, they are even provided with school equipment and practice opportunities.

Nevertheless, the whole initiative has stalled since March, 1995, though the ones who completed the courses have the proper professional knowledge. The majority passed exams with excellent results and are now capable of doing everything independently. But to begin an enterprise capital is needed, and they hardly have enough money to make ends meet. To begin their own business they should also have promotion skills and knowledge since there is no solvent demand for their goods nearby.

The latest restrictive measures of the government, the lack of support from small businesses, and the suspension of the retraining aids "torpedoed" the continuation of the courses. Five of the 12 pupils have already dropped out of the grammar school and only six of the 24 course participants are present regularly during the classes. They do day-work for their living since their village needs no craftsmen but rather cheap day-labours (such as woodcutters, people who prune, dig and sow).

As Attila Böcs bitterly admits:

- As a fanatic educational I had known that my work would not go smoothly, but I had never thought it would end in such a large-scale indifference and disinterest.
- The young participants of our courses and those studying in the music and secondary school perceive less national disinterest, than the malice characterising the self-government of our village. For example, there had been a public pump in front of the school of music. They turned that off first in the village. We only have latrines and therefore our pupils are unable to drink water, to wash their hands or to keep the necessary minimal hygienic requirements.

- Although The County Pedagogical Institute and the County Labour Centre help wherever they can, they do not believe in our efforts since it is already March and the Ministry of Labour has not authorised the launching of new retraining courses this year. Thus, our whole programme is in danger of falling, because there is no organ that would finance our retraining courses. Some of the secondary school pupils would be willing to move into dormitories but there are no such facilities in the county.
- Any results or solutions to the problems could only be achieved by a thorough, complex and long-term plan and consistent work. The subsidies given to the village for the Gypsies should be spent on supporting Romas themselves. The village should not build two mortuaries and a luxurious school with gymnasium, while the Gypsy children hardly complete the eight-class elementary school. Neither should they build a marvellous palace for the physician, but rather they should provide drinking-water, bathing and washing facilities.
- The road conditions in the Gypsy populated areas should also be improved, and educational reforms that do not make the Gypsies feel like outcasts in their own village school should be introduced. The present conditions of the Gypsies as well as the general Hungarian situation demonstrate the shocking deficiencies of the last decades. Provision for bread, tools, means of transportation and safety are not enough, because they only mean satisfying the most essential needs of human life. It is indispensable, but not sufficient. The existence worthy of man assumes spiritual enlightenment, since this belongs to the human being.

#### Notes

1. István Kemény, Gábor Havas & Gábor Kertesi. **The condition of the Hungarian Gypsies.** 1994.
2. We are able to furnish, together with the associates of Hungarian Television's Gypsy Magazine program, approximately one hour video material to those interested.

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# Chapter Nine

## A WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS OF WORK: COMMUNITY SELF-EDUCATION

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### CONTEXT: FROM HOMOGENEITY TO DIFFERENCE

The text which follows is the result neither of a survey nor of a case study. It is a fundamental criticism of non-empirical validity about social energies in conflict, the dynamic force of which may be a pointer to some of the mechanisms of the overall crisis of work.

It is generally believed that the concept of post-modernism may present a sufficiently coherent view to express the shifting and spreading reality of the end of our century. However, contrary to this generalization, post-modernism is always tied to particular contexts. The crisis of modernity itself takes different forms, although it is evident that it has developed out of defensive and contradictory paradigms.

Although we may agree about the basic significance, particular meanings arise as soon as we compare truly *post-industrial* societies whose modernity is discussed in terms of "crisis" with *post-totalitarian societies*, where the crisis arises from a "betrayal" of an artificial modernity, a crisis best expressed as an ideological "leap" of modernity.

By way of example, let us consider *mass culture*. In Romania, we could talk of mass culture without making any particular reference to information technology. Basically, during times of totalitarianism, *the mass* always expressed itself as an obedient *crowd*.

So, in developed societies, post-modernism brings into the open a crisis of scientific truth, an epistemological discontinuity, while in developing post-totalitarian societies, the post-modern crisis emerges from the depth of “moralities”, *personal values* that are called into question, and a sense of social *well-being*. *We are then speaking of liberty and its ethical foundations*.

The (post-totalitarian) resurgence of individual wrongful behaviour and the current rejection of life — widespread after the collapse of social awareness in 1989-1990 — stands in sharp contrast to the time when the unification of social groups and the homogeneity of values attempted to *assimilate personal choices into (pseudo-)collective choices*. Let us stress, for the moment, the distinction between what is *common* to a *community* or is *cooperative*, and *collectivism* or *communism*. We shall track both of these down.

On the one hand, there were the values which form part of democratic cultures, but were here compromised by communist slogans. In a random order, which is not exhaustive, these were:

- activism, self-management, equality of opportunity, lifelong education, mobility of the labour force, and the advancement of women and the young. On the other hand, there were values exclusive to totalitarian power:
- the undeniable revolutionary truth, the single party of the united working class, the exceptional nature of those elected, the homogeneity of aspirations and social values, the ideal of the “new man”, and the socialist society that had been developed on all fronts.

Although the latter belong to history, their effect still undermines the system, threatening any attempt at radical change.

In this context, the concept of literacy or *basic education implies more than functional knowledge*; it can establish a new “educology” whose logos gives rise to a community *ethos*. While rejecting the sterility of annihilating collectivism, a moral resurrection of group life appears to be vital to any social or economic reform.

So that we do not forget the frustrations of the people, we have to restore and constantly foster, without becoming demagogic, *the right to be different as a right to freedom*. It should be added that in the case of the Romanian democracy, the political opposition between *consensus* and *difference* in the interests of power was so strong that it reinforced the negative connotations of “difference” as an instrument of social destabilization.

We shall not go into the various aspects of the current social crisis. It is enough to stress the perspective of radical change, which is needed to give new validity to the relationship between *sameness and difference*, and the problem of effectively involving the person (in Latin “*persona*” means both person and role).

Having set out this contextual premise, we shall now explain the paths open to this alternative approach, with a view to reconstructing values (see the table at end of chapter)

- to generalize *dialogue* in order to impose idiosyncrasy on a system still ravaged by totalitarian symptoms, the *alternative* as opposed to the *uniform*;
- to shake the power of an amoral restoration in order to encourage change in social situations regarded as "disadvantaged", the *marginal* as opposed to the *central*;
- to confront the labyrinth of uncertain transition in order to stimulate *conscious* resolutions, — the *elective* as opposed to the *prescribed*;
- to steer clear of a new centralization of the market in order to encourage economic *responsibility*, the *innovative*, the *marginal*, the *elective* and the *alternative* thus become the dominant features of the *self-formation of groups* which gives greater attention to individual traumatism than to global compensation, and greater regard to the confirmation of the *persona* as opposed to trans-personal ideological power.

## THE PRELIMINARIES OF THE PROJECT: A PERI-CURRICULUM

The story begins with what happened in an institutional project to give professional training to teachers and trainers which predates the Institute of Educational Science. We can even speak of secondary premises, given that the project was constructed out of the peripheral effects of the initial training already received. It was more a case of de-constructing the key units of the initial approach so as to develop flexibility and to better serve the structural mobility of the various educational communities.

The first experiment was a piece of participatory research, begun in 1992, on how teachers generated and trained themselves in basic professional skills.<sup>1</sup> From September to December 1993, a pilot training experiment was addressed to teachers in marginal school settings, with particular attention being given to relationships between heterogeneous groups and to attitude change in the new interrelationship between *education and careers*.<sup>2</sup>

The following experiment, designed on the basis of the results of the pilot programme, took the project into the areas of community life difficult to influence from within a school: the comings and goings of the city surroundings. The aspect of training in the most important skills remained, but with the addition of the question of the values by which *work activities* were encouraged, a question which went beyond solutions available in the school curriculum and were marginal to the planning of teaching.

What we had seen as a problem exclusive to providing qualifications to young people preparing for manual work proved to be a veritable social project on the *skills of being* and of *living* of certain groups and communities, which may be classified as *periods of transition*.<sup>3</sup>

The crisis affected not only the loss of skilled workers but also the (ideological, economic and cultural) dissolution of the symbolic legitimacy of groups and occupations.



The problem, such as the pressure of commuting and the migration of the labour force, was not a recent phenomenon. Sociological studies on urban/rural movement had long shown particular interest in the "spread of urbanism", which tends to wipe out the differences between town and village.<sup>4</sup> What was new was the symptoms of a new social perception among the various groups which could not be understood in terms of previous criteria.

Generally, a course of guidance which follows the criteria of training is given the (Latin) name *curriculum*, which carries the meaning of "a course" but also "a race". Perhaps we were thinking more of building a state of mind — brought about by a mixture of propositions of renewal, or maybe an absence of innovation — when we chose to see our approach as a *peri-curriculum*, a journey which lies close to the curriculum. On the one hand, it is a matter of an *emerging curriculum*, very appropriate to the concept of *educology*, in which *literacy* only stands for the functional (which embraces the instrumental) aspect of *cultural emancipation*; on the other, we are stimulating the "reawakening" of an alternative curriculum that would ensure the free development of choice and its influence on the homeostasis of the system.

The distinctions are not limited to the hypothesis that school education in its various guises has (analysable) effects on the morphology of the market. It is quite clear that schools are currently too conservative, given what is available on the market. But also, although there is an intention of restructuring the relationship between *training and work*, the production of goods is still waiting for real economic expansion.

As soon as one addresses the question of production, one must also consider the problems of the responsibility of producers, and the support they receive to promote their products on the central market. While we are giving attention to the guiding of young people towards alternative means of social integration, our project does not set out to fund an alternative market, but to prepare *people* for a new market. The aim is to develop inter-personal skills through active workshops, which are nonetheless limited to the capacities of educational research. We are encouraging the appearance of alternative structures, but we cannot guarantee them or in fact impose them on the market. What remains for us, the educators, is the opportunity, but also the chagrin, of the constant *quest*.

## RESEARCH IN ACTION: COMMUNITY SELF-TRAINING

First of all, we should stress the electrifying nature of self-training, which is an approach closer to traditional, ritual public meetings than formal educational activities. In accordance with our main thesis, the meetings set out to confer prestige on the potential areas of life and work in order to create centres of alternative occupations. Since the system of economic training is largely concerned with centralized problems on a national scale, it is possible

to encourage the development of small-scale, local economic structures without their being either marginal or isolated.

On the basis of these choices, and in conjunction with the ways forward described in detail in the discussion of problem's context, we shall now consider the aims of alternative group self-training and the effects of the "community self" as opposed to collectivist immorality.

- First, we are trying to bring local freedom and the true meaning of community autonomy up to date, with a view to assisting the management of civil life in which each suburb, at present a transitory culture, acquires an identity and becomes a micro-culture for flexible and tolerant groups.
- Next, we are stressing *relational skills*, extirpating the autocracy of leaders in favour of participatory group management.
- Then, we are encouraging the social *involvement* of community groups, so that they become aware of their contexts, their roles, their perspectives, their rights and obligations; local freedom and identity already give them the bases of a particular ethos.

Having given an outline of the context, we are trying, finally, to relaunch the need for vocational training, especially in directions which imply neither school education nor labour force retraining. For there is no economic restructuring without the ethical foundations of work. We therefore foster critical thought which may encourage the creation of a market based on an alternative set of values.

Given the formula of *assisted self-training*, the active objectives fall into two levels:

- the dimension of *assistance*, which identifies the existing social knowledge of the target group, and then analyses and produces skills in terms of community skills. We had the idea of producing *written regulations*, by changing the form of local, oral norms — secondary, derivative orality — into *normative*, written, codified norms. This time, the norms would be established according to criteria of esteem and assimilation within the group;
- the dimension of *self-training*, which is more important and has a place from the very beginning of the initial assistance in identifying existing knowledge. It is a matter of ensuring that the norms thus arrived at are adopted by community sub-groups. One aim of this process is the ability to introduce a symbolic market.

Each *values workshop* built up a two-way relationship:

- the *elective* arose in relation to *the self*;
- the *marginal* saw its relationship with *the real*;
- the *alternative* was guided by its relationship with *other people*;
- the *innovative* propounded a relationship with *the possible*.

In the period 1993-1994, project activities were developed at the first level: promotion of awareness among the groups of young people from the industrial schools in the suburbs in order to update their "community potential". The aim of the research, organized in active workshops, was the *emergence* of structures within the groups that could deal with the conflicts and remove the blockages in the relationship between their lives and normal career prospects.

As for inter-personal training, activities were arranged in *values workshops* which finally resolved themselves into four different scenarios: the *alternative*, the *marginal*, the *elective* and the *innovative*.

The concept of the market was applied particularly to aspects of *relationships and communication*, with the market seen as a *modus vivendi*. The workshops thus sought to restore certain primary functions such as *transactions, exchange, partnership and networking*. No way of proceeding was indicated or laid down, the moderators being careful to encourage openness to all possible approaches, and especially to the opportunity of "finding one's own way"— as a means of preventing social disorder.

It is quite obvious that the whole training was firmly based on the *motivation* to act (whether put into effect or not) and on the process of internalization. The appropriation of the *innovative* was evaluated through *imaginative* actions; and that of the *alternative* through *conceptual*; the *elective* gave rise to *expressive* actions; and the *marginal* became actual through *instinctive* actions.

## THE CONCEPTUAL VIEW: TIMES OF TRANSITION

The *self-learning of skills* of community being, born of a pilot training course with the aim of preparing teachers to deal with the novelty of social mobility, is still conceived as a grass-roots programme of assisted self-training, intended to encourage the development of the *concept of self* within anomic, transitory groups.

The issue centres on a key concept: *suburbanism*, with two subordinate dimensions: *shift of power* (especially economic) and *innovation by minorities*.

Although there is also a positive connotation due to the proximity of urban civilization, and indeed a negative in the conventional sense, **we define suburbanism as an existence which typifies ambiguity, transitoriness and anomy**. It is not captured in the antithesis between *central and peripheral*, between *urban and rural* or between *innovative and traditional*, because it escapes all structural duality. That is why it appeared to us to be an ideal zone of operations if we were to examine the malfunctioning of community dynamics.

The programme is also addressed to the actors (or agents) who have real or potential local power, and can influence the effective recovery of the values of community life, despite the ravages of the collectivism and totalitarian homogeneity that sought to destroy group structures.

At the same time, there is a certain methodological interest in the fact that the issue had arisen in the organizational micro-cultures of schools providing vocational education, which have recently been affected by a fall in enrolment, notably in traditional crafts and local industry.

## THE PROJECT TARGET GROUP: ALTERNATIVE GROUPS

In the recent years of post-totalitarianism, it has been observed that we are caught between two extremes:

- either we willingly adopt the palliative approach, in the name of “transition”, which leads to minor corrective adjustments and small steps; an option that relies on what may be called “the positive experience of the past”;
- or we cling to the idea of *radical change*, with reference to the “crisis”, which aims to build a new socio-political “literature”; an option that mistrusts and rejects the mechanisms of the past and doubts the possibility of using anything much from historical experience.

We do not have to choose now: it suffices to say that the corrective option, officially adopted in the reform of the system, still gives us the disagreeable feeling of building on sand and of not achieving anything. It is restricting to see, for example, that many social projects by central institutions which concern minority cultures have a routine flavour, since the system exaggerates the benefits of the majority ideology.

This happened to us in our attempt to intervene in the system of general basic education with a methodological stance that ignored current shifts in normative non-formal networks (which are unobtrusive and deceptive!). It should be recalled that the object of this discussion is not any type of community, but specifically urban neighbourhoods, which are prolix, variegated and defy classification.

By being dependent on the city, suburban areas have arrogated to themselves a false urban identity which they will very soon lose because of the reverse migration of the active population. The symptoms of a decline in school attendance in the industrial schools of the urban ring provide evidence of more than difficulty with educational planning. One test would be for a number of industrial schools to resist at any price, either by revitalizing their workshop activities or by introducing information technology.<sup>5</sup> It is nonetheless questionable whether a temporary school management solution could counter the destructuring of basic education for some work groups.

The observation thus expressed leads us to seek an alternative which is valid in its context, if not by virtue of its methodology. The drawing together of areas in which the value “work” is being subjected to the very marked influence of a conflict within behavioural knowledge clearly reveals the shape of the essential thesis of the project:

“In an area that has lost its values, more or less at the margins of the central market, one of the alternative ways of reviving community life (of which the value work is the leaven), would be to follow non-central, non-authoritarian, indeed unobvious paths, which offer the only chance of restoring true group relationships that would otherwise be well hidden by egalitarian and consensual ideologies.”

In accordance with the principle of homomorphism, could such an area provide solutions to the general crisis of work? It is hard to say. In any case, it is honest to allow for the risks of acting on such an assumption: it can encourage the appearance of a visionary and innovative local elite as well as the creation of insurgent groups.

All that can be done is to unleash group potential and to realize creative behaviour, while not forgetting that collective fantasies were well nurtured by the former regime.

## FROM IDEOLOGICAL CONSENSUS TO ETHICAL SOLIDARITY

From the point of view of social criticism, we therefore compared the evidence of epistemological slippage in the ethical orientation towards marginal ways of thinking. In fact, any central logos is only an ideology that imposes ideal solutions applicable to all. By contrast, relativism and the rational constructs of small communities validate a differential approach to social life and, in practice, to civil institutions (whether for scientific, cultural or economic reasons).

Self-training in relational skills, which was born of an alternative approach to continuing education programmes, applies to the flexible use of *situational skills*. It can be postulated that any exchange network (starting with symbolic exchanges) proves the emergence of a community.<sup>6</sup> In practice, a market does not necessarily make a community. While it is true that the values of *homo economicus* still predominate, we are seeing increasingly lively discussion of the *ethical bases* of economic activity.<sup>7</sup> An open market is, above all, no panacea. And the open market does not solve the problems of *exclusion*. The division of work and the diversification of tasks add nothing to the solidarity of interests.

On the one hand, pure economic values such as profit and investment are valueless in the absence of ethical, deontological bases. There is nothing to suggest that the proprietress of a small shop has changed her point of view from what she believed when she was the manageress of a socialist state outlet. In consequence, there is no social evidence that the proliferation of small and medium enterprises has brought about real changes in the development of new economic skills. Since external forms have not changed internal structures, it is up to us to harmonize these by adequately preparing group relationships.

An alternative market, based on the community ethos, seems to us to be a path worth trying with a view to changing behavioural knowledge fundamentally, if not a solution that will counter the manipulative power of the central market. We chose the urban ring because it represents a *new relational potential*. Large superstores and shopping centres already compete with businesses and major industrial companies, which are now under threat. This is not competition in production but a new form of employment and socialization.

The activities mentioned in association with values, such as *imaginative*, *conceptual*, *expressive* and *institutive* actions, underlie the compilation of skills for community self-training. This approach ends by awakening choices with respect to group life and an open attitude towards the complexity of alternative ways of living and working. On that basis, the approach becomes the property of the group, and the development of the desire to continue it as *self-training* — starting from existing alternative norms — is coordinated by the group itself.

This project thus expresses a process of motivation rather than an economic solution. It consists of discovering oneself and of building one's own functional skills for further development. It is not a new ideology but a *strategy to face up to the crisis* and an active opposing of the system's exclusivity. It is possible to conduct it through appropriate education and individual choice, and the right to exercise this.

The formation of alternative structures proved far more difficult than we had imagined. Communities are not given the preparation to take local decisions, even though the regulations allow for this. Under these circumstances, is a "minor" market that is not controlled and is self-organized not a utopia? How can it be reconciled to the requirements of *the market*?

We have been talking here about the community *self* (not necessarily the collective unconsciousness) and about a social mode expressed in terms of group skills. These two aspects are also part of *basic education* or literacy). As soon as one becomes aware of *identity* and *its relationships* with what is different, it becomes possible in turn to intervene in any way. Otherwise, we are left with exclusive and frustrating commands. The reappearance of a sense of cooperation based on the way of thinking of the group can be the premise for abolishing the separation between those who are "included" and those who are "excluded".

Without making reference to ideological and consensual power, the power of knowing *how to be* — which has been preserved by traditional communities — is what calls into question the civilization of work.

## Notes

1. From 1992, a team of researcher-trainers, composed of Adela Rogojinaru, Serban Iosifescu and Tiberiu Mihail, worked on alternatives to the traditional approaches to continuing training and training of trainers in the framework of Romanian educational reform. A synthesis of the partial theoretical results is given in a small guide book entitled *Alternative strategies of continuing training for trainers*. Vademecum, published by the Institute of Educational Science in 1993.
2. This was the "Teleajen" oil industry school group in Ploiesti (Prahova), where a significant reduction was observed in the (rural-urban) migratory school population traditionally commuting or living in the school as boarders. Many are currently giving up their studies because of the difficulties of employment in the oil industry with the industrial partners of the school no longer obliged to provide employment to school-leavers following government restructuring.
3. A slight distinction is made between "transitory" and "transitional", the former term indicating greater social insecurity and cultural non-identity.
4. For the statistics before 1989 on social mobility, see the work by Dumitru Sandu: *Fluxurile de migratie in Romania (Flows of migration in Romania)*, Bucharest, Academy of the R.S.R. Publishing House, 1989.
5. This is the case of the 1st May industrial school group of Ploiesti, whose director is attempting to carry through a school project which responds to local training demands.
6. I have to acknowledge the strong influence of the thought of Fernand Braudel on my theoretical choices, although I do not strictly use Braudel's terminology.
7. Mousse, Jean. *Les fondements de l'éthique professionnelle*, les Editions d'Organisation, Paris, 1989.

| <b>Basic Relational Skills,<br/>Units of Peri-Curricular Expansion</b>  |                    |                 |                 |                   |
|---|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| <b>Identity Values</b>  |                    |                 |                 |                   |
| <b>Levels of<br/>self-training</b>  | <b>Alternative</b> | <b>Elective</b> | <b>Marginal</b> | <b>Innovative</b> |
| existing skills   | deliberate         | detect          | delimit         | distinguish       |
| contextual knowledge  | discern            | decentralize    | differentiate   | define            |
| operational knowledge   | discharge          | disentangle     | disarm          | design            |
| strategic knowledge   | decide             | democratize     | delegate        | develop           |
| Aspects of community<br>Transformation action   | Self-regulation    |                 | Motivation      | Orientation       |
| <b>Note:</b> The names given to skills are determined by the coincidence of three fields of meaning ( <i>knowledge, values and action</i> ). Relational skills operate as metaknowledge: they guide thought rather than immediate action. |                    |                 |                 |                   |

# Chapter Ten

## THE ECONOMIC EQUITY PROJECT

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### THE ECONOMIC EQUITY PROJECT

This article presents a small intent in the struggle for dignity, equity, economic power and social recognition in the Province of Ontario, Canada: the Economic Equity Project. This Project, run from August, 1994 to April, 1995, was a combination of local economic development, community building and popular economic education.

Ontario, with a population of approximately 11 million, is the most industrialized province of Canada. The 80's were not easy years for Ontario; the industrial recession and the free trade agreement signed by the Federal government with the United States of America put a heavy toll on the economics of this Province. It is believed that at least 100,000 jobs were lost in the industrial sector, with the subsequent losses in spin-off industries.

In 1990 a social democratic party, the New Democratic Party, was elected to govern the Province and a major issue of its program was the creation of jobs. The government proceeded with all the traditional measures of boosting industry (subsidies, tax breaks, etc.), and tried to foster some alternatives in small business and in the community sector.



Parallel to the government initiatives, different groups in the community were trying to find more active functions in the economic arena. The Economic Equity Project is one of these projects — a result of a year of planning a coalition of community organizations trying to grasp non-traditional ways of achieving social justice.<sup>1</sup>

In 1993, the first intent to gain funding from the government was pursued. A year later, at the beginning of 1994, the coalition secured funds to run the project. In the second quarter of the year, the coalition started advertising the project to community groups all across the Province and, on August 12th, 1994, the Minister of Citizenship for the Province of Ontario opened a "Community Forum" in Toronto as the launching of the project.

The Economic Equity Project used popular education methodology and direct participation by the community as its way to seize results. The Doris Marshall Institute for Adult Education and Action was in charge of the organizing, planning, delivery and evaluation of the education and training components of the Project. The organizations selected to be part of the Project would explore the possibility of using economic ventures as a way of regaining control of their own future and creating jobs in the community. It was not expected that all beneficiaries of the project would embark on some kind of venture at the end of the project.

## ASSUMPTIONS

### Can Social Justice Come Without Economic Justice?

*The first assumption of the Economic Equity Project was the need to achieve economic justice as an integral part of the struggle for social justice and equity.*

For a long time women, blacks, youth, the unemployed and the under-employed, the homeless, native people, people with disabilities, and a long list of communities have claimed their rightful place in society with varying success on the legal and practical level. Yet, in most cases, the social recognition has not been accompanied by a better life for most members of the communities.

The poverty issue is easily linked to the marginalized and excluded groups in society. A vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion followed by more poverty and exclusion is identifiable in most groups excluded from the mainstream. A question resurfaces frequently: Can we achieve social justice without economic justice? As part of the picture of the struggle for equity, the construction of direct and controlling participation in the economy starts to play a frontal role.

The sense of community and the struggle for justice are the seeds from which a large number of strong organizations are founded. The limited resources of these organizations restrict their actions. The enrichment of their communities could give these organizations a better chance at having a more effective voice in the struggle.

## Community Economics, an Alternative to Globalization of the Economy

*Our second assumption was the need to form an economic alternative to the globalization agenda and have control of that agenda and the resources needed.*

Marginalized and excluded groups always have had very little say in the way the economy is run. They suffer all the consequences, from the lack of well-paying jobs to the reduction of social programs and state support, but their voice will not be considered important enough to be listened to at the time of decision-making. This is a common story.

The globalization of the economy created a new mentality in society "We need to compete and everything that holds us back should go". The "charity" mentality that prevails in some countries in the North, Canada included, tends to disappear. The targets of social discrimination and economic injustices are transformed into culprits of their own discrimination. The government and those powerful in society refuse to acknowledge their roles in the creation of a two-tier society — good jobs and education for some and the lack thereof for others.

The globalization of the economy not only hurts traditional marginalized groups. It has created new excluded individuals and groups. Large numbers of white male factory-workers joined the number of unemployed when plants closed and moved South. White youth are facing a future of low-paying services, jobs and creativity will close the door in their face.

## Community Economic Development

*Our third assumption was the need for viable economic ventures developed by a strong organization accountable to an organized community.*

Community economic development is a concept that jumped into the mainstream in the last decade. For many years, different intents of community-based business or local economic plans were tried all over the world; workers-owned production co-operatives in the developed countries and farmers' co-operatives in the developing countries are the most common examples. This was always treated as lateral to the mainstream economy. With the surge of global unemployment, government agencies started paying attention to this "alternative" form of creating employment.

With the acceptance of the concept of community economic development two debates arise. One is "What is a community?"; the other is to question the understanding of "economic development".<sup>2</sup> In the first debate, re: "the community", the issue concerns geographic communities or locales and the notion of 'community of interest' in which members share a common destiny but are scattered over different locations.

The Economic Equity project was building support on the open concept of community. *Communities are dynamic forces interconnected by history and needs.* A community could possess different shapes or forms, a community could be geographic, as a neighbourhood or rural area; a community could be linked by common interests or relationships, as for example, the environment, race, gender, age, abilities.

The second debate is about "economic development". On one side, the view is oriented to a more economically pragmatic position in which "the principal goal of local economic development is to develop local employment opportunities in sectors that improve the community using existing human, natural, and institutional resources".<sup>3</sup> This approach is oriented simply to economic growth. The other side of the debate is oriented to a more organizational change in the community. "Community economic development seeks to change the structure of the community and build permanent institutions within a community. As a result, the community begins to play a more active role vis-a-vis the institutions outside the community, and the residents of the community become more active in the control of the community's resources".<sup>4</sup>

The Project supports the second concept of "economic development". In the concretization of the Project the concept was moved from theory to practice by deciding to work with organizations in geographic or common interest communities that were oriented to organizational change using economic ventures. The need for the Project to work with organizations was clear. The organizations formed by and within these communities gave them a voice in different structures, some more formal than others, but to effectively represent the community they would need to have some lines of communication and accountability. The community is the blood and flesh, its organizations are the voice.

These organizations are usually those who identify the need for a more active and direct intervention in the economic domain and put forward the idea of some business for, or in, the community. These businesses should start by considering the needs and potential in the community, followed by the recognition of social and cultural values for the community, and finish by considering environmental issues. These characteristics: *community oriented, culture valued and environmentally friendly* are part of the model of community enterprise promoted by the Project.

The organizations joining the Project would work in three fronts: a) building the business, b) building the organization and c) building the community. These three feed a successful and viable economic alternative in the hands of the community.

## **Equity Capital, Role of the State**

*Our fourth assumption was the conceptualization that the government could provide support to the communities by investing on their ventures.*

Some of the marginalized groups gained concessions from the government by using political pressure, lobbying, organizing at election time, demonstrating and several other methods. Two examples to illustrate the point: the Human Rights Commission of the Province of Ontario is to investigate, and prosecute when necessary, discrimination cases on the basis of race, sex, religion, etc.; and the Employment Equity Commission of the Province of Ontario is there to guarantee equity in jobs, salaries, promotions and hiring/firing policies by the employers, etc.

An area in which the government has been particularly active is the investment in economic ventures for the marginalized groups. The government contributes financially to some economic ventures promoted by native people as well as supporting some training plans in other communities. It is just starting to pursue active participation in that arena.

The government should play an active role in supporting community economic ventures by funding and creating policies to strengthen them. The areas of policy to consider are taxation, investment and training. Another potentially active area of participation by government is its "buying power". Buying products from the community venture will help to develop those alternatives.

## **How Do We Do It? Popular Economic Education**

*Our fifth assumption was the decision to use popular education methodology as the pedagogy to train participants in Community Economic Development.*

There are plenty of materials on how to get in touch with banks or government agencies or how to start a small business. There is also plenty of information available about Community Economic Development as a method to get local economic businesses going. Then why a new project on the same issue?

The excluded groups do not have, for many reasons, easy access to that information, nor do they feel welcome to use these materials. Exclusion is not a perceived reality but a concrete set of actions and reactions. The need to be involved in the control of their own destiny made it necessary to use tools that allowed that control to happen and to revalue the experiences of the community.

Popular education allows the participating organizations to understand and learn about the operation of the business and the vision of community economics. To run a community venture, the organization needs tools at the operational level, (for example, how to prepare a cash-flow projection) but to be able to create community control, a vision is needed of where they are going. Popular education enables the groups to utilize tools in a context of challenging power and building alternatives.

Other traditional materials about Community Economic Development extrapolated concepts from the business world without an alternative vision.

In these materials implicit values are embedded; as a result, some basic skills are required. Some examples could help to understand this better:

- Financial rewards to individual participants is considered the primary moving force, more than increased participation of the community in the control of their future. In no case does the Economic Equity Project oppose the possibility of individuals having financial rewards. It just does not see that as the most important value to achieve. If the value is individual financial reward, then specific knowledge of numeracy, taxes, ownership and financial planning is required. If the value to achieve is community control, community organization, networking, accountability and investment in the future of the community and not the individual members, are skills to be developed parallel to the ones mentioned above.
- Organizing of business to participate/compete in the marketplace is the main survival/growing strategy instead of the creation of an alternative to the marketplace. In the first case, the community venture needs knowledge to be just like "one of them"; marketing, pricing, advertising are the skills required. In the second case, instead of skills to think about "the market", the attention should go to "constituencies" and participation.
- Using traditional financial institutions (banks and government agencies) rather than tapping the potential of the community. To be able to satisfy the traditional institution, the community venture will need to do business planning using foreign concepts (cash-flow analysis, secure collateral, etc.) with new skills required exclusively to convince bankers. If the community organization opts to persuade its own members to support the venture, the skills required are knowledge of the community, friendship and sound planning in financial community development.

Most of these values cannot be considered tools for liberation of the marginalized and excluded in the society; neither are the value elements of a vision that could help them to find dignity and equity. By using popular education methodology, the project supports the recovery of the communities' experiences in organizing, planning, fund-raising and independent functioning as the base for building a community economic venture.

## Other Players to Create Jobs

*Our sixth assumption was the understanding that there are players allied to the cause of the community organizations within the economic field already.*

Marginalized and excluded groups are not alone in the struggle to recover economic power. For decades workers organized in unions and in cooperatives have been fighting the same struggle. These groups have learned important lessons over the years about how to gain back some part of the benefit of their labour. *Unions* have mastered the ability to lobby governments for legislation and pressure companies for rights and economic benefits. *Cooperatives* have developed democratic control of the workplace as well as interesting alternatives to traditional marketing.

With the increase of immigrants and refugees from non-European countries, the traditional Canadian workplace has changed its racial composition. These "new" workers, members of unions if they work in an organized company, are natural links between the community and its allies.

Small businesses have also been left aside by large corporations and governments serving them. These small businesses are usually already located in some segment of the community and some of their owners and operators are members of the community. These small businesses have important lessons to share in the survival against large chains and corporations. They also could benefit from networking with new markets.

## HOW THESE ASSUMPTIONS RELATE TO LITERACY WORK

From its conception the Economic Equity Project had two main characteristics: organizational and educational. Organizational by inviting and creating coalitions and networks of community organizations; educational by choosing training to build alternatives to mainstream job creation programs. The organizational tool selected was Community Economic Development. CED, which, by fomenting the creation of community-based enterprises, allows a point of concrete bonding among organizations. The educational tool selected was literacy or basic skills training needed to engage in community economic development. Popular education was the methodology applied to achieve the goals of the project.

Community-based business has the potential to allow marginalized sectors to build self-reliance, create an alternative centre of power by giving control to the community, address socio-political, cultural and environmental concerns and refocus the concept of work in a more meaningful way. The basic skills needed to develop community-based business have to be captured, named, internalized and diffused. In other words, from conceptualizing the opportunity to relating the concept to others, words must reclaim a meaning to fit the struggle of the marginalized groups.

*Literacy enables one to capture reality by using words. We know what "bread" is. By learning to write the word "bread", we start controlling some of its use. When we add the context of how bread is made, how many hours of work are needed to buy a loaf of bread, who has more bread and who has less, we enlarge the concept from naming the object to reflecting the social reality.*

Popular education can be defined as the **collective process** that allows **critical reflection** of the reality, **challenging** institutional power and mobilizing to **create** changes in a **continuous** process. Applied to the terrain of economics, we can say that popular economic literacy:

- Interprets elements of the socio-economic reality and its relationships, discovering the patterns amongst them;
- challenges these patterns and in the process, transforms the current structure of work and ownership of the products of labour;
- captures, names and transfers knowledge of the historical context in which work and ownership of the products of labour is framed.

In the case of community-based business, the dialectical tension uncovered by popular education fluctuates between the need to know concrete tools (for example, marketing plans, cash-flow projection, registering a business, etc.) and a vision of how the business should operate (community-controlled, environmentally friendly, culturally aware, etc.). Collective actions and evaluations allow that tension to reinforce and invigorate the different ends of the contradictions.

## STRUCTURING THE PROJECT

### Community Role

While growing numbers of organizations are becoming interested in community economic development, projects are still generally isolated from each other and are in stiff competition for resources and scarce funds. The Project addressed this problem by forming an umbrella of coalition organizations. The coalition planned to achieve four goals:

1. **Building a model of community-based economic venture:** What does a community-based economic venture look like? What kind of accountability process is necessary and to whom? What kind of training should be in place? How is this kind of economic venture promoted?
2. **Coalition building:** Networking and supporting each other have been an agenda topic for these organizations for many years, using local economy as a tool, which could and should be reinforced.
3. **Strengthening organization:** The organizations who are part of the coalition saw the Project as an opportunity to fortify their base in their communities
4. **Advocacy:** Creating a coalition and having success in the Project will create an alternative centre of attention towards advocacy and lobby in front of government agencies and will allow promotion of an alternative model of community-based economic venture.

### Doris Marshall Institute (DMI) role

The Doris Marshall Institute for Adult Education and Action is a group of mixed-race women and men educator-activists working for social justice and equity. Their mandate is to build the community and coalitions to help break down and resist structural barriers such as race, class and gender. They work with others to develop analysis for local and global action and promote democratic practice as a key to building effective social movements.<sup>5</sup>

The Institute reflects the following principles in its projects as well as in its own internal practices:

**Respect people's experiences:** Our approach assumes that people have a range of skills and knowledge, and that their work is rooted in a particular history and context. The Institute does not substitute its expertise for theirs, but provides additional content and skills as needed.

**Analyze power relations:** We believe that race, gender and class oppression are major forces in Canada, as well as globally. We recognize that there are other forms of oppression which also need to be challenged, such as age, heterosexuality and ability, therefore we promote an examination of power relations within our educative work.

**Develop theory from practice:** The Institute encourages ongoing analysis of the political, economic and social forces which shape everyday life and the societies in which we live.

**Create cultural alternatives:** Critical thinking and effective action are not just intellectual activities, but require the development and use of a broad range of creative energy and activity. The Institute seeks to integrate various forms of cultural expression into our work because it is energizing and equips people to work for change.

**Act for social change:** Education is an essential process: linking learning to action; shaping action consistent with goals; mobilizing and connecting sectors of people. Education is integral to action for change.

The Institute took an active role in forming the coalition of organizations that promote the Project. The Institute also participated in the Advisory Committee and was in charge of the design, facilitation and coordination of the workshops.

## **GOVERNMENT ROLE (JOCA)**

The "Jobs Ontario Community Action" (JOCA) is a 'community economic development' government program meant to encourage partnerships in community action which will result in economic development and job creation. JOCA is a \$300 million, three-year program that provides funding for approved community development and community capital projects.<sup>6</sup>

Formulating and funding a community economic development project is an elaborate and time-consuming process, one which underfunded, understaffed community and workers' organizations are usually under-resourced to do. Most government financing of community economic development tends to favour organizations with proposals already on the computer, and who already have enough infrastructures to present a feasible proposal.

The Ontario Government has recognized that something is wrong here, that money should be distributed more equitably, and that more than the current allocation of money should be going to cooperative, community development projects which benefit more than a single entrepreneur. In order to achieve equity among organizations, there is a need to support the effort of community groups in developing their project proposals. This involves better access to information and training resources and the creation of a support network.

## **KEY PROJECT COMPONENTS**

The project strategy consists of integrating three related components: Action, Research, and Training. These components, woven into every activity of the Project, aim:



- To strengthen the organizational and leadership capacity of community groups to act as animators of community economic development projects.
- To ensure broad-based participation, access and equity in planning, designing, and implementing community economic development projects.

**Action:** The action component of the Project consisted of a series of field experiences for participating organizations during which they conducted some or all of the following field/on-site activities: needs/resource assessment, project identification, proposal development, and organizational planning. The participating organizations engaged in the activities that better fit their needs. These activities took place in between the training workshops attended by participating organizations.

At various stages of the Project, participants received coaching support from members of the Project's Resource Teams, whose role was to assist the participating organizations in carrying out their tasks at the community level.

**Training:** The training component was implemented through two successive stages:

*Stage One:* a one-day training/information session aimed at casting a wide "recruitment net" as a special measure to reach out to such groups that ordinarily would have difficulty in accessing the CED programme of the government. This outreach effort was specifically aimed at communities of common interest whose constituencies are primarily women, immigrants, racial minorities, unemployed workers, low-income groups, or people with disabilities.

*Stage Two:* two training workshops (two and a half days per workshop) aimed at preparing the participants to implement the action/practicum component of the Project. Training was conducted just before each of the practicum/field activities.

**Research:** The research component of the Project consisted of compiling, analysing, and utilizing data from the training and field experiences of participants. From this research, the Project aims to develop recommendations towards the shaping of CED models, based on the experience of the participants.

## EXPERIENCES COLLECTED

The use of participatory education as methodology opens the door to integrating experiences learned by doing the Project. In the process of building the Project, new skills were identified as needed. In most cases, these skills were not part of the traditional literacy domain but rather part of the training to start up a small business. The broader understanding that popular education methodology brought to the Project permitted the building of tools in the following areas: creating a vision; network and coalition building; exchange of experiences and internal coaching; capture and name community values; label services and resources in the community.

### Creating a Common Vision

To be able to work together to achieve a common goal, the participants built a vision of a community-based business. The venture had three pillars: a) the community, b) an organization in the community and c) a business created/promoted by the organization. These pillars could be at different points of development but were still the base for a community-based enterprise.

The business should be:

**Holistic:** Its conception should integrate social, economic, political, cultural and environmental issues to reflect the nature and the spirit of the community.

**Community controlled:** Mechanisms should be in place to empower the community to participate and make decisions about the nature and the future of the business.

**An alternative centre of power in the community:** The challenge to mainstream notions in the community should be front and centre to the plans of the business.

**Culturally aware:** The business should support, value and strengthen the way of life in the community.

**Creating self-reliance:** The future of the business, the organization and the community are linked to controlling resources, thus the self-reliant businesses could help the other players in their struggles.

## Starting at Different Levels, What Will The Outcome Be?

A concern of several supporters of the Project was the fact that some organizations would have different starting-off points into developing an economic venture. Some organizations already have an idea, a business plan and will require very little support on marketing and networking, while again, other organizations will use the Project to reach out to find if there is interest in the community for some kind of economic venture. The Project views differentiation as a strength, not a limitation.

The concepts of coalition and networking should be concretized to make sense to the participants. It is not enough to claim the need to build coalitions. The advantages of coalitions should be presented in a clear and tangible style to the members and participants.

Participants identified the following advantages for being in a coalition and starting at different points:

- The projects that just begin to think about an economic venture could find ideas and experiences on how to go about reaching out to the community, organizing, and preparing for the venture from veterans;
- The veterans could review their activities at the same time they help new groups develop. By reviewing their activities they could check for any flaws or fast conclusions that could hurt their ventures down the road;
- Since these economic ventures need suppliers and customers, some projects could start linking up to each other and challenge one another in their understanding of how to do "business".

## Training Time Also Used for 'Grooming' Projects

Designing the training and coaching posed a problem. How was the Project going to make the training and coaching sufficient enough for the participants when the funds to pay for it were very scarce?

The limitation presented by conceiving training through a traditional method is the lack of time to groom a project to termination. The trainers

and coaches will be at the starting point to help participants with ideas and methods; in some cases, resources will allow them to stay longer in development, but rarely can they sustain their closeness for long periods.

The result of this common situation is a split between the training and the growth of the Project in two typical scenarios. In the first, the Project moves very quickly to make as much use as possible of the expertise of the trainers and coaches. Usually this approach leaves some members of the community behind. In the second scenario, the trainers and coaches of the project respect its rhythm, the project moves slowly and everybody in the community is involved. In this case, the trainers and coaches are not part of the whole cycle due to the lack of resources to sustain their participation.

Popular economic education, by building coalitions and putting tools in the hands of project participants, differentiates the training period from the grooming period. The trainers and coaches will have a role in grooming, but will not be the only ones around the project doing that function. Other members of the coalition, by sharing information and stories of success, will be backing and supporting each other in the growth process.

Because of the need for training and grooming to function at different rhythms, practitioners of popular economic education incorporated the means for grooming as part of the training offered to participants. The training using popular economic education enlarged the traditional economic base training (market needs analysis, legal incorporation of business, ownership, marketing, etc.) adding supporting and grooming tools such as: building coalitions, respecting diversities, networking, etc.

## **OUTSIDE COACHES VS. INSIDE COACHING**

Another aspect of the popular economic education methodology is the dependence within the community for developing and supporting the projects. A common understanding of community-based economic ventures is "the need for resources and, possibly, clientele coming from the community". The projects shared that idea but enlarged the community role to one of active supporters providing knowledge and insight. The trainers and coaches see their roles evaporating as the projects grow in skills and understanding, and will create an environment in which the different projects will go into their own communities to look for support and new training. Popular economic education practitioners believe in the abilities of communities to support themselves.

Traditional trainers and coaches (sometimes called consultants) create a dependency on their knowledge and support for the success of a project. At no point are we implying that all trainers and coaches who do not use participatory methods are doing this work to create dependency. We recognize the valuable job many people in the community economic field are doing, but we argue that the methodology in itself has a content of dependency on other

peoples' knowledge. By insisting on creating tools to immerse the projects into their own communities, popular economics overwrites any possibilities of dependency on outside support.

As a goal, the trainers and coaches of the Project have to work themselves out of the Project, therefore leaving the community and the coalition prepared and motivated to support and promote economic venture.

## **COMMUNITY VALUES AS A MARKETING TOOL**

In this time of «free-market» ideology, a constant reminder to any new economic project is the need to compete. Free-market supporters see the price of the product as the final and most important device to be successful in business. They will argue that the «customer» in a free-marketplace will always look for the cheapest, best-quality product. On that estimation, any business should strive for good quality at a cheap price to be able to survive.

New business can, in many cases, provide good quality products, but the prices are usually higher because of the small scale production and, possibly, a better pay scale. This crude reality discourages many communities from engaging in economic ventures. The ones that try, in many cases, end up exploiting themselves or going bankrupt trying to compete at the price level.

The Project rescued the idea of community values as a marketing tool. A series of ingredients made the community economic venture different from traditional business. The following ingredients should be used for marketing purposes.

- The community economic venture should be embedded in the community and created to satisfy a need of that community, for example, catering traditional food in the South-Asian community or producing a neighbourhood paper to talk about community issues and advertise the businesses of the neighbourhood.
- The community economic venture should be supporting people in the community on their job creation efforts, for example, a snack shop employing youth of the neighbourhood or a taxi company hiring drivers from the community.
- The community economic venture should be environmentally sound and democratic in nature, e.g. a group of farmers who harvest organic products to be distributed directly to people living in their town.
- The community economic venture should help the community keep its traditions and its identity, for example a group of Filipino nurses and domestic workers doing health care for the elderly and the sick respecting their way of thinking and interrelating.

These elements, could be the most important tool of marketing for a community venture.

## **NETWORKING AS A MARKETING TOOL**

A large percentage of business done by large corporations is through internal shopping, for example, Bell Canada (owned by BCE) will buy equipment

from Northern Telecom (owned by BCE). In the brave world of global competition, 49% of transactions are inter-corporate. This is an aspect of big-business mentality that can be applied to the coalition of community ventures.

Networking could be an important starting point for creating a successful community venture. For example, a community restaurant could buy some supplies from an agricultural coop, have some renovations done by a construction coop and hire employees for training from the youth of the community. When the coalition of community organizations act as the matching partner, networking could be enlarged to interact with other community ventures. Newsletters and computer bulletin boards could help different ventures link up with others providing related products or services.

## **SERVICES THAT SERVICE COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (CED)**

The service sector is the fastest growing sector of the economy in developed countries. At the same time that plants close and move south, the service sector is creating large numbers of non-unionized, low-paying, mostly part-time jobs. Two questions are presented when one thinks Community Economic Development: 1) How do we create community economic ventures in the service sector that can employ community people, pay decent salaries and be successful in the market?; and 2) How do we use community economic ventures to improve the situation for the workers in the service sector?

The idea of networking community economic ventures to commerce among themselves has been previously addressed and it is important to keep in mind in the following instances. The Snack Shop, the Care Givers or the Food Catering Providers are examples of services provided in a community economic venture environment and the networking and advertising in the community will help them flourish, pay decent wages and employ community people.

Another aspect to consider is that a community economic venture is a «potential» client as well as a producer. Any community economic venture will need some accounting and legal support, some computer and transportation requirements to cover painting, electricity and installations in their premises, etc. At this point the community economic venture has the power to negotiate for these services. By checking the record of the potential providers of these services, the community economic venture could make sure their money is being spent in a business that treats their employees respectfully.

A second and more complex way of addressing this problem is through the coalition of community economic ventures and its supporters. When several community economic ventures share their needs, there is the possi-

bility of discovering a requirement shared by many organizations, for example, special features in a computer accounting program to account for community loans at no interest. By joining forces in the endeavour, the coalition can promote a new community economic venture in the service sector and cover their needs.

## **CED Creating Community Wealth**

An important aspect considered is the creation of wealth in and for the community. Wealth is understood as the economic, cultural and productive enrichment of the community. Each community, in its own historical development, carries cultural values, traditional ways of doing things and has some individuals better off than others. The coalition of organizations and projects tries to rescue these features and improve on them.

The idea of approaching small investors in the community instead of going to banks was advanced at several levels. If the Project obtains economic support from the community, it will show it is really part of the community, will increase the money circulating in the community when profits are realized, will open doors for new ventures to obtain capital, and will create an alternative market for investment.

At the production level, the Project recognizes different ways of doing things in different communities and tries to build on that. Instead of promoting uniformity at the organizational level, in the marketing and distribution of products, etc, it promotes the «look at the ways in which things are done around you». This will increase community wealth at different levels. Members of the community will be able to integrate and be productive a lot sooner. They will not feel like strangers in the workplace and they will be able to contribute ideas for improvements. An example of this in Toronto was a group of tailors from India making pyjamas in their traditional system and training young people from the community to do the same.

The last aspect of creating wealth in the community is the cultural aspect. At the cultural level, the community could be enriched by recognizing and integrating their cultural symbols with the nontraditional world of «business», for example, advertising in different languages, using different graphic images, etc. Another angle for consideration is enrichment of the culture by mixing with others and allowing young people to contribute new ideas.

## **DEVELOPMENT IS LEARNING AND EXPERIMENTING FOR NEW IDEAS**

The Economic Equity Project is part of the more general Community Economic Development plan. The major thrust of this article so far has been the economics of the community. We would like to touch on the development part of the equation. A common understanding of development is «helping and promoting the growth of something», in this case community ventures.

Using this understanding as a point of departure we find two tendencies: the first tries to «develop» traditional business in a traditional manner by putting the ownership in some form in the community, for example, open a variety store in a poor (and consequently threatening) neighbourhood because the traditional chain stores do not want to have a branch there. In this case, the business is a traditional one and will probably be organized in the same model as any other variety store.

The second tendency is to develop something new and original from and for the community, like an open door newspaper for which any community member can write or network to exchange services among with other members. Because of the nature of the enterprise, the internal organization will differ from traditional ones.

The Project aligns itself with the second tendency: experimenting and giving time to the projects in order to succeed was considered part of the mandate of the group. The new ideas could be in the form of business in the internal organization and/or in the relationship with the community as a potential market and source of investment.

## **INSIGHTS AND REFLEXIONS**

### **Conversations in the hall**

Some tensions formed during the implementation of the Project. In most cases, they were reflected in informal conversations during breaks or between workshops. We will use some of these comments to illustrate the tensions.

*“They do not want to open a real community business. It is a family business. If tomorrow they want to sell the business, the community will have nothing to say.”*

A permanent discussion will evolve around the difference between “entrepreneurship” (individualistic — market oriented definition) and “community-based” (collective — oriented to the politics of the community). The Economic Equity Project did not discard the value of individual and family business in the community, but was oriented to the community supported venture.

This tension opened two different debates. The first centered on “ownership” and the second on “entrepreneurship”. The first debate encompasses lines of accountability and decision making processes. In a traditional business the decisions are made by the owners. It could be that the owners are individuals, partnerships, families or share-holders in large corporations. A community-based enterprise is not clear enough in defining what kind of ownership is preferable to be accountable to the community. Some participants feel inclined towards an organization with a Board of Directors representing the community and hiring employees from the business. Some prefer the idea of a community advisory board. In both cases, naming the link with the community was a major issue in planning the venture.

The second debate pointed to the need for economic survival of the business. The main focus of the Project was the building of communities and coalitions through economic ventures successful in the market and able to survive to produce what the Project envisioned. A "community-oriented entrepreneurship spirit" was identified as a primary need for success.

*"The government doesn't understand. We need the funding to develop alternative models and advocate for them."*

This comment reflects the contradiction between funding needs and control of the process. The Project was funded by the Ontario Provincial Government to fulfill some of the expectations of its constituencies. At the same time, most organizations felt the need for the government to provide funding and "leave us alone" in order to realize their own mandate. A contradiction developed between the request for funds and the plans to use them to advocate alternatives to the government's projects. The need for self-reliance and alternative sources of funds were part of many conversations during the implementation of the Project. Also, the limitations and the trade offs involved in using government money for community projects provoked heated discussions.

*"Will people buy our project/service even if they do not like our cause?"*

This is another aspect of the need for a "community-oriented entrepreneurship spirit". The quality and prices of the final products should allow the community-based business to survive in the market place. Any venture that depends solely on the support of those committed to their belief would have a difficult time surviving.

*"Too much effort is put in coalition building, etc., etc. What we need to learn to do is "cash-flow projections" and business plans."*

Another contradiction is present in the need to produce short term results for business (products/services) and the long term goal of empowerment for the community. A balance between effectiveness and empowerment should be reached and reflected in the training plans, in the new literacy for employment.

*"We started the project for us and, now, everybody wants a piece."*

At the conception of the Project, the organization members of the initial coalition looked to share resources to obtain funding for their projects. Instead of individual applications, they decided to make a single application. When the funding was approved, new players came to the table requesting the opening of the funding to more organizations in a larger geographical area. The process was opened and several organizations who did not initially belong to the coalition were selected to participate.

The trade off to have a democratic process was the loss of the common vision that the coalition had originally generated. Also, the resulting larger geographical area made the coaching and the follow ups after the workshops very difficult.



## JOBS AND LITERACY FOR A BETTER FUTURE

The traditional definitions of “jobs” and “job creation”, limited to the conventional workplace, would not help the marginalized groups solve their employment problems. A new definition of “job”, centred in the community and more than just making a living, could be the answer to chronic unemployment and discrimination. The new definition of “job” should incorporate cultural recognition, control of the workplace, immersion in the community, acceptance of community values and dignity of the worker. The new definition of “job” should go farther than traditional economics and move into the socio-economic, political, cultural and environmental terrains.

These new “jobs” cannot be created by traditional methods (tax incentives, credits, etc.) nor by traditional agents (government, private corporations). The direct intervention of an organization established in the community should mobilize the potential of community ventures and job creation, and the community control should replenish the opportunities. With the organization in the community playing a leading role, economic incentives and outside agents play the role of supplementing and supporting the venture. Recognition and support by governments, banks and private corporations can open doors to the community venture.

The “literacy” necessary to acquire these new “jobs” is larger than language, numeracy and conventional skills on the job. These are necessary tools to create successful ventures and jobs, but they need to be put in a context of challenging power relations.

We can use the completion of a bank application for a business loan as an example of a traditional tool. To fill in the bank form, language skills are needed to explain the nature of the business, the market and competitors, potential, etc. Also, numerical skills are needed to prepare budgets, cash-flow projection, payroll, etc. In a traditional setting there would be no following debate about the context in which this bank form plays a role. The participants would learn the skills required and move on to the next chapter.

In popular economic education the questions of “who benefits from this?” will be presented to the participants. Who makes money when a loan is repaid? Whose money is protected when a loan is denied? How do financial institutions decide which is a good or bad market to invest in when accepting or denying a loan? Why are only economic assets valued as collateral for a loan from the banks? These and many other questions set the context in which that form is used.

In many cases, due to previous experiences of participants, the possibility of looking for alternatives to finance a business could begin by understanding the context. At the same time, by looking at alternatives, the participants challenge the power relations in which they are functioning.

Skill development and language/numeracy training are tools in the hands of the community venture to improve its success ratio and for possible employment in other businesses of members of the community. Setting the

context and challenging the power relations increases the possibilities of independence from the community in traditional economics.

**Popular economic education** is reactive and proactive in its training. As we mentioned in the previous section, it is reactive when it introduces traditional tools and challenges the power relations in which these tools are used.

It is also proactive when it includes non-traditional economics guidance in the training. For example, networking and cooperation are presented as alternatives to marketing and competition; the history, culture and economics of the community are alternatives to the traditional market statistics. The workplace created by a community venture could model a solidaristic and non-hierarchical organization. To be able to create a **democratic organization** in which power sharing is the norm, a new set of tools must be incorporated into the training.

Fragmentation, direct control by management, division of conception and production and technological control out of the hands of workers are the most notorious aspects of the traditional (Tayloristic) work methods found in most workplaces. Some workplaces are introducing self-directed work teams to gain a more active participation of workers in production, yet, workers do not have much say in the introduction of new products, marketing, investment or long term planning. The contribution of workers in most cases is directed to the production process.

The concept of community controlled and organized business creates the basis for a different relationship between workers and owners. In some cases, these businesses will be worker cooperatives with some organization in the community. To be able to establish a different relationship, a new model and tools should be in place to deal with that reality should it be provided for the participants.

These tools form part of the new "literacy" for work. Popular economic education should involve strategic planning, technological research and development, conflict resolution, decision making techniques and group work design.

**Notes:**

1. The organizations part of the coalition include: Our Local Economy (OLE); Canadian Coop Association (CCA); Coalition of Visible Minority Women (CVMW); National Council of Filipino Associations (NCCFA); Doris Marshall Institute (DMI); Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO); Northumberland Community Coalition (NCC); Windsor Urban Alliance on Race Relations (WUARR); Canadian Chinese National Council (CCNC).
2. Perry, Stewart E., Lewis, Mike and Fontan, Jean-Marc Fontan. **Revitalizing Canada's Neighbourhoods: A Research Report on Urban Community Economic Development.** Vernon: CCE/Westcoast Publications, 1993.
3. Blakely, E.J. **Planning Local Economic Development.** London: Sage Library of Social Research, 1989.

4. Swack, M. & Mason, D. "Community Economic Development as a Strategy for Social Intervention". Part of E. M. Bennet, **Social Intervention: Theory and Practice**, New York: Lewinston, 1987.
5. Arnold, R., Burke, B., James, C., D'Arcy, Martin & Thomas, B. **Educating for a change**. Toronto, Doris Marshall Institute for Education and Action with Between the Lines, 1991.
6. From the **Application Guide to Jobs Ontario-Community Action** from the Government of Ontario, 1993.

## **SECTION FOUR**

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**New Types of Economic Organization,  
Regional Development and  
Resistance to Dislocation**

# Chapter Eleven

## THE “IN LOCO” ASSOCIATION AND ITS WORK IN THE SERRA DO CALDEIRÃO

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*This chapter is dedicated to J. H. Brito de Carvalho, a friend now lost to us, who remains indelibly in the memory of our team.*

*The author would like to thank those in the Serra and the In Loco Association who shared their experiences and opinions, enabling her to complete this work. Her thanks are also addressed to the Institute of Educational Innovation and the Education Services of the Gulbenkian Foundation, whose support made it possible to carry out the work.*

This research sets out to describe one approach to promoting local development; this is the approach adopted in the work of the In Loco Association<sup>1</sup> in the region of the Serra do Caldeirão in southern Portugal. We shall also attempt to analyse the way In Loco creates opportunities of entering the labour market that may be seen as alternatives to existing possibilities.

In Loco's work is a process of education for all those who participate. It also includes specific periods of training that are closely linked to the wider context of local development in a given region.

First, we shall briefly describe the characteristics of the region where the work takes place, the Serra do Caldeirão, the principles that underlie In Loco's position, and some of the projects that the Association has developed. Then, we shall try to define the most significant features of some of this training, of the methodology used over the years by the training team, and some of the lessons which experience has taught us. In order to go into the matter in sufficient detail, we shall emphasize one of the areas of training: vocational training for women.

In this, we shall identify the different actors: development workers who work within the organization of the In Loco Association, and those who operate in the field, in the Serra do Caldeirão, in projects started by In Loco. We shall attempt to give an impression of the various actors' perspectives on their work.

## THE BEGINNINGS

The work in the Serra do Caldeirão began in 1984 with a small group of people connected to the Higher College of Education in Faro, the capital of the Algarve region. On the basis of the significant inequalities observed in the Algarve region and the discovery of a "hidden Algarve" (a surprising rural reality that is quite different from the famous tourist coast), this group considered the situation and designed a project to set up a "Support Network for Integrated Development in the Algarve" (under the Portuguese acronym RADIAL). Work began in 1985 in four villages in the interior, in the Serra, with financial support from the Bernard Van Leer Foundation.

In 1988, the impetus created by the project enabled it to become independent of the Faro Higher College of Education. A group of citizens willing to make a commitment to the project then formed a development association, the In Loco Association. This brought together teachers from the Faro Higher College of Education, and a number of development workers and officials from various public institutions. It was to be a cause to which professionals and the general public supportive of participatory democracy and "common sense" professional work could devote themselves, and in some cases it became people's "life work".

## THE AREA

The Serra do Caldeirão, a mountainous area of moderate height (400-600 metres), is located in southern Portugal and forms part of two administrative regions: the Alentejo and the Algarve. The main economic activity is agriculture, despite the poor soil over most of the area. Small family farms predominate, practising traditional subsistence farming.

During the first half of this century, the population of the Serra grew enormously. This growth brought about intensive exploitation of natural resources and made it more difficult for families to earn a reasonable income. This situation contributed to emigration by a large number of people, especially from the 1950s. The men, especially younger men, went in search of work in the urban and industrial centres that were then expanding, either in Portugal (largely in the Lisbon area) or abroad (especially in France and Germany). In most cases, the older men, the women and children stayed at home and lived off their smallholdings and the money sent by those who had emigrated. This money also helped them to save for better living conditions in the future, after the period of emigration. With the departure of a large number of its inhabitants, the Serra lost demographically and now has a lower density of population.

In the 1960s, tourism "discovered" the coast of the Algarve, thanks to its sun and beaches. This mass phenomenon unleashed a profound and rapid urbanization of the coast, and created jobs, notably in construction and the tourist industry. A large number of people from the Serra came to work in the coastal region, largely in unskilled jobs. Today, many inhabitants of the Serra do Caldeirão, men and women, including young people, work on the Algarve coast; they travel there every day, a distance of 50 or more kilometres. Others only go home at weekends or have moved completely to the coast.

Hence, the Serra region has not undergone any significant restructuring of production even though occupations have changed. We can define the region as one that "exports" unskilled labour. Farming is increasingly a supplement to income derived elsewhere; other small activities, such as crafts, are tending to disappear.

Nonetheless, careful examination reveals significant continuity from the past. Just as farming is now complementary to outside activities, other occupations were then complementary to farming, in a region with few resources. The quest for work outside the region is also a long-standing custom in the Serra do Caldeirão, although it was far less widespread than it is today. People frequently used to travel to work on the large estates in the plain of Alentejo and what was called the "Baixo Algarve" (Lower Algarve), nearer the coast. Traditional crafts such as weaving and basketry, occupied people in their free time, and their products were sold in the local markets, bringing their families a little money. Now as then, in an area in which property is generally split up, socio-economic reality is marked by an ancient characteristic: the diversity and complementarity of sources of total family income.

If we study the Serra from this angle, we find a population that has long managed to survive in a region with few resources by adopting a way of life that has resisted — and still resists — the powerful changes in society as a whole and the consequent pressures. They have, for example, resisted total dependence on working for other people by developing many different activities. This attitude of resistance can provide potential for finding alternative types of development.

## OUR WORK IN THE SERRA DO CALDEIRÃO

From the outset we realized that this project was a support project for a regional type of development, even national or nowadays European development: a balanced, harmonious type of development to fill gaps and based on the human individual, on his or her aspirations and needs, not on capital. People go where the money is: we have to try rather to do the opposite, to make money go where the people are. (Alberto Melo, Chairman of In Loco)

The creation of a local development association such as In Loco has its roots in the notion that civil society must play an active part in development. This position is reinforced in the way in which the world economy has evolved and national policies have developed — and are developing at an increasing rate — those aspects related to social solidarity have been sacrificed in the interests of economic success.

Work in regions like the Serra do Caldeirão that are marginalized by this type of economic growth, provides an opportunity to stress development alternatives including all the aspects implicit in the concept: economic, social, cultural, etc.

Places where the survival of different traditions and ways of life reveals resistance to the process of mass (“one-dimensional”) uniformity in our societies, are well suited to experiments with alternatives (with the exception of those that are predominantly economic) and to the use of action-research that embraces both tradition and innovation.

In this context, In Loco is described as an *intermediate development agency*. While remaining outside, it has sought to establish relations between the institutional support that it can mobilize on the one side, and existing and potential projects in the Serra, on the other.

As a development agency, it set out to promote a process of lifelong education, so that the seeds of a “development culture” would be sown among the people of the Serra. In other words, as A. Melo has put it, “to create skills that people at first think they don’t need”. This implies persuading local populations to appreciate the value of their own views of themselves, of the culture to which they belong, and of their place in changing situations. Those who work as “development workers” (people from outside the local reality) become involved in a process of personal learning, through their own role in the search for new development models.

In strategic terms, intervention is based on carrying out specific small-scale projects to encourage activities for the creation of jobs and local income. Besides the financial dimension of the work responding to the local need for sources of income, work is also done on important educational aspects. People gain a sense of self-worth through what they produce and the services they provide. The fact that products frequently combine elements of traditional culture coincidentally raises the value ascribed to that culture and its images.



In Loco gives particular importance to social work, enabling us to identify and support ideas and aspirations by transforming them into new projects. In this way we try to achieve wider and wider participation by the people; we try to make people who are at first passive become gradually more actively involved, take initiatives and assume responsibilities.

Action-research is also crucial to the process, since it addresses questions such as: "What existing resources are there, and how can they be put to use?" "How can outside resources that derive from different concepts and realities be fitted into local reality (equipment, technical jargon, etc.)?" One of the objectives of action-research is also participation, so that the outcomes can belong to the local population, the protagonists of the process. Research plays an important part in the design and implementation of vocational training, which is frequently linked to the conduct of projects. The actions of the Association throughout its experience of training are essentially the fruition of an action-research project. The starting point was the evaluation of every item of training, and from this evaluation, new forms were then tried out and checked, and once more evaluated.

## OPERATIONAL HISTORY

In 1985, our work began with three people and no exact division of responsibilities. The number of people involved grew slowly until 1992, when the "LEADER" programme started and, to a certain degree, forced the team to expand rapidly.<sup>2</sup> Today, In Loco has some 30 active staff and does not wish to increase this number so that it can keep everyone involved and remain flexible.

In widening its intervention, the central team has taken on new roles. Today, it is essentially a body coordinating the work of local social workers in the environment and encouraging the creation of autonomous organizations to carry out particular activities in partnership with various regional agencies. This is the case in two projects now running. One is the launching of an enterprise to promote and sell products and services from the Serra do Caldeirão; among the shareholders are personalities and entrepreneurs from the Algarve. The other is the establishment of a resources and applied research centre (CRIAImm) in partnership with the Regional Department of Agriculture and the local authorities of Loulé (soon to be joined by the University of the Algarve, the Forestry Institute and other bodies).

Throughout the process, the internal operation of the Association has undergone several major transformations. A large number of people have joined the team to take responsibility for administration and other support functions, in order to meet new requirements. Most of these people are young; we are thereby trying to ensure that a job in In Loco is also a significant opportunity for training and learning about social intervention.

Our older staff are generally those with university qualifications in the following fields: psychology, sociology, philosophy, law, geography, economics, agronomy, education, etc. This is also the coordinating group. The "veterans" group of In Loco has been joined by many members with similar qualifications who have largely come from the training courses associated with In Loco, such as the training course for professionals in regional planning or the course for young development workers.

The youngest members of the In Loco staff have in most cases studied social work and have subsequently taken courses at the In Loco Association. Others have come to us via vocational programmes arranged by the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP). According to A. Melo, "the best motivated and those who have participated most actively, such as those who liked the way of working at In Loco, stayed on". This group of something over 20 persons do not generally have university qualifications, and they support those responsible for coordination in carrying out projects and in administrative and other tasks.

## PROJECTS

In 1985, a careful examination of the realities of the Serra immediately called our attention to the lack of local development prospects. Younger people, especially the men, were looking for work outside; older people lived on subsistence agriculture and their pensions; the women did the everyday work on the smallholdings and looked after the house and children. In this context, it is obvious that there was little motivation to improve living conditions among the local community, which was stuck in the myth of a more fortunate past and very sceptical of its own abilities to change those conditions (Melo and Soares, 1994).

In Loco started its actual operations with two community meetings and with contacts with senior officers of the local authority and chairmen of the *Juntas de Freguesia* (parish councils). One of the hopes expressed by the population, and by its representatives, was the creation of jobs locally.

Furthermore, as in urban areas, people felt the lack of institutions to "take care of the children", both before they reached school age and when they were waiting for several hours after school in the centre of the village for transport to take them home to their small villages.<sup>3</sup> The idea was therefore put forward of establishing activity centres for children to meet their educational needs from the age of three years and to bring about a change in educational practice at school as a result of the way they would be run.

Our work, which was the outcome of these contacts and the means of support that we were able to mobilize, began with two emphases: vocational training for women so that they could create their own jobs, and creation of activity centres for children. The latter led in turn to the training of young assistants in the field of educational social work.

These first initiatives, developed in the local authority offices in four parishes in the interior of the Serra, led to the establishment of seven small craft businesses as an outcome of the vocational training for women, and to the running of four activity centres for children, which are today administered by parents' associations that In Loco set up and supported from the outset. The IEFP, the Regional Social Security Centre and the local authority offices gave other vital support.

During the nearly ten years that have elapsed since we started work, the range of our activities has expanded and diversified. The year 1992 marked the beginning of an important phase of development and social intervention, with the launch of the Project to Support Integrated Rural Revitalization of the Serra do Caldeirão Alentejo/Algarve (ARRISCA), a local action plan for the development of the Serra do Caldeirão which In Loco presented to the European Commission under the Community LEADER initiative. Today, In Loco's work covers an area of 3700 km<sup>2</sup> and almost 50,000 inhabitants. This action zone (27 parishes or villages, divided between two different administrative regions, the Alentejo and the Algarve) is trying to create a relatively independent geographical identity, the Serra do Caldeirão.

The ARRISCA project gives particular attention to supporting activities that could become sources of income to complement the small family farms. To this end, it has invested heavily in action leading to the promotion and selling of regional products, especially agro-food products. Examples are a systematic inventory for processed foods; research into achieving improvements in their quality; the "Serra Fair" organization (six fairs have already been held); and the opening of specialized shops under the name *Casa da Serra* (House of the Serra) in urban centres. These activities also aim at supporting the small women's enterprises set up within the vocational training courses.

Meanwhile, In Loco has also been making a list of the tourist potential of the Serra. Rural tourism is an activity that should be supported since it creates significant networks for selling local products. Nonetheless, it must be realized that tourism may cease to be a complement to other sources of income.

Funds from the LEADER programme have at the same time enabled financial and technical support to be given to launch small projects. These projects, put forward and implemented by a number of inhabitants of the Serra, cover various fields such as the establishment of small units to process raw materials, tourist entities (accommodation and catering), modernization of existing small enterprises, design and production of advertising material to promote products, etc.

The work also promotes a strong and positive image of the Serra identity, both externally (seeking particularly to establish a positive relationship between the origin and quality of each product), and among the local population, which is generally sceptical about the value of its own culture, region

and capacity for change. Hence, the Association has supported the publication of varied material about the Serra for the general public and the local population. The establishment of their own identity by the people of the Serra, and the appreciation of the value of each of its components have led In Loco to invest also in launching a monthly periodical to be read and, as far as possible, written by the people of the Serra. This is the *Jornal da Serra* (Serra Review), which presents local news, articles on the cultural heritage of the Serra, the idea of integrated rural development, and the progress made in the region.

We are not trying to mention everything that we have done, but it is important to say that In Loco is anxious to establish networks to communicate and cooperate with other organizations that have concerns similar to its own, by arranging some meetings and taking part in others. We are attempting to exchange experiences with the aim of sharing information and forming wider groups to defend similar interests in and outside the Serra, in Portugal and Europe. In Loco has also launched a computer network which operates at national and European level. Among other publications, it produces a periodical magazine *A Rede* (The Network).

The ARRISCA local action plan has also been implemented since 1992 with the aid of a key feature of In Loco interventions, a network of local development activists working in their own region. These workers were trained between 1992 and 1994 (the period when the ARRISCA programme was run under the LEADER initiative of the European Community). With appropriate orientation by regional coordinators, they were chosen from among the In Loco team and are responsible for direct contact with the various sections of the population, for the identification of needs, expectations and possibilities of intervention, and for implementation of the intentions of projects and the follow-up of local projects.

## VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR WOMEN

Two vocational training initiatives conceived and implemented by In Loco are particularly significant in the context of this discussion. At the beginning, we did not think of training exclusively for women, but women showed interest, and were available. Experience showed that they were a group with great potential, making it worthwhile to address them.

The "Da Torre" workshop is a unit producing wooden toys and set up in a small hamlet (a Torre) belonging to the village of Alte. It was formed out of one of the vocational training courses run by In Loco. The course had not been designed for women, but they were the only ones who enrolled. At the end of 1988, the news of a training course to make wooden toys spread throughout Alte. Several women thought about this and concluded: "Why not? It might be interesting."

Some of the women had no outside occupation. They were housewives and were looking for activities that would enable them to "learn about something different" and to "get out of the house". If they succeeded in making a little money, so much the better. Others had already worked as maids in hotels on the coast of the Algarve.

When they enrolled in the course, they thought that it would be like others they had experienced: that it would enable them to learn something and "meet other people". But, from the selection interviews, they began to see that this time it would be different. The organizers talked of their forming their own business, and they thought: "Shall we manage it?" To begin with, some of the husbands did not like their wives going out of the house, and as the course tutor was a man who spent the whole day alone with them at the school, the neighbours made suggestive remarks to the women. Such a thing had never been seen in Torre.

Five years have elapsed, three years of training and two of independent work. The women, who had not originally chosen this type of training, are today happy with their situation as self-employed workers. They appreciate the freedom they have and see work in a different light: they feel more responsible, largely because of the agreements that they make between themselves which must be respected. They are also calmer than they would be if they had a boss: "We don't make much money, but we don't work much, either!" And if they stayed at home, they would not do any more: they "would spend the day moving things around that stay put all day instead". By coming to work, they are together and work becomes agreeable.

They also like to sell their products themselves at fairs, and in the workshop they enjoy explaining to people about the toys and seeing their surprise. It is not always easy, and sometimes they are obliged to leave their homes and families and travel a long distance.

Two years ago, two women in the group decided to stop making toys and to go back to working on the coast, as they had done before. Some time later, they came back: "We were working a lot, the work was hard, we never stopped." They left home at six in the morning to travel a long way, and came back late, and very tired. They earned more, but the difference was not worth it.

Today, they realize that they have changed significantly, know more people, have better relationships with other people, and know and appreciate craft products in an unconventional way. They think that they are recognized and valued in their village and are particularly proud of being the women who make wooden toys: "It's nice, people are surprised and ask: did you really make that?"

During its first phase (1985-1991), the training developed with the help of a vocational training programme supported by the Ministry of Employment and Social Security.<sup>4</sup> This programme allowed for training lasting two years and the possibility of a grant to enable those who had followed the course to create their own jobs once the training was completed.

The regulations also provided for an organization to take responsibility for the course, the training plans and the selection of trainers, and to make machinery and equipment available. The In Loco Association was this organization. It provided seven courses in fields as varied as hand-loom weaving, design and making of clothes for women, traditional patisserie, knitting and allied crafts, hessian embroidery and doll-making, wooden toy-making, and growing, harvesting and processing medicinal and aromatic plants. As provided for in the programme, these activities set out to revive traditional knowledge (with certain exceptions such as wooden toys, which had not been a local tradition).

The training plans included production techniques specific to each activity, design, promotion and selling, as well as book-keeping and business management. On the basis of the experience acquired, In Loco, as the sponsor of the training, validated and increasingly stressed both personal development and group dynamics. These two aspects proved to be essential.

By allowing for a period of training followed by the launching of trainees' own businesses, the support programme (Conservation of Cultural Heritage, CCH) established a division between the period spent in training and the time of entering the labour market; In Loco tried to avoid this separation by involving people from the beginning in the dynamics of a project.

In the case of this training, work began with women who generally had no clear ideas about the productive activity in which they were engaged and, at first, were not all interested in setting up a small business together. Furthermore, the fact that the CCH programme gave the right to a training grant equivalent to the national minimum wage encouraged many women to enrol in the training course in order to have some income for a couple of years. In such a situation, it was very important to make clear from the beginning that the training was not an end in itself, like other training courses that many of the women had experienced. For example, in order to take part in the course, the women had to agree to deposit part of the training grant in a joint bank account in the names of all of them, thereby establishing a common fund. The situation was always clear and unequivocal, and this remained a feature of the course throughout: the women undergoing training always knew that the common fund belonged to them. During their course, the sum was used to purchase equipment and raw materials as the grant from the Ministry of Employment and Social Security was in general restricted to the set-up costs.

From the point of view of In Loco, it was necessary to put the women in the position of really running "their own business" as early and rigorously as possible during training. As they acquired productive skills, they started to manage directly all the organizational and financial aspects of relations with suppliers of raw materials and purchasers of their products. Thus, they gradually began to manage the production group with increasing autonomy, to keep financial records, etc. This attitude enabled different training

programmes to be developed from questions arising from the way the group actually functioned.

Once the training was completed, and after it had been running for several years, it was apparent that the women quite easily took on the role of running small craft manufacturing businesses, perhaps because these did not require the women to do anything very different from what they had previously really been doing locally: even in the past, women worked as specialized craftswomen in certain production areas.

## Results

The women's attitude towards their "entrepreneurial capacity" raised more complex questions. In comparison with their previous situations, they had arguably taken a great step forward. Nowadays these women have regular contacts with the outside world, often travel with their products to fairs and other regional and national promotional and sales events. Nonetheless, they do not take part in events other than those that are regular and already familiar; they generally prefer to wait for buyers to come to them, and hence maintain a passive attitude. They are shy to look for customers (especially in urban areas) and of making contact with shops, etc.

Several factors contribute to this passivity. For one thing, women are still appreciated in the local culture for their modesty and reserved behaviour. In fact, they play an important part in managing and maintaining the domestic budget, but it is the man who should appear, to the public eye, to play the main role. Still today, it is often not easily accepted in these women's social milieu that they should go away from home to sell at fairs or to take part in other events outside the family or local community. For another, relations between this population and urban environments are still difficult. In addition their own shyness, the women feel that the fact of being from the Serra has negative connotations in urban areas, and diminishes them in the minds of potential buyers.

So, although the training was devised with a view to the financial stability and viability of the activities that would flow from it, the real financial situation of most of the production groups is poor and produces only limited profits. These production groups nonetheless respond positively to certain aspects of the work which are generally undervalued: "these projects are very important to almost all the women (...) not only because of their business dimension, but also because of their personal dimension of acquiring a chance of socialization which did not previously exist" (Manual Soares, training worker for In Loco).

In fact, these enterprises are examples of integration in the labour market which include an important aspect of personal development and social integration. The women leave the closed world of the home and family life and begin to develop their own activities, the future of which lies in their hands.

Others give up unskilled work to take up making products that other people appreciate. They manage their working conditions among themselves. They widen their social circle, expand their contacts and face up to new experiences. "When they're asked how it would be if they went back home to their housekeeping chores, the response is unanimous: 'Never!'" (M. Soares).

All the same, if we reflect that immense efforts have been made to set up these production groups, the results are somewhat meagre, below what is desirable. Considerable investment has been made in continuous training, eight hours a day for two years, both in terms of manufacturing equipment, motivational work, encouragement of a collective spirit, and development of the will to make a commitment to a production group.

### **Suitable Training Methods**

Although the training may be a useful tool in certain cases, it is too rigid and cumbersome for the purposes of most initiatives, at least in the socio-economic context of the Serra do Caldeirão. According to the conditions of the contract, the programme itself obliges people undergoing training to engage in exclusive occupational activity for at least three years. Furthermore, from the moment they begin, the production units are subject to the financial commitments and contributions required under social security. These charges prove very onerous for small enterprises that are just starting up. Nonetheless, the CCH programme, under which the vocational training for women that we have been discussing is run, does enable training to be linked to a job, even though the two are not concurrent.

Unlike the dominant model, in which there is a tendency to undervalue polyvalent functions and to overestimate specialization (Soares, 1994), In Loco has realized that these activities generally develop in tandem within a family economy that embraces several activities.

The team in charge of In Loco training therefore thinks it important to open regional training policies promoted by the state to the implementation of training programmes more closely linked to the context in which they are to run. It is also important that people should not be required to commit themselves to working afterwards full-time in the activity, and that people should not be pushed into forming collective enterprises if they do not want to. Furthermore, we consider it important to support people at the difficult time when they are launching such projects. This support consists largely of encouragement, advice and guidance to ensure the success of the project in the context of the training. However, it is precisely at the time when projects are launched that training ends.

This situation has led several of those charged with vocational training for women at In Loco to ask themselves questions, and has brought about a search for more suitable training methods. In 1993, In Loco launched a new vocational training initiative for women, under the EC "NOW"<sup>1</sup> programme.



This demonstrates that the In Loco team has learned some important lessons leading to redefining of training needs and methodologies.

This training was designed for women with a personal aim of creating activities. The projects reckoned on being funded under the "LEADER" programme and were ready to be launched. Women engaged in similar projects in the field of rural tourism were selected (catering, reception and guiding). There was also a constant concern to support projects developed within the confines of the family economy, according to the principle that this should embrace several activities. The projects should therefore focus on farming.

Since this training was aimed at women who were mostly engaged in a specific economic activity, had family responsibilities and came from different places scattered over more than 3500 km<sup>2</sup> of the Serra do Caldeirão, a training schedule of two or three days a month was chosen, consisting of a series of modules run by different trainers: personal development, development of the enterprise project, receiving tourists, and gastronomy. The modules were complemented by individual follow-up in the field of decoration, including a visit to projects of the same type in another area, and visits to each other's projects, which proved very important for developing a group spirit among the women undergoing training.

A very important aspect of this training was the fact that the participants were engaged in a project that they had started themselves, with very precise ideas on their own aims and interests. The team in charge of the training thought this a very positive fact, primarily because it was reflected in greater commitment on the part of the women.

In the future, In Loco will aim to stress this type of training, which is more flexible and better suited to the ability of people who already have an actual occupation, to attend regularly. We are even thinking of offering a free choice of training modules, with the option of following the training courses of direct interest.

In all the training that we have conducted, both vocational training for women and training for young social workers (which we have not discussed here), certain methodological aspects have been common and crucial. We have always used the project method, and the various training courses have always been structured, evaluated and redesigned to match the outcome that was actually intended: the creation of a production unit, the launching or reconstruction of a tourist service, the exercise of the functions of an educational social worker or an integrated rural development worker. This way of approaching the question was naturally complemented by situation-based teaching. As far as possible, the training content was derived from the questions arising out of the actual situation, real work and people's everyday problems.

The training carried out has only offered some more structured fragments of a much wider educational process, which aims at creating changes leading to integrated development in the region.

A very lively sort of learning is implicit in all aspects of In Loco's work in the Serra do Caldeirão, for all the people involved in carrying out new activities and in seeking new solutions that will help to solve the problems they face. By setting out to counter the predominant movement of economic and social marginalization of the people of the Serra do Caldeirão, and by trying out alternative development models, In Loco has taken the role of essential protagonist (as it would like the people to do themselves) in the education that it offers to the people with whom the Association has worked and will continue to work.

We may end with the following assessment by Priscila Soares:

... if we think that the aim of any training, formal or informal, should be to transform each person into someone who has a project ... I believe that these processes are true training processes ... that the people with whom we work have made great strides in this direction, have stopped being just numbers in statistics and have become actors ... with aims that relate to reality, finding resources and putting these into practice ...

### Notes

1. "In Loco" is a Latin expression meaning "in the place [itself]". The Association's motto is "Think globally, act locally."
2. LEADER: Liaison entre actions de developpement de l'economie rurale (links between development action and the rural economy). A European Union programme setting out to support local development that recognizes the worth of the rural economy, especially focusing on non-agricultural activities.
3. The "monte" means all the buildings of a farm in the province of Alentejo, where farms are quite a long way from each other.
4. More precisely, the Conservation of Cultural Heritage Programme organized by the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training, an agency of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security.
5. See the study by L. Smeyers and D. Wildemeersch —in this volume — on the Flemish experience of *Wonen en Werken*, which is also under the European Union "NOW" programme.

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# Chapter Twelve

## FROM HOBBY TO BUSINESS

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### FROM HOBBY TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Slovak project basically follows a triangle: **ideas — their change — labour market**. Our aim is to help unemployed people solve their situation in a period of economic transition and deep work crisis through the enlivening of traditional folk crafts. In our research we use new forms of informal education conducted by informal educators and social mobilization as active tools in solving the work and cultural crises. One specific aim is to show that leisure time activities and hobbies (which represent a traditional literacy) in the present situation gain a new important social and economic role. Their social function proves that it is not purely a market-economy role. Our second target is to support successful people in their craft to motivate and mobilize others with hidden abilities in various professions to change their own hobbies into entrepreneurial activities.

To put these aims into practice requires direct contact with the target group in different regions of Slovakia (whether individuals, cultural associations, transformed state companies, new joint stock companies, etc.). To define the entrepreneurial activities we concentrated on traditionally rural areas of Slovakia (agriculture, agrotourism, crafts, ecoactivities, services, etc.). We came to the conclusion that the usage of cultural literacy in local conditions “can play a significant role in economic revitalization in different Slovak regions”<sup>1</sup>.

The results and conclusions of our research enabled us to propose new strategies and recommendations concerning the preparation of adults to join the labour market under the new economic conditions. They will help to develop adult education research, cultural policy, the education system, work and social affairs policies. How to find new resolutions and recipes proved by concrete experience is documented in the following examples.

## REVITALIZATION OF TRADITIONAL FOLK CRAFTS

**Adult Education or andragogy** teaches how to mobilize people in order to resolve their real problems. (I am convinced that this is the real definition.) One possible way to solve social problems is, according to various experts, social **mobilization**<sup>2</sup>. We agree with this opinion.

This is the mobilization of mind and ideas, forgotten information and skills in interpersonal relations - what J. P. Hautecoeur calls "mobilization of inner sources". In our case, this is done through leisure time activities and hobbies. It means to mobilize oneself and one's surroundings in order to attain certain ideas to benefit all. Social mobilization means mutual help. This becomes obvious when we talk about such problems like gaining or losing a job. Various kinds of hobbies, for example folk crafts, can help create new job possibilities in our social and cultural context.

The term **literacy** means that literate people are able to gain new ideas, skills and knowledge and become "more literate". Where can we find sources for this process? As we talk about cultural literacy, the local cultural environment may be the main source for further development of ideas, knowledge and skills. To put it very simply, knowledge and skills which exist among the people of the various types of communities (villages, regions, families) serve both as a school and as a teacher. We can use fashionable terms and say that community culture becomes a source of requalification-qualification in the framework of contemporary processes which help people to get to the labour market.

Today I can say, and the Slovak project proves it, that leisure time activities have become an interesting object of our cultural-anthropological action research thanks to their remarkable ability to transform cultural values into economic ones.

Leisure time activities are an important part of life style<sup>3</sup>. We talk about a wide scale of these activities ranging from the practical — gardening, animal-breeding, home-mastering, sports, travelling, collecting things, etc. — to various forms of self-education, artistic and scientific activities, and phono-activities. Leisure time activities represent those human activities which are done in people's free time and which are not directly educational nor artistic/professional. Following J. Kúbálek<sup>4</sup>, we have divided these into: intellectual activities, aesthetic activities, physical activities, manual activities, and the organizing and managing of activities.

Within the manual activities it is necessary to stress sewing, cooking, and handwork. Sometimes these hobbies take the form of artistic craft. People learn forgotten traditional crafts, interior and exterior design, and/or develop folk construction (which is simply domestic mastership and maintenance). Many people deal with gardening, animal-breeding or phono-activities, etc. In the past, these activities were considered to be a tool for the development of human personality, an important means for balancing the monotonous work process by revitalizing and relaxing.

Today we can say that leisure time activities have gained a new reoriented dimension. Their recreation and relaxing role changed into a new socio-economic one because they help people gain new literacies and find their place in the labour market. One of the possibilities for solving the work crisis in Slovakia can be the revitalization of traditional folk crafts. In the field of folk crafts, Slovakia has a long history rooted in the period of the 4th and 5th century when the Slavs came to Slovakia. The biggest boom was during the Great Moravia where crafts were widely developed and spread. Many archaeological findings show a high level of creativity and skills of previous Slavonic artisans. The products found document unique characteristics of the culture of our predecessors. They represent a traditional professional basis developed through many generations.

In the beginning of the 20th century several co-ops, associations and institutions were founded [Izabela 1895, Lipa 1910, Detva 1919, Association of Slovak Folk Co-ops in Martin 1919] which dealt with folk-artistic production and were active until mid of the 20th century. After the Second World War, the state established and supported the Centre of Folk and Artistic Production (1945) where all physical and legal persons were compulsory members. During the period of 1949-1989, petty entrepreneurs disappeared together with individual attitudes of artisans towards their crafts, resulting in traditional designs of products nearly dying out.

In using the complex model of cultural literacy developed by UNESCO and Lumen Foundation, we want to stress the need of folk crafts development for the purpose of everyday life and economic activities. Our people have the chance to satisfy their personal ambitions, support and widen the local market and employ themselves. This idea was put into practice in the project *When a Hobby Becomes a Profession* through alternative literacy, teaching tinkery craft by a non-formal educator.

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF LUMEN FOUNDATION**

As an adult education specialist, I'm acquainted with the contemporary problems of Slovak people. I tried to connect my professional knowledge with real resolutions of the present-day problems.

I was inspired by the UNESCO Institute for Education methodology of research in particular by the last projects *ALPHA 94* and *ALPHA 96* coordinated by J. P. Hautecoeur. To fulfil the aims of action research *ALPHA 96*,

and to deal with other problems connected with unemployment, local culture destruction, drugs, etc., an interdisciplinary approach is needed. It cannot be secured by any state or academic institution. So we decided to establish a non-governmental organization, the Lumen Foundation (registered in 1994). This non-profit organization focuses especially on analysing and promoting alternative activities undertaken by individuals or organizations along with civic associations to reduce unemployment of the regions in decline of the Slovak Republic. We are involved in the following fields: framing entrepreneurial activities, traditional folk crafts, seasonal entrepreneurial activities, ecological activities, placing stress on the entrepreneurship of women, ethnic minorities and problematic groups of the population.

## Purpose

- Recommendations to the State entities within the conception of the state employment policy in order to reduce unemployment in Slovakia.
- Recommendations to the government for the application of new strategies in the sphere of adult education.

## Tasks

The main tasks of the Lumen Foundation are to:

- act as an alternative educational institution to promote literacy and self-employment in the transforming economies of Slovakia;
- provide counselling services (tax advising, psychology, personal management, etc.);
- establish an informal centre (data bank) for perspective entrepreneurs;
- develop an international collaboration in the area of alternative adult education;
- spread information about the training programs for unemployed people.

## ACTIVITIES

- **Research:** the defining of basic concepts on the theoretical level: the human capacity for creative work in an independent environment.
- **Training and Education:** organization of seminars, training courses and educational programs in the areas of entrepreneurship to help reduce unemployment and to develop innovation activities: counselling and advisory services in the various spheres (legislation, economy, health and social care, adult education, psychology): publishing of miscellanies from workshops and seminars organized by Lumen Foundation and compilation of special materials for media.
- **Cooperation with other entities developing collaboration with:** non-governmental international organizations (UNESCO), non-governmental Slovak organizations, and other entities like universities, information centres, cultural centres, etc..
- **Information:** creation of a bank of information focused on the mutual exchange of knowledge and creative confrontation among domestic and foreign experts in the area of adult education, research and legislation.

## What Has Been Done?

In November 1994 there was an international workshop and exhibition entitled *"Literacy and Work — A Resource of Prosperity in Local Conditions"* where the results of the Slovak action research project *"When Hobby Becomes Profession"* were presented (within the framework of ALPHA 96).

In May, Lumen organized the international seminar *"Literacy and Work"* which included an exhibition and other cultural activities.

In July 1995, in the historical town of Kezmarok, an international seminar and fair took place where Slovak folk artisans presented their work. Lumen also published a book about informal education of Romanies through cultural literacy. Through its database, Lumen traced many original products, forms of folk crafts and technologies, as well as collected a list of original literacy bearers and a list of non-formal educators. We are planning to issue a report from the Slovak seminar held in Stupava entitled *"Literacy and Work"* (in Slovak and English). We are currently working on the project of establishing a European House of Crafts.

## TRADITIONAL FOLK CRAFT PRODUCTION IN THE JOINT-STOCK COMPANY DRÔTOVNA HLOHOVEC CIE.

We have chosen this example of the Joint-Stock Company Drôtovna Hlohovec because it offered the opportunity to put the ideas of our project into practice and to enliven the tinkery craft tradition and skills. This company was originally a state firm which has been going through economic transformation, along with many other Slovak firms. In the region of Western Slovakia, it offers quite a lot of job opportunities for people (the biggest town is Hlohovec with 15,000 inhabitants). The period of economic transition affected this region also. Unemployment mainly affected people without university education, the physically disabled and women.

This factory for wire production seemed to be an ideal place for enlivening this old craft as it is the only one which produces waste material suitable for this production. After we visited the factory several times, we found a partner ready to fulfil our aims. Mr. Jurovaty, a retired man, accepted our offer to become a non-formal educator. The management decided to help us put the idea into practice, awaken the old craft and turn the attention of the public towards it. Together with the enlivening of traditional culture it also helped to employ physically disabled people of the region, as well as old employees that had been dismissed from the Joint-Stock company Drôtovna Hlohovec. One of the reasons why we have chosen this company was the still-existing technical equipment needed for the project and the course. We had suitable room, waste wire, tools, a production program and people ready to start with the new production.

## Stages of the Project

Even though Lumen was registered only in 1994, some of the activities connected with ALPHA 96 had been done before its registration :

May–December 1993: preparation of the project for the course coached by Mr. Jurovaty and Lumen representatives, working out the course methodology

January–April 1994: preparation of material and technical basis

May–June 1994: the course coached by Mr. Jurovaty took place

July 1994: The project was accepted by Drôtovna Hlohovec.

The production process definition, in-house employee training took place

November 1994: the advertising and promotion campaign started.

May 1995: presentation of a video-record from Drôtovna Hlohovec during the international workshop "Literacy and Work" in Stupava.

## The Tinkery Production Program

The fundamental provisions of the course and the philosophy of the tinkery production program are as follows:

- the spirit of traditional Slovak tinkery craft must be preserved;
- the traditional technologies and handwork characteristics of this craft have to be maintained;
- a bridge over the period the craft was not used and adjusting it for the purposes of present-day people from the point of view of utility, design, hygiene, technical requirements and production extent must be built;
- the course members must be trained in order to prepare them for the role of future adult educators and production management.

For Mr. Jurovaty, the non-formal educator of this course, the project stage objectives were:

- study the history, museum collections and literature concerning tinkery craft;
- renew recollection of visits with two old Slovak tinkers, Mr. Serík and Mr. Hoz·k (the last authentic Slovak tinkers still active);
- prepare the course schedule for the Hlohovec factory;
- design separate, individual objects for each participant;
- draw the objects in 1:1 measure so that the participant can cope with the making of the tinkery objects;
- define the necessary tools for craft production;
- find suitable production and social rooms, solve the interior problems of lighting, ventilation, floor space, furniture, work security, etc.
- get acquainted with the environment the participants worked in before.

Following is a direct quote from Mr. Juróvaty, cited from the video-record of the Stupava seminar:



Now I am 62 years old when I managed to fulfil my life dream concerning the craft activities and transmit my experience to other people. I am happy. I had to get acquainted with the former environment of participants to know their work conditions, their way of thinking, their attitude towards new literacy. It enabled me to think over my influence on their personalities and be ready for possible obstacles that might have occurred<sup>5</sup>.

This stage of the course consisted of theoretical and practical preparation. The theoretical preparation objectives were: to learn the history of tinkery folk craft from the 14th century to the present from simple narration, the theory of craft technology and the differences found in Slovak tinkery. Mr. Jurovaty provided the practical tasks of verbal instructions for individual approaches, individual products and practical production demonstration.

Within these individual instructions, he demonstrated all aspects of the crafts. For example, technical perfection, aesthetic feeling for details and the whole product, utility and design. Participants put a number on their products and placed them on the exhibit wall. Everybody could clearly see the stage of success and quality of the products. It was good feedback for the educator and the exhibit wall motivated and mobilized all members to continue working. The people who had been working hard with wire for many years learned that it can be a pleasure for them to create nice and useful objects.

## Evaluation

After the evaluation of the course by the factory management and the director general, everybody was excited by the results and production was finally started. As Mr. Jurovaty said: "Our artisan can sit on the grass and using simple tools make such a product. It's all handmade."

One of the course participants, who is now a production leader, said after finishing the course: "Wire was for us a product we counted in tons. It was a final product. Now you can see that one can produce a piece of art out of it and people like it. Wire has been re-evaluated, it's not just wire any more. This work is completely different, it's very demanding, it gives us a joy and satisfaction. I never experienced something like that before"<sup>6</sup>.

Step by step, Mr. Jurovaty drew some new patterns for the future collection which the participants learned to produce in Hlohovec. They produced it in eleven pieces assigned to:

- 1 for the Lumen Foundation;
- 1 for the Povazské tinkery Museum in Zilina;
- 1 for a sample catalogue;
- 7 for marketing needs; and
- 1 as a present for the general director.

The collection of tinkery products today represents nearly 70 kinds of products. These products are aimed to serve as utility objects for domestic use. Since the very beginning, all the products were made under the control of the master course participant, without constant supervision by the

educator. The educator solved the administration and production problems and checked the quality of works when necessary. They had to face a lack of administration, as well as price and wage regulations caused by the absence of this craft since 1918.

The Lumen Foundation started at the same time the advertising campaign started through the media, mainly the press. We prepared an exhibition in Bratislava (November 1994), in Budapest (February 1995) and in Stupava and Vienna (May 1995). Drôtovna Hlohovec used all possibilities, for example, participation in a tourism fair in Bratislava and an international workshop organized by Lumen Foundation. The negotiations concerning potential customers are in the making and some smaller orders have already been fulfilled. The idea is to extend a variety of products and to penetrate the trade and tourism markets. The new collection represents about 150 kinds of products but the possibilities are even wider.

At the end, we feel the need to stress that the public highly appreciated this activity and we received only positive responses.

Our attitude within the project *When Hobby Becomes Profession* is that it is a contribution to the international project *Literacy and Work* organized on a national level, using cultural traditions, interesting activities and folk crafts. Many results of action research are, today, already a part of prepared plans of the Slovak ministries of culture, education and social affairs.

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# Chapter Thirteen

## A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION IN JÁSZSZENTLÁSZLÓ

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### THE COMMUNE OF JÁSZSZENTLÁSZLÓ

Jászszenlászló is a village commune located in the sandy region of the Hungarian Plain called Bugac-Majsai Homokhátság, between the Danube and the Tisza. At the present time, it has 2960 inhabitants. The region, of poor-quality sandy soil, is largely forested and in recent decades has suffered from a significant lowering of the water table. It has long preserved its administrative and structural peculiarities, which have been seen particularly in the use made of the *pusztas* (deserted plains) around the villages and which distinguished it from the remainder of the system of *comitats* (counties) that developed in medieval Hungary.

The most characteristic forms of habitation in the region were for a long time isolated mixed farms which belonged, with the exception of Jászszenlászló, to the neighbouring agricultural towns. These hamlets — especially the wine and fruit farms — grew up at the beginning of the 18th century, after the period of Turkish domination, and they are still undergoing

transformation and adaptation to new circumstances. Administrative reorganization in the 1950s transformed some of the farms into rural communes.

Because of the unfavourable agricultural conditions, life has always been hard, but perseverance and the people's ability to join together and combine their efforts have helped them to overcome the severe trials of the various historical periods. In order to reduce the inherent risks of agriculture to a tolerable level, the local inhabitants found complementary activities such as crafts, stock-rearing, fishing and processing of agricultural products. Sales of these products helped to improve their lot.

The sometime establishment of a Farmers' Club, the "Ant" Cooperative, steam mills and windmills, an abattoir, an oil press and a reed-processing factory, and the appearance of a forge and locksmith's shop, fishing, rubble-wall building, basketwork, broom-making, embroidery and dressmaking, demonstrate that Jászszentlászló was a well-organized village with a society and an economy that developed harmoniously and adapted easily to local conditions. This process of enrichment and development, which had continued in the face of difficulties, was interrupted by the Second World War and the erroneous policies of the so-called socialist period, which were based on centralization, the concept of the planned economy and the destruction of the former economy, society and culture.

In the early 1960s, the inhabitants of Jászszentlászló were forced to become members of a Soviet-style agricultural cooperative. They were deprived of their land and their tools of production. In this "vast agricultural factory", a large part of the traditional knowledge and skills of the peasants vanished, the remainder still being used within the limits of the permitted small-scale personal activity.

Large-scale agricultural production helped to transform the system of hamlets (or isolated farms), to new villages and the disappearance of a large number of farms. In Jászszentlászló and its surroundings (as in the entire country), isolated farms were depopulated and many families and communities broke up. During those years, farmers and town-dwellers both became wage-earning members of the proletariat.

As a result of the change of regime, Jászszentlászló, like many other Hungarian communes, is now in a situation in which — while liberty and democracy have been won and there is a return to the private economy — people's chances of survival and possibilities of action are diminishing, and the potential for individual and collective development is being squeezed, as are resources. An *employee mentality* has replaced that of the entrepreneur, the owner and free citizen, and even the knowledge and skills that have been acquired prove unusable at this time of new challenges. Most people who had a job are functional illiterates who lack either the financial capital or the intellectual ability, or both.

However, thanks to some useful initiatives taken at the right time by some of the inhabitants, and to the goodwill of their supporters, the commune has

been lucky, or at least that is the impression that we have after several years spent there. What has come about in this village through the creation of a foundation to provide services and increase well-being, together with the development work already done, may serve as a model for the renewal, reorganization and reactivation of other Hungarian communes in similar situations.

## **HOW DID OUR EXPERIENCES BRING US TO LAUNCH THE PROJECT?**

Several residents of Jászszentlászló set out to find a way of leading private lives, and from the mid-1960s, they were encouraged and supported by the director of the local cultural centre. The worse the situation became for people, the more they drew together, at least to exchange opinions, and the closer they came to this local institution, which was there to help them to understand the conflicts of everyday life and to think of solutions together.

What did the popular educator of Jászszentlászló actually do to help local residents to solve their problems? For example, he widened the vocational knowledge of all those who (while being unwilling members of the cooperative) wished to continue or to start agricultural production for their own consumption, on their individual plots. Not only did he aim to transmit the necessary agricultural knowledge, but also to bring new life back to the farms. He was in fact a socio-cultural worker at a time when the term was unknown.

It was this local popular educator, director and only paid employee of the cultural centre, who told, informed and taught the inhabitants of his commune that the young people — who met only to enjoy themselves in other communes — could cover the costs of their programmes through a joint agricultural enterprise, that irrigation wells could be bored in small parcels of cultivated land even though the soil was poor and the climate dry, that there were ways of improving soils and that their productivity could be increased by the use of various less “modern”, more traditional fertilizers and technologies, and that the cultural centre could also buy equipment and machinery that could be lent to farmers thereby reducing their purchasing costs. In short, agricultural production was possible outside the confines of the cooperative and could be adequately productive if it was based on old and new practices and methods and pursued in collaboration with other people.

Even when such practices were still unusual in Hungary, not to say forbidden, the activities of the Jászszentlászló cultural centre were organized in response to the desires, demands and needs of the local inhabitants. The cultural worker, who was committed to his community, agreed to organize demonstrations against the demolition of the old mill. He played a major role

in laying out and running a fishing centre on the banks of a lake that had till then been poorly maintained. This attitude of the cultural worker, although not without parallel from the mid-1970s, was far from typical in Hungary. It was not the attitude people in high places expected officially, nor the attitude generally and willingly adopted by such workers.

Later, at the beginning of the 1990s, when the inhabitants of the commune had to face numerous new difficulties (their devaluation on the labour market, unemployment, lack of the knowledge and skills to start independent businesses, etc.), the cultural worker and the people confronting these problems were prepared to look for solutions. It was through a competitive bid under the European PHARE programme that the new foundation was offered the makings of a solution to this new critical situation.

## THE INITIAL PROJECT AND THE START OF THE WORK

At the beginning of the 1990s, the situation of the village cultural centre had also worsened. Its prospects had become unclear. The newly elected municipal council supported the idea of transforming the cultural centre into a non-profit making organization in order to take part in PHARE. The council members, probably with little faith in the success of the bid, readily agreed to make a material contribution to the possible establishment of a new foundation by giving it the cultural centre building, the library, the cinema and the fishing centre.

A subsidy of up to 15 million forints was available if the bid were successful. In order to present their project, the inhabitants of Jászszentlászló drew on the earlier cooperation between the cultural centre and a (somewhat) small section of the local population. They aimed at the economic development of agriculture and rural tourism, and the renewal of the crafts that had flourished formerly. On that basis they hoped to relaunch local society and community development.

The bid won a subsidy of 12.5 million forints, which immediately raised a number of problems. At that time, the municipal council went back on its earlier decision. They were no longer willing to make a donation to the Foundation, but only to rent out the property. After four turbulent meetings, the matter was settled.

The new Foundation was to work under the supervision of a governing board composed of seven members, its administrative manager being the former director of the cultural centre. The Foundation agreed to continue the cultural activities of the cultural centre and the library, and the municipal council granted a small amount of funding to this end.

The local development work conducted by the Foundation since its establishment (in July 1993) is much greater in extent: it has already procured 34

million forints from the region. These subsidies were granted to economic development projects and training courses.

Hence, the cultural centre, once a peripheral local institution despite its vocational work and innovative character, has become an organization of key importance for the inhabitants of the commune. This change for the better is due to the success of a development project based both on the initiatives of the 1970s and '80s, and to the help of the municipal council (support for the cultural institutions and their employees in the Foundation). The Foundation adopted the principle of always basing its initiatives on local knowledge and conditions, and on developing new knowledge by carrying out innovative activities. Above all, it has banked on the acquisition of practical, saleable skills. The other basic principle was to break with the isolation of the local, fragmented community and to create living communities through community activities.

## THE MODEL FARMS PROJECT

One of the elements of the projects submitted to the PHARE competition was the establishment of (private) *model farms*. With the help of experts from the University of Gödöllő, we planned to establish three *model farms* to serve as examples for those who wanted to set up their own in future. One of the three farms would have been mixed, another a stock farm, and the third, both raising stock and producing fodder.

However, this plan came to nothing because the university experts were too far away, and it was difficult to be in daily contact with them. The local inhabitants were not yet sufficiently prepared or well-disposed towards this type of enterprise. It was difficult for them to take a serious and final decision about long-term projects. The rejection of the initiative was due largely to the uncertain agricultural situation, to the very low prices and the large number of large and small businesses that were bankrupt. (It should also be said that the people of Jászszentlászló found it easier to reject the establishment of model farms at the suggestion of outside experts than the implementation of their own ideas. We felt this reaction on their part, and that is why we regarded the failure of the idea not merely as a negative result.)

## THE CULTIVATION AND SELLING OF PEPPERS

The other initiative that was part of the initial project and was also intended to set an example had far greater success. When the Foundation was created, in the light of the reduction in unemployment, those in charge gave greater attention to the products that had traditionally been grown in the region. They examined the situation of peppers (paprika) in the market and found it promising. They contacted a private firm, the third largest in the

country, which bought peppers wholesale for export. (It is interesting that the sales company in the region, previously a state enterprise, had no interest in the proposal, while the contractor was a businessman living in Transdanubia, across the Danube.)

In 1993, six Jászszentlászló growers sold 75,000 kg of peppers, but in 1994, the quantity sold had already reached 300,000 kg, and the number of producers taking part in the project had grown to 27. For sales on this scale, pepper growers, who were previously unemployed, were obliged to buy or have made some 10,000 boxes. Naturally, they gave this work to other unemployed workers in the region. In 1995, 50 growers signed a contract with the exporter for a quantity of 700,000 kg, and in 1996 they foresee selling a million kg of peppers.

Besides examining traditional products and market conditions, the Foundation has also taught the growers all the details of production, both growing the plants and business skills. Together with the exporter, they have for example agreed that the price of the seed should not be paid until the product is delivered. During the period of work, the Foundation staff and outside experts have toured the area under cultivation three times to advise the growers, who are sometimes bewildered and indecisive. Before bedding out and picking, they also arranged discussion meetings.

In 1994, the idea of creating a cooperative of a different type was raised at a consultation meeting between the growers and the Foundation staff. Most of the growers still protested against this idea, as the word "cooperative" always reminded them of very unpleasant experiences. Nonetheless, the pepper growers' operations already possess nearly all the characteristics of a classic cooperative based on private property. It is certain that people will in time openly show the nature of their collaboration. Already they have considered the possibility of building a pepper-drying plant, which will bring additional income to the inhabitants, who were still unemployed and without prospects a short while ago.

## THE CRAFT FARM

After initial problems, the *craft farm*, another project submitted under the PHARE competition, also took off. The foundations of a building were laid in 1993, and this was completed as planned in autumn 1995. It will be for craftspeople themselves and for those wishing to learn these trades. The building work was entrusted to unemployed workers who had been in the construction industry before they lost their jobs. The buildings are constructed largely of cob, since rubble-walls were formerly typical of the region, but this practice is forgotten. The future users of the craft farm also took an active part in its construction.

The possibilities inherent in the project are promising. Building in rubble was itself a learning experience, in the course of which the participants



relearned this ancient technique. Many visitors have followed the experiment during construction in the hope of renovating their own farms and using the same technique. During construction, a weaving course was started for the village women so that they could take immediate advantage of the farm's potential once work was finished. (See the model at end of chapter.)

## THE FISHING CENTRE

The work of renovating and enlarging the *fishing centre* began in 1993. In relation to the other projects, this was somewhat peculiar in that it required relatively little money, but much more active physical labour. On the other hand, the project aimed at integrating the local inhabitants' leisure time in a much more complex manner, while enlarging the commune's tourist potential.

From the outset, the inhabitants showed great interest in the way the centre would operate in future, and took an active part in the work. Almost 300 people worked voluntarily on cleaning the much neglected bed of the lake, renovating the buildings, fitting out the huts that would offer accommodation, and constructing the wind pump that would increase the amount of water. Most of them, together with the members of their families, still continue to use, protect and enhance the potential of the fishing centre.

To *sum up*, out of the four original projects, one proved not to be feasible, but the other three, after promising beginnings, are progressing very positively. The projects that have proved most effective are those demanding and guaranteeing greater independence, or requiring less money but more manual work. The community programmes have consistently been maintained almost without exception, and the economic projects have begun successfully. Their effect of making life busier and more exciting is felt throughout the entire village, and has influenced the other projects that people are beginning to plan.

More importantly, it was very quickly not only the needy inhabitants who turned to the Foundation. The idea of extending the Foundation's competency to the whole microregion has been raised with increasing frequency. The need to develop the microregion has been recognized, plans have been made, and new applications have been made to obtain the funds needed to launch new activities.

## NEW PROJECTS FOR THE MICROREGION

The essential principle of development projects and programmes is to address the issue from the point of view of the microregion. In the light of this principle, a Microregion Development Association (*Bugac Majsai Homokhátság*) was established in 1994 at the instigation of the Jászszentlászló

Foundation. This association, which brings together the municipal councils of the nine neighbouring communes and four voluntary organizations working in those villages has already designed five important projects. Two of these projects are well presented, while two of them still leave something to be desired.

### **The “Hátságús” Project (Meat from the Hátság Region)**

The aim of the project is to unite stock-raisers and fodder producers in the region on the basis of their common interests. (The various partners who are growing fodder crops, raising stock, processing and selling meat would be combined into one enterprise.)

The elements of the project are as follows:

- construction of an abattoir;
- reconstruction of the fodder mixer;
- cooperation in setting up a large butcher's shop;
- other sales contracts;
- contracts with producers and councils; and
- creation of an administrative staff.

### **The “Hosts of Homok”**

The aim of this project is to develop local tourism that can bring in new income and create new jobs. The development of tourism in the microregion could also help to revitalize relationships between the communes. According to surveys carried out in the nine communes, some 100 families would be willing to receive tourists, providing 300-350 beds.

The elements of the project that are already definite are as follows:

- development of an organization;
- action programmes to brighten up the communes, and the development of the region;
- finding out about local values;
- grading;
- creation of a welcoming social environment;
- market analysis;
- education and training;
- relationships between tourism and agriculture;
- individual investment by the hosts; and
- a unified system of signs and development of an infrastructure.

### **Crafts**

The aim of this project is to revive traditional crafts and to organize the various stages of the work, from training to selling.

The project has made a very positive beginning, and the inhabitants of Jászszentlászló have succeeded in winning an additional grant (6.5 million forints) from the PHARE programme.

The elements of the project are as follows:

- creation of the necessary organizations;
- construction of the craft farm and beginning of its operations;
- design of training programmes; and
- organization of training courses, summer camps and a demonstration under the title "Craft Farm Days".

About 40 inhabitants of Jászszentlászló are looking forward to being able to start work in the workshops, which are well equipped with machinery and tools. More than 160 other craftspeople from neighbouring communes wish to be associated with the project and to devote themselves to ceramics, basketwork, weaving, embroidery and wood sculpture.

## **MICROREGIONAL COORDINATION**

The aim of this project is to work out regional development programmes, to carry out inter-communal coordination and to develop relations with outside partners.

The elements of the project are as follows:

- to define a model for the operation of the coordination bureau; and
- to set up a coordination bureau covering the geographical area of the microregion.
- This organization is in the process of being created.

## **A Microregional Information System**

The aim of this project is to provide the inhabitants of the microregion with information about the Microregion Development Association, to make available the knowledge accumulated in the course of development work, and thus to provide opportunities to join projects, as well as to create local communication channels and means of social management.

The elements of the project are as follows:

- to inform residents, collect and disseminate information;
- to create local community databases;
- to carry out participatory community surveys;
- to provide information bulletins, local newspapers and guides;
- to open a community radio station covering the territory of the microregion;
- to provide training courses;
- to permit the exchange of information between specialists and consultants; and
- to prepare information for the outside world.

*To sum up*, there is already ongoing and continual analysis of the situation of the microregion and development of relevant projects. Outside experts are regularly invited to take part in the work. Rural tourism will become one of the main activities in the region. Community surveys and community development projects will be carried out and completed in the nine communes, which will increase the number of voluntary organizations and will improve the quality of their work. The Foundation and the Microregion Development Association are continuing to seek funds and are watching for announcements of the various competitions.

## IMPORTANT RESULTS FOR AND WITH THE COMMUNITY

All these results indicate that a new alternative local centre has been established in Jászszentlászló for the development of society and the economy, in the place of the collapsed centralized system. Using the combined will and interests of the locality, with the support of partners and the funds acquired for these purposes, the centre can put forward solutions to a growing number of key issues. The work has already gone beyond the local level as the need for relationships at microregional level is felt in almost all areas of development.

Despite all the difficulties and failures, it is clear that the effects of the shock caused by the change of regime and the changed situation can be mitigated even in the case of people who have an employee mentality. The Foundation sets out to help those people who do not have the financial or intellectual capital to create a new framework for their lives (in independent businesses) and who wish to improve their lives. The Foundation also intends to help entrepreneurs to recognize their common interests and the potential these offer for cooperation. It is also playing a key role in identifying problems in the microregion and developing joint solutions.

It is sometimes difficult to find local partners and to obtain outside subsidies and resources. Excellent experts and truly motivated, competent volunteers are a rarity. On the other hand, there are more good examples of cooperation and combined interests. Hence, people used to regard themselves as competitors in rural tourism, but nowadays they are combining to improve their provision. In two communes, local associations have already been set up to develop rural tourism.

For the moment, it is pepper growing that remains the most effective sector for "restarting" growers in the region. The lake and its surroundings have been revived, possibilities are still expanding, and the area is becoming a sort of forum for the village residents. The craft farm, a new establishment, is regarded as a very important initiative even by those who are not interested in its operations since it was created by the common will and by the effort of the community, whereas community investment and construction are not typical in Jászszentlászló or the region as a whole.

The organizational changes in the cultural centre which was ceded to the Foundation have resulted in a significant improvement in technical conditions (purchase of necessary equipment: telephone, fax, photocopier, minibus, video camera and computer). Under the conditions prevailing earlier, one or two employees would have had to be dismissed (which has happened in the other institutions in the region).

The most important result is therefore the creation of the Foundation, which acts as the "motor" for the development of local and regional life. It is local residents' will, interests and needs that set the motor working. The

Foundation is able to analyse and interpret what is happening in the immediate, and the more distant, surroundings. On the basis of this analysis, it can design development projects that match local citizens' interests and potential, and it is an effective partner for the community in carrying them through. Important results for and with the community.

The central point in the programme of the fund is to revive and promote the handicraft traditions of Jászszentlászló in order to utilise these in programmes that are intended to improve current conditions and decrease the unemployment of the area.

The building of the Craftsmen's Farm is related to the above mentioned aim from two points of view:

- first, the setting up of the farm itself; the product will be a building complex which will show the characteristics of the old type of farm and represent the possible use of building materials that can be found in the area
- secondly, the running of the workshops in which they want to revive production that can be made from natural materials such as hay, thatch, clay and wood. Furthermore, they want to also produce objects suitable for packing agricultural products of the area. All such products would be for sale.

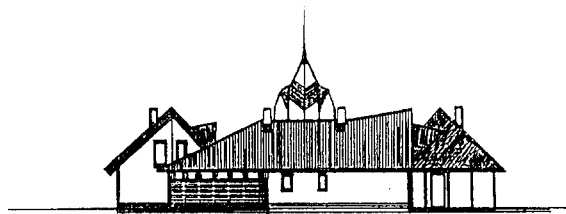
### CRAFTSMEN'S FARM

in the periphery of Jászszentlászló  
County of Bács-Kiskun  
Builder:

WELFARE SERVICE

THE FUND OF JÁSZSZENTLÁSZLÓ AND MÓRICGÁT

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# Chapter Fourteen

## EDUCATION IN THE SERVICE OF ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

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In this paper we try to offer an analysis of some ways Mexican marginalized rural groups use to face economic disadvantages or to say it bluntly, to survive. For many years these groups have established a variety of survival strategies due to the country's low social and economic levels. Given Mexico's current severe economic crisis, these strategies become even more important for research. There is a need to reflect upon what these groups are doing to survive, how they learn and how they put into practice untapped indigenous knowledge and know-how.

Two groups of experiences have been singled out for this analysis. The first group was funded by the State, the other by an NGO based on a clear cut educational methodology. In this light, some conclusions that may be drawn out of the analysis will consider the sponsoring organizations, and their impact on their results at the organizational, educational and economic levels. The idea of participation will become the axis around which we shall assess some conclusions.

Both sets of experiences take place in marginalized areas of two different states: the state of Mexico and the state of Hidalgo, both of which have significant indigenous populations: mazahuas and otomies respectively. The indigenous regions have been chosen as the project locations. As usual it is

in these areas where some of the lowest living standards among populations can be found (D'Emilio, 1994). An important thing to take into account is that the context in which these projects take place is a so-called 'Third World' country. Being such, a large part of the population lives in extreme poverty. Therefore, it is not difficult to find a target population that falls into these living conditions.

In this paper, we will look at the rural sector, a space where alternative economic strategies have a particular specificity: codes are more restricted, isolation has an impact on socioeconomic levels, access to public services is restricted, schooling levels are low, formal organizations are absent, etc. People in the rural areas were severely affected since 1986 because of decreasing agricultural prices. This forced people to resort to a wide range of non-agricultural activities and increased migration to nearby cities. It is in this sector where some projects have been launched recently, grouping people that used to work on an individual basis.

## THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Besides Mexico's 'Third World' reality, the social and economic crisis that began in 1982 has been a fundamental cause of socioeconomic initiatives carried out by people in rural and urban areas. As Tuirán (1993, p.96) points out: "1982 marked a crucial point within the growing trend followed by the Mexican economy since the postwar". The economic crisis that Mexican society has experienced during the 80s has caused important consequences for peoples' living standards. Social participation within income distribution has decreased during these years.

As an example, salaries and training dropped to unprecedented levels: more than 40% of Mexican working population has training levels that limit their incorporation into manual labour (Trejo, 1988, p.30). Schooling levels among the employed population show that 10.6% have no education, 41.8% have primary education, 34.7% have secondary education studies, and 10.8% have completed higher education studies (Latapi, 1993).

Despite these circumstances many people have been capable of avoiding drastic shortages in their family income by incorporation of other members of the family into the informal labour market, working extra hours, and looking for a variety of activities that may provide an additional income (Lustig 1992, pp.94-95). Mexico, as any poor country, may be a good example of how people develop local initiatives to face economic disadvantages, despite the fact that many of these initiatives do not always end with appropriate and long lasting levels of organization.

Lack of training, financial and organizational support, lack of knowledge of the market and of economic feasibility, are among the factors that have limited the setting up of economically productive projects. Such projects rarely go beyond the individual or the family; it is at this level where initiatives

and creativity show. People's efforts to complement their income seldom reach the level of social organization, and even then do not include many persons. Very often people get together to meet specific social demands (water, pavements, etc.). Once demands are met the group no longer exists.

These project communities do not have basic services such as drinking water, pavements, telephones, drainage. Brickstone houses are rare and mud houses are the most common. Most people are married with at least two children, although it is common to find couples that have more than four.

In Mexico many rural localities can be characterized as having marginal social and economic features. The majority of the people who set up social and economic projects are low income rural families with low schooling levels (rarely go beyond primary education), and who have a predominantly low social, economic and political status. They are a rather heterogeneous group (small-scale producers, agricultural cultivators, artisans, day-labourers, small scale traders of various kinds, etc.), who are not engaged exclusively in agriculture. Nowadays men work in many types of activities, although they are generally viewed as non-qualified manual labour belonging to the secondary labour market mainly working in nearly urban centres (watchmen, porters, bricklayers). Particularly in this State, there is a close link between the urban and the rural because of its proximity if not its partial incorporation into, the enormously expanding urban conurbation of Mexico City. As a result it is quite common to migrate to nearby Mexico City to get temporary jobs.

In the case of rural women, low schooling levels and a predominant subordinated social and economic role are common features in rural communities. Women's everyday conditions are characterized by their primary reproductive role confined basically to time consuming domestic activities and to the contribution to family economic life. Women are usually engaged in traditional work, concerned with both domestic and farm labour: tending crops (sowing, weeding, harvesting), feeding the animals, fetching wood for the fire, time consumed in making tortillas, cooking, washing, taking care of the children, etc. In some other cases women are small-scale traders (fruits, vegetables, flowers, handicrafts), an activity that transforms their labour into something less traditional (Benholdt-Thompson, 1993).

Therefore, in the rural areas it is important to note that we are talking about women and men that perform many activities. Both as a result of their local culture and forced by the need for an income, people in these areas must diversify. Therefore, they are simultaneously traders, farmers, artisans, bricklayers, etc. As they express:

We, the people from the Valley, live in poverty. We have different jobs. We are engaged in looking after the animals, working in the field, doing housework, day labour, and a little bit of handicrafts; we are never engaged in only one thing.



## THE PROJECTS

### Economically Directed Projects

Many initiatives are coordinated by neighbourhood associations. There are several governmental and non-governmental organizations devoted to link people with economic projects or to help out already organized groups by providing training, credit, and social and technical assistance.

Projects can be very diverse due to their cultural, social, economic and political aims. *Economically directed* projects relate to: commercializing organic waste, toy-making, cooperatives, clothes-making, production and distribution of domestic appliances, crafts-making, baking, blacksmith and carpentry workshops, car mechanics, trout hatcheries, mushroom production, green-houses, etc. Productive activities carried out by these groups usually involve traditional knowledge, such as wood furniture making, wool knitting, cooking, etc. Groups that develop economic projects on topics without previous knowledge, such as waste-processing, are very rare. Also uncommon are those groups involved in social or cultural activities besides an original economic project. Many of these groups are very small and comprise only family members, but some reach out to the so-called 'extended family', and some may include members beyond the family. Many of these projects usually take place in a room in someone's house, and this becomes known as a 'workshop'.

### Socially Directed Projects

*Socially directed*: People that group together to meet social and economic deficiencies.

Socially and politically directed groups are generally found in large urban areas such as Mexico City where people have had to face a lack of public services because of urban growth from the rural migration to the cities (getting public services: roads, pavements, drainage, electricity, neighbourhood libraries, etc.). These groups are self-developed (neighbourhood associations), although they have occasionally received support from NGOs (and popular education groups) as well as left wing and official political parties. Many are community, ethnically and linguistically based people coming from the same region that have moved to a specific sector in the peripheral areas. Strong bonds and solidarity are common among them, although more through 'passing the word' about jobs, giving a hand, letting friends stay over until they find a place to stay, etc. (Lomnitz, 1975, p.193). People's level of marginalization varies and so does the extent to which they can be considered as functional illiterates. The more marginalized the groups, the more difficult it becomes to establish contact with them.

## Culturally Directed Projects

*Culturally directed:* Predominantly social groups that get together to carry out cultural activities such as music and theatre. Non-economic aims are seldom pursued (INEA 1984).

The research took up several projects with different characteristics:

- a) a group of projects fostered by the State within the framework of a wide social programme, the PRONASOL (National Solidarity Programme-*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*);
- b) a group of projects that have been supported by SEDAC (Educational Services-*Servicios Educativos*), an NGO.

The difference between both programmes is in terms of the methodology of social participation and compromise of a development agency (SEDAC) with the very particular interests of the people. The educational activity can be identified with what has been called 'popular education', a strategy where education and participation become the focus around which community development takes place. Education certainly has a very crucial role in SEDAC's goals and strategy. In a way SEDAC works on the basis of community based education.

Finquiélvich (1994:75) analyses the different forms in which the State is linked to social and community projects. Among survival strategies there are different kinds of interactions between the State and the community:

- 1) the model in which the **community does not participate** (based on State's assistance);
- 2) the model in which the **State takes the basic role** with relative participation on the side of the community (State assistance-participatory);
- 3) the **participative model** in which both the State and the community play significant roles, relatively equal in importance; and
- 4) the **self-help model**, in which the community takes care of itself with little or no participation of the State.

The two sets of projects that have been chosen fall clearly within the *participative* and *self-help* models respectively: the first one (PRONASOL) as a cooperative between State and society, a model that is taking big steps in Latin America and giving way to a new form of participatory planning. The second project (SEDAC) is a clear cut community participation strategy where poor sectors of society use their human and material resources to solve their own problems, sometimes helped by more or less organized groups (NGOs and voluntary organizations).

## THE PARTICIPATIVE MODEL

A new programme launched by the 1988-1994 Administration was the PRONASOL, a programme created with the purpose of combating poverty, meeting social and economic needs of the Mexican marginalized population

and intended as a counterbalance of the Neo-liberal economic policies. The programme is based on granting credit to marginal rural and urban groups so that they can start economic projects or improve what they are already engaged in. Groups that have ongoing projects are usually given priority. Credit therefore becomes the basic support provided and not much attention is paid to organizational needs. Some of these groups are family groups but others go beyond that level. The Solidarity Programme comprises different sub-programmes that support specific demands coming from indigenous populations and from women's social and economic organizations. The sample within the participative model was composed of six projects which are being supported by some of these sub-programmes. They are described below.

### **Carpet-Makers**

A project that uses carpets to make sun protection covers for car dash boards is an example of a group given support by this programme. This project is located in a community called Temoaya, located in the otomi region of the state of Mexico. The project has made some impact. Nowadays it is common to see these products being sold in the nearby cities and even distributed in another states.

The story began a while ago when some of the members used to sell car accessories in the streets. Once they were asked to produce sun protection covers for car dash boards. After several tries they developed a model out of felt, later they added a tissue to cover it all around in order to make it more fashionable. Gradually they began to develop different sizes according to the different brands of cars. Prior knowledge of the market helped them during the commercializing stage.

They either sell the covers themselves or through vendors who pick up every now and then a pack of coverings and go out into the different states. They all talk about how this is much more convenient than factory work which pays minimum wage and entails work schedule.

The group is now facing serious competition from those who have imitated their ingenuity and gotten into the same projects. Time went by and the market began to be flooded by these products. People now want to move into the production of different goods, but economic resources and training continue to be the main blocks.

In this region several groups carry out similar projects concerned with making apparel, that are distributed and sold in the streets. In addition, there are other communities where crafts-making is a tradition and people have developed cooperatives or small groups to collectively produce wood and wool articles.

### **Greenhouses**

Those engaged in this activity had worked several years ago in one of Mexico City's most important flower and plant market, known as

Xochimilco. Some, as a result of the region's poor labour market in the 80s, migrated to the city looking for job opportunities. They all migrated when they were young (15-20 years old) and their schooling does not go beyond the primary level, with few even completing primary school. Once they discovered the possibility of doing the same activity on their own, they came back to their communities to put into practice what they had learned, setting up small-scale greenhouses in their communities. While one of the conditions for granting credit is group membership, work is usually carried out on an individual basis. Participants in this project sometimes give a hand to each other (they are all friends) and try to sort out transport and commercializing needs together.

They have never received any training. Everything they know they have learned on the job. Learning is developed through practice, observing peers, and traditional techniques. As an example, building a greenhouse (made possible thanks to the credit that was granted) is carried out entirely by themselves. From designing the structure to choosing the materials to be used previous knowledge is implemented. Previously bricklayers, some now participate in the designing and construction process showing how people adapt knowledge from one situation to the other. It is also a means for poor people to save money by not having to pay for this service.

## **Puppet-Makers**

Puppet-making is carried out by several families in the community. They affiliate themselves with a larger group to obtain credit, enabling them to progress. Family work, though, prevails over group work. The group is not organized on a collective basis. Group work is merely concerned with commercializing their products and it is a condition to receive a credit from PRONASOL.

People have been engaged in this activity for several years already (5 years in some cases), and what they produce varies depending on market demand, the time of year and fashion changes (puppets seen in films, Walt Disney's characters, Christmas articles, etc.). It is basically women who take part in the production process (mainly using a sewing machine) and men who take care of commercializing the products. Men, though, have gradually been incorporated into the production process depending on the demand of the product. Men learn from women, through practice, and by imitating others. Imitation is indeed a major source of learning among poor communities.

Products vary and incorporate various skills and knowledge. So, besides puppets, people make pillows, napkins and table-clothes where women use embroidery skills they have learned from their own families. It is traditional knowledge they have acquired since they were young, and common among women in many communities. Women usually get together at a friend's house, use a room, and spend several hours a day doing embroidery work: it is their workshop.

The schooling level among most members of this group is extremely low, never going beyond primary, usually between first and third grade. Again, when participants are asked their preference between this job, a factory job nearby or in Mexico City, they all agree that they prefer this cottage industry even if they do not earn as much as they would like. What they get is merely a complementary income, which helps them endure a severe economic crisis.

## Baking

This project was initially formed five years ago by ten women. Currently there are nine women working on the project. Bread making starts at 4:AM and continues until noon. After that, another member of the group is responsible for selling bread during the afternoons.

Women talk about how this work has been a great experience for them: *'we have learned to do it on our own'*. Within the framework of a rural environment where women have a traditional reproductive role, a project like this one, run purely by women, has been a space for them to express their voice and carry out their own activity. It has turned into a space where they have the opportunity to participate, to do something on their own, apart from their everyday traditional activities. In addition, being enrolled in such a project has meant dealing with family opposition, basically from the husband, and a timetable that demands their absence from home during peak hours (breakfast, getting children ready for school, etc.). Husbands, though, have come to terms with these problems after realizing the need for an extra income.

Women are happy with what they earn. Some had already worked in nearby factories and all agree that this work is better than a formal job. This experience has now become an example to be followed by other groups. People from a nearby community, also interested in setting up a bakery, have been allowed to observe and be trained.

Here learning takes place during the production process. At first women did not know anything about baking. In spite of some initial support, new members have learned from old members, mainly through practice. There is a need expressed by members to go beyond what they already know. A consistent demand is the desire for additional training to improve economic output. Imitation and learning from others usually has a limit. To go beyond this level, external support is needed, particularly with technical matters. After five years of ups and downs the bakery has been forced to stop paying wages because no profits have been made, a situation which has occurred several times. There is a need to improve their skills in order to diversify products and improve quality according to demand.

How important are formal literacy skills for this project? Very little as far as the analysis shows. Basic skills like arithmetic and knowing how to read and write are put into practice by only one member, the one who takes care of the accounting (production statistics, basic payments, etc.). It is interesting

though, how these projects demand initial and basic skills that rural people, especially women (given their subordinated role in their communities) do not have.

Setting up an economic project as a strategy to survive, requires being able to get support, make contacts, fill out credit applications, payment of taxes, etc. Usually people have to face these stages if they want to start their project. This knowledge is important because it also means facing social and economic disadvantages, dealing with unfamiliar laws and procedures, making space for their participation, dealing with the government, and with private and sometimes powerful social and economic interests.

### **Trout Hatchery**

This project, as the others, was given credit support. It has been running for two years. A group of ten people started it, mainly friends and relatives. The project was launched on one of the participant's prior knowledge of trout fisheries. He already had a pond and was willing to expand into other ponds and partners in order to be able to get a credit. After two years many participants are discouraged because they do not receive any profits from this activity. They take turns taking care of feeding and cleaning, a time spent in the project for which they are not getting any significant income. Now people are thinking about dropping-out and devoting their time to some other activity where they can get an extra income.

The few things the participants knew about trout hatchery they learned from the only person who knew something about it, from whom the whole idea started. Lack of participant knowledge and involvement in the designing of the project, the need for unfamiliar skills and the lack of organization and training support are some of the causes that explain why the project is doomed to end up as a one person project.

### **Shoe-Making**

The idea to start it came from a friend living in a nearby community. He convinced some people and raised expectations and enthusiasm among them. The Solidarity Programme supported them with credit, then the building was built and machines were bought. There was no knowledge of the trade when the project was conceived of and started. It was not until everything was ready that a three month training course started and people got the minimum skills to begin.

Drop outs began from the moment the project started. Twenty people were registered in the beginning, but now after one year only eight people remain. Sales are very low and marketing has come up as a problem they have no elements to fight with. Wages are paid to participants occasionally, only when sales go well, and then the amount never pays for the time and work

invested. Frustration and drop-outs follow as a consequence and then people have to resort to finding jobs either in the city or by migrating to the United States where they find it "easier" to get some money. It is evident that the shoe-making project required a level of knowledge distant from participants' everyday knowledge. Training, besides, was not enough. Organizational support was also missing, something that could be observed in the trout project as well.

As opposed to this project, a similar project (puppet-making) in another community has a promising future. A person who used to work in a manufacturing factory in the United States border started it. Recently he invited some friends to join in the project and asked for credit support in order to buy more machines. Currently the project employs five people who work on a daily basis. The difference in this project is made by the previous experience of the person launching it. He worked in manufacturing companies, was a vendor of different products almost in every state, and a community delegate for three years. These experiences enabled him to deal with credit applications, to know whom to ask for support, and so on. He is now prepared to expand into tennis-shoe production based on a prior job at a shoe manufacturing factory.

## The Self-Help Model

*Servicios Educativos, A.C. (SEDAC)* is an NGO located in the Valle del Mezquital. Its experience dates back to 1975 when a project to develop study groups among illiterate adult population started under the principles of the *autodidactismo solidario* (solitary self-didactics), a self-learning solidarity model as the educational methodology on which the experience is based.

The work that has been carried out since the early 70s has developed along the years a Peasant Centre, 140 communities linked by 12 regional programmes, more than 2000 houses, 22 collective stables, 46 mills and tortilla machines, nine sewing workshops, 220 credits to carry out micro projects, 23 projects to introduce drinking water in the communities, 12 community shops and basic articles for 400 families, 20 first aid community sets, and 210 craft-makers joined in three cooperatives. All this was possible thanks to SEDAC's support (through its educational methodology) and with the support and solidarity of national and international groups: Interamerican Foundation, Misereor, Ford Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Caritas, Habitat, and others.

The experience took place in the Valle del Mezquital, located in the state of Hidalgo and considered as one of the poorest regions in Mexico. It is a mountainous, semi-desert land. Its people belong basically to the otomi indigenous group. Through the years, the people shifted from agriculture to hunting and picking. Otomies in the Valley are basically engaged in craft-making, pulque (alcoholic drink which comes from the maguey, a plant that grows in many

regions of Mexico), and scraping wild lettuce and maguey fibre, all of which do not provide a minimum income to improve their living standards.

Among the range of projects fostered by SEDAC, the Collective Stables, the Nixtamal Mills and the Handicrafts Cooperative are some of the most successful experiences. The methodology that supports SEDAC's work constitutes one of the clues to understand the social and economic outcomes of these experiences.

The methodological model called "*autodidactismo solidario*" is based on peasant participation may be the source of a *collective learning process*.

Autodidactismo means learning by oneself, knowing how to take advantage of what the group offers, not keeping for oneself what has been learned; communicating it to others. If there is a doubt, asking others even if they do not belong to the group; teaching how to do research looking at books, journals, the experience that work provides .... This way of studying helps us to look after ourselves (Cardenas and Garcia, 1992:46).

The *autodidactismo solidario* model is based on the following elements:

1. group self-learning;
2. exchange of experiences as intergroup support. This is a key element within the model that aims to: "*tighten relations between the groups, comment their experiences, analyze problems they have faced and getting to know the extent to which the study has made progress.*" By taking part in these interchanges groups get involved in a collective learning process where they learn from each other;
3. group self-teaching (groups with more experience teach those with less experience);  
There is no need to have someone to tell us what to do. We need to form groups, knowing how to relate with people so that we can talk without any fear and take up some experiences from each other' (Ibid.:44);
4. group self-tutorship;
5. group self-evaluation ; and
6. collective planning and execution of activities.

## Collective Stables

The collective stables join a Union that united twelve groups with dairy stables. The project works on the basis of a loan of five cows granted to a group. The payment is done with the calf born from the original five cows the moment they are the same age as those they received. These new cows are given to a similar group on the same basis in order to make a chain of small projects: a Union of milk cow stables.

Groups that have taken part in this project have learned to inject, to get rid of parasites, and to dehorn. Learning takes place through the exchange of experiences among the groups which take part in this project and occasionally through tutorship provided by SEDAC. Nonetheless, the educational methodology fosters learning stemming from the experience of others. It is then that groups get their self-tutorship, self-evaluate and decide actions to be taken in common in order to solve problems which arise during



the different stages of the project. The groups' demand for knowledge usually referred to the handling of cows, their own lack of experience, ills, nutrition, feeding, genetic improvement, etc. In a way these exchanges entail a process that facilitates among the participants the collective creation of knowledge made possible by a communication in community based on what people know. This was evident during the meetings where experiences by some groups provided new techniques, 'tricks', ways of handling the cows, etc.

This project is a good example of an economically productive activity taking place in a highly marginalized rural environment, where people do not have the knowledge to start (they had never been engaged in this kind of project). Based on practice, they developed knowledge and know-how that enabled them to set up a project that could guarantee them a complementary income in order to survive. People in this kind of environment face a lack of experience and knowledge, besides they do not have a formal organizational base to carry out any specific project. In this kind of project the link between learning and production is direct. People learn new useful knowledge for the project through their practice, a knowledge that has only distant links with formal education. The potential to generate alternative productive survival strategies is rather poor.

The project has now led to the setting up of a small-scale factory where some members of the Union of stables have learned to produce cream and several kinds of cheese. At first, learning about this activity was possible through external support. After that, newcomers learn from participants who received the initial training.

## The Nixtamal Mills

The development of Nixtamal Mills started in the Valley of the Mezquital during the 70's. The mill uses nixtamal (cooked maize ready to be grinded) to produce maize dough needed to make tortillas, a basic food of Mexican people living in the rural areas. When there is not a nearby mill in the communities, women usually have to do it manually using the *metate* (a kind of flat stone where maize is grinded with the aid of another cylindrical type stone). The mills were fostered and organized according to the otomies' way of organization. That is to say, they were conceived as one of many community services and not as a productive enterprise.

Setting up this kind of project in rural communities has meant fighting against several barriers, namely a law which prohibits setting up nixtamal mills at a distance less than 500 metres from another mill in order, allegedly, to avoid ruinous competition. The existence of this law meant a series of obstacles that the community had to overcome in order to set up their self-run mills.

Certain problems in private run mills such as lack of hygiene, expensive

charges, inconvenient schedule, distance, etc., are among the reasons that motivated people to launch this project. Finally, this project sought to make women's housework easier by letting women get rid of a time-consuming and heavy task. As a result, community mills have enabled women to find new social and economic spaces where they can participate: *'so that we start to think what sort of different things we as women can do'*. The fact that women usually take care of the mill contributes to reinforce women's role within social life in the community.

This project, similar to others, has developed using the educational methodology of the *autodidactismo solidario*. This has entailed group learning processes such as: collective filling of applications, collective writing of regulations, exchange of experiences, forming different committees to take responsibility of different matters, etc.

Knowing how to run the mill begins with the exchange of experiences with groups who are in a more advanced stage. Therefore, training is done at a horizontal level with obvious advantages for the participants because a common code of communication is being used. Service at the mill is done in a rotative way (part of the educational methodology), so that knowledge does not remain with just a few people and many can learn from the experience. As expressed by one of the members: *'the mill is a school, and we all have the right to learn'*. Besides, this has economic advantages as well because people do not need to pay for external assistance.

## Handicrafts Cooperative

Handicrafts production entails a mixture of time, space, and productive activities. There is no clear limit between the time devoted by the artisan to different labours such as picker, scraper, agriculturer, housework. None of these can provide a minimum income to support family needs. That is why people generally have to diversify their endeavours in order to survive. In the case of women, domestic and productive tasks; in the case of men, it goes from work in the fields to occasional outings to the big cities in order to look for day-jobs.

Time devoted to handicraft work varies. It may start early in the morning and go until afternoon; it may take advantage of other spaces and during other activities such as while feeding the animals, during meetings, etc. Work carried out by the artisans is not isolated from the exploitation system that any peasant experiences. One of the biggest problems faced by artisans is the small payment they get for what they produce. People's ignorance about dominant codes, their lack of organization and knowledge about marketing are among the causes that explain why this activity has not been able to contribute sustancially to the betterment of artisans' living conditions. The cooperative of the Valley tried to be an answer to this problem. It began with five communities and currently three cooperatives group more than 210 arti-

artisans. The project has been running for more than twelve years. Different groups of artisans put into practice traditional knowledge and skills they have inherited, to form a cooperative for the selling of their products.

The cooperative has been a learning experience for many of the participants. Different groups of artisans have participated for a number of years in meetings where people have learned from each other through the exchange of experiences. Through these meetings artisans have learned about the value of their handicrafts and different ways of commercializing them through the cooperative. These meetings have been the basis of the work conducted by the cooperative, where people have analysed their problems and discussed where they want to go and what they would like to do with the cooperative. Through participation in these meetings people have learned about their opportunities as artisans, their problems, and what they can do together. As a result of these meetings people decided not to distribute the benefits and opted to save them in order to set up a cooperative shop where they could sell their products.

## THE LESSONS LEARNED

Both sets of experiences provide food for thought. Next we try to reflect upon some particularities within these projects and draw some lessons.

## TRAINING STRICTLY LINKED WITH CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Formal education seems to have little relevance when looking at the set of economic survival strategies used by marginalized groups. Formal education does not provide people with knowledge or skills that enable them to widen their production process or the range of possible alternatives. This fact places formal education's usefulness debatable in terms of being able to overcome situations faced by marginalized groups, particularly in the rural sector. Formal education, as Schmelkes (1980:39) points out: "seems to do no more than provide rural people with better chances to survive in the urban areas."

For people in the rural areas it is more important knowing how to sew, how to weld, and how to do some basic carpentry, than basic literacy skills. Educational demands are concerned with addressing immediate needs, generally relating to economic activities people are involved in. As an example, carpet makers demand training to make covers for car seats, something they have felt the need to produce in face of competition and low sales in other products. In addition to economic support (loans and credits), **people need training strictly linked to the activities they are engaged in, and to what they need (Vielle, 1994).**

The need to have more knowledge and skills was quite evident in many of the projects. If the project goes well there is a need to improve their skills to move to another stage or into different areas of production. When the project goes through commercializing or competition problems, training needs point towards acquiring different skills that may enable them to enter different markets.

This leads to re-evaluate nonformal education as a means to respond to marginalized people's basic needs. It is a fact that for-the-job training activities provided by the government are usually located in the formal sector (technical education programmes) and the support provided to nonformal education programmes is directly linked with the labour market (programmes offered by the Ministry of Labour). On-the-job and for-the-job training programmes offered by private companies have been taking a major role.

In this light, it is clear that a wide sector of the population living in the rural areas and in marginalized urban regions is remaining peripheral. That population generally does not have either the education or technical training to be linked to the labour market. *We are talking here about an ample sector of the population that is being forced to resort to personal, community or family survival strategies in order to gain an income.* As Muñoz Izquierdo (1994) points out, if vocational training growth depends on the needs of the main markets, there is a risk that marginal social groups will become even more isolated from educational programmes geared to meet their specific needs.

## People Have Their Own Pedagogy

An important thing to highlight is that **people have a great amount of knowledge and skills they can resort to**. When they do not have them, they acquire them in many different ways, particularly when economic circumstances are rough. When people do not have the skills nor the training support they end up learning from their peers: observing, copying, imitating and becoming their pupils. People also resort to knowledge and skills they learned in previous jobs, transferring and adapting knowledge to different situations. Their success lies in the system they have to adapt to new circumstances. People acquire knowledge and skills within the context of their needs and possibilities. Those from the informal rural and urban sectors have in common a very efficient process of communication and transmission of knowledge. **They have indeed their own pedagogy** (Posner 1994). From this, they have learned how to produce regional goods and have been involved in all sorts of economically productive activities.

People learn in many ways: through contact with their family they receive *inherited knowledge* (when there is a tradition to be bricklayers, carpenters, artisans, etc.); *through previous work* in factories people become shoe-makers, carpenters, carpet makers, etc.; through *knowledge they acquire in nonformal education courses* (weaving, clothes-making, knitting, beauty workshops, etc.),

and which constitutes the base to start self-run economic activities, either on an individual or collective basis.

An example is a carpet-making (Persian type) project run by a group of women in the community of Temoaya. Carpet production is a well known economic activity for people in this community. Many people who used to work in workshops owned by large firms have trained their children and friends and developed individual or family workshops of their own.

In communities like Temoaya there is a trading tradition. This has fostered among people the chances of collective learning through community inherited knowledge and imitation. If something does not work people try to imitate what others do using different kinds of skills they already have. As one of the carpet makers was saying: *'we would like to get additional credit in order to buy some carpentry machines and do some wood goods as some other people are doing here in the community. ... We know something about carpentry already'*.

Lacking employment and economic disadvantages within the communities forces people to imitate or copy regional productive activities. This increases competition among this same sector of the population. However, some people who imitate do not have the skills, experience and knowledge to produce with the same quality as their competitors.

It seems that poverty generates its own conditions for survival. People are forced, from childhood on, to resort to a wide range of activities in order to meet basic economic needs. People are not afraid of learning, that is not a constraint. The need to survive provokes the need to generate knowledge and skills. Lack of formal education (quite common among marginalized population) does not seem to be an important constraint among people living in regions like Temoaya, rather it is the lack of resources and training opportunities. What kind of knowledge do people put in practice to respond to unemployment and basic economic needs?

- It is common to have some traditional knowledge and skills, often acquired within the family (knitting, embroidery, clay, etc.);
- skills that pass from one generation to the other (bricklaying, car mechanics, etc.);
- knowledge and skills acquired through nonformal education courses (clothes-making, metal-work, carpentry, beauty);
- in community relationships (knowing how to lay bricks when helping friends build their houses);
- knowledge acquired when working in different production and service areas like trading; skills learned in manufacturing industries; working in greenhouses and being able now to set up their own green houses; working in the United States border in shoe manufacturing companies and having the opportunity now to set up their own small workshop; and
- knowledge that comes from their own activity in the agricultural sector.

## **The Need of Credit Resources and Technical Education**

Lack of capital becomes the basic problem when looking at these strategies. To start a project or to develop it capital is needed. For some people the support provided by the Solidarity Programme has meant being able to start a long dreamed-of wish, for others it has meant the possibility to consolidate their project, for others the take-off. For some, a hopeful project may not be able to succeed in face of the lack of experience, few economic resources, and lack of complementary supports for the organization and commercializing process.

Training programmes will only be effective if they are part of mechanisms and policies that make marginalized people less vulnerable to the effects of competing in oligopolic markets. There is a need to provide these sectors access to credit resources and technical education (Muñoz Izquierdo, 1994).

### **What People Used to Do**

The economic crisis is felt by people in terms of an everyday increasing unemployment, less alternatives to get a minimum income, and harder task to meet basic family economic needs. What did marginalized people do in the past?

- They used to work selling all kinds of goods in the streets (car accessories; toys, puppets, etc.). Trading seems to be one of the last resorts for people who do not have any productive skills, neither the means to compete in the market, nor the means to initiate an autonomous process of production given the lack of skills and experience.
- They had jobs where they learned knowledge and skills, such is the case of people running their green house project or the shoe-maker who got experience working in the United States border and then runs a promising small-scale puppet-making workshop. People that have worked selling goods in the streets have also developed ideas of how to start a project on their own.
- They used to carry out house work, such is the case of women. Then, stemming from their economic need they decided to put into practice their traditional skills (all kind of handicrafts), or any kind of skills (cooking, trading home-grown vegetables), or they have put into practice knowledge acquired in nonformal education courses (knitting, sewing, etc.) doing occasional jobs.
- People in the rural sector develop survival economic strategies around their everyday activities and knowledge: agriculture and cattle become usually the axis of their projects. Maize production continues to be, in many cases, a refuge to resort to and one that provides a minimum required support. Land possession has truly a great value for Mexican peasants.

### **IS THERE A SOLID ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVE?**

Projects run by people rarely become a significant source of income enabling them to meet their basic economic needs. Generally, projects are only complementary supports. Even when running their projects, people have to resort to occasional jobs, taking advantage of the crops, getting sup-

port from other members of the family: sons and daughters with a minimum age carry out minor jobs; wives and daughters who perform different kinds of productive activities (selling fruit and vegetables, giving lessons, making handicrafts, selling articles they have learned to make as a result of taking part in nonformal education courses (Lustig, 1993; Tuirán, 1993).

In the beginning, projects generate expectations. Lack of training, experience, marketing, organization and financial problems, and planning are some of the factors that make it difficult to generate enough income for the participants. As a consequence, drop-out rates and frustration among the group are high. This is the case of the shoe-makers where, as one participant expressed, "Before getting into this I had at least money to eat". Now they have to be all day in the workshop and the payment, when they receive it, is not enough. Their wives comment on how their husbands stay all day in the workshops, the months go by and there is no payment despite time and work invested.

This means people had to abandon what they were doing before for the sake of the project. When earnings are not enough it is difficult to keep hopeful, frustration comes and many drop out. These kinds of economic projects do not have the potential to capitalize in the short term and so **rarely become more than temporary survival strategies**. For those who stay, resorting occasionally to other economic activity (usually doing day-jobs) becomes a must.

## A COMMUNITY BASED PERSPECTIVE

One of the main conclusions drawn from the analysis is concerned with participation, absent in many of the projects launched by marginalized groups. This may explain why some projects are not at all successful. Participation acts like a catalyzer of learning processes. It acts like a detonator of new knowledge, new demands, a widening of horizons, the acquisition of a new voice among marginalized groups. Within these contexts **participation becomes one of the most urgent needs, even more than literacy or basic education**. When people have the opportunity to participate in something they believe and have interest, new skills and knowledge follow in a trickling process. There is a need to realize that an adult is not only someone who can be educated, but also someone who can transform himself by taking part in the process of transforming social reality (Muñoz Izquierdo, 1994).

The relation established between the promoting institution and the peasants is a basic component of the educational methodology. The relative success of some programmes lies in the educational methodology, both in terms of production and in terms of the effective learning that comes out of this process. The organizational side is reinforced by institutions like SEDAC, where social and economic outcomes may be explained by a strategy based on two main elements:

1. the fact that there is an institution that has a key role providing assistance for organizational and technical problems; and

2. the fact that there is an educational model as the basis of every activity carried out by the institution.

Community economic development cannot easily be achieved through the strategy that is being used by government institutions (where the absence of participation strategies constitutes a basic characteristic of the programmes). Programmes do not promote participation, as the essential condition and basis of community economic projects where people's participation is considered as a *sine qua non*. Where there is no commitment on the part of an institution, projects inevitably become isolated efforts doomed to failure with benefits which in many cases usually do not extend beyond the individual or the family. The objective pursued does not reach beyond the workshop itself. There is no real further process of building on the achievements of the workshops, either short or long term. The sphere of possibilities does not transcend the micro-social level.

We must conclude then by considering that the importance of having community economic projects lies in the crucial role and potential this action has in terms of reinforcing and building the sense of social identity among the members of the community. The mere fact that such community based grass-roots projects could exist has the unique quality of reversing the marginalizing and social reproduction effects government-sponsored programmes usually have. As opposed to the projects sponsored by PRONASOL, SEDAC's work is concerned with strengthening the capacity of communities through integrating projects within a wider social context: a community based perspective.

## DEALING WITH THE "OUTER" WORLD

When looking at many of the problems faced by rural communities it is possible to observe a set of hidden knowledge (literacies?) that become important in people's everyday life and that have a strong link with people's survival strategies. We are referring basically to knowledge that is located in the social-legal-organizational-political field, concerned with: what is required to apply to introduce drinking water, how to get a credit, solving technical problems, how to make arrangements to set up a sewing workshop; what is needed to set up a nixtamal mill and where to apply, etc.

When thinking about the bakery project, it is important to note that it was women who had to take care of dealing with building a place, an electricity contract, taxes, accountability, etc. This entails a different world from the one they were used to, basically when it comes to sort out problems they have never faced because of their traditional isolation from worldly matters. Again people learn through practice, knowledge which is precious to marginal communities, a knowledge which arises from participation and which refers to a literacy not to be found in formal schools but is a basic knowledge to survive in these environments. There are small but significant accomplishments



that reinforce the participants' learning process, motivation and involvement within their projects. This new knowledge entails a step into the dominant codes, a new open door that will facilitate dealing with the "outer" world.

In many cases participation matters more than specific knowledge, which comes afterward sooner or later. Within this framework **interaction between people and the outside world** should be highlighted when it comes to learning. It allows people to make a step forward to a more elaborated code, in touch with a dominant code that offers access to the comprehension and manipulation of social norms, to the construction of a hierarchy of material and symbolic values, and to their manipulation and forms of realization (Posner, 1987). This kind of literacy refers then to knowledge that allows people to make arrangements so that a piece of land can be obtained or sorting out provisions for an initial training so that the project can begin. **Basically all the projects described in this paper talk about this need which refers to a literacy most useful to marginalized populations.**

SEDAC's work considers the acquisition of this knowledge an essential part of the educational methodology. As opposed to other NGOs and government institutions, SEDAC's work encourages people to be responsible for their problems and duties. SEDAC's work is conceived of as a **companion of processes, which entails providing groups tutorship but never taking care of tasks.** As an example, legal registration of the handicrafts cooperative never was done because a previous NGO team had assumed the control of this activity. After that, under the principles of a different methodology, a committee was formed, applied for registration and got it after four months. This process had an important educational outcome because it entailed visits to Mexico City, talking to bureaucrats and filling applications. People, by participating and not remaining aside, learn knowledge and skills they would seldom get when they stay isolated from these processes.

A similar outcome was produced as a result of people's participation in a research aimed at finding out about handicrafts markets and ways of commercializing. A visit to Mexico City was organized. A researcher and some artisans went to different shops and to the Museum of Anthropology in order to see their own handicrafts and look at the prices. This visit was an experience where people learned about markets where their products were being sold. Following, this knowledge was discussed with other members of the cooperative and put into practice.

## **PARTICIPATION, AN EMPOWERMENT PROCESS**

What to do so that projects may have a real social and economic impact in the life of the communities? What to do so that projects go beyond and reach out for different forms of social and economic organization and participation? It is difficult to add something to what has been said so many times.

There is a need to take into account community proposals and see in which way training courses can complement and support activities that are carried out by the communities themselves. There is a need to have confidence on what people undertake, respect their own ways of organization and support precisely there where people need it to achieve their very particular goals. In this light an economic project has a different dimension when it is linked to a wider social project.

Usefulness people see behind training is indeed a most fundamental element to take into account when designing for-the-job training policies. The fact that people feel that the skills and knowledge are being useful, feel that they are learning, and putting into practice what they learn, are some of the most motivating factors that help make the project successful and something that reinforces people within their training process.

Besides usefulness, starting from what people really need and from their main interests (be it making puppets as their neighbours, or setting up a welding workshop) is something that moves people's participation. As Vielle (1994) points out: "the need for training is the *first engine a priori*, motivator and mobilizer of adult education".

People's participation and involvement in the nature and orientation of the projects becomes a must. Projects entail for people a means of participation, they contain **the hope of participation** (Rodríguez Trejo, 1994), the hope for people of being able to participate in their own social, economic, cultural, project, any kind, but with a very clear social orientation, as a code that guides any activities undertaken. It is urgent to count on a participation that makes viable people's socialization within social, economic, cultural and political exchange circuits in order to counteract the isolation of large sectors of the population from dominant codes. In this light, community participation for solving their own problems is much needed as a way to counteract the lack of voice and power of these marginal sectors of the population.

Participation may be the key for a gradual exercise, even if slow, of a new voice. Participation carries within itself an *empowerment process* within people, to which it follows a qualification of the nature of people's demands (D' Emilio, 1994). In this light there is a need to revert the code into a more participative and liberating one through people's self-ways of participation and forms of organization:

"social participation *versus* lack of power"

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## **SECTION FIVE**

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### **Education & Training in a New Type of Socially Useful Enterprise**

## Chapter Fifteen

# STRUCTURED WORK AND INTEGRATED LEARNING IN A SOCIAL ECONOMY PROJECT

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### THE “*WONEN EN WERKEN*” ASSOCIATION

From 1990, the unemployment rate in Belgium rose steadily to 16%. Since 1994, there has been a slight downward trend. This change has little or no effect on a specific group of the unemployed: those with low levels of formal education who have been active for a long time. Economic growth is not producing new jobs for them or increasing their chance of finding a job. The labour market is very demanding in Belgium. Greater mobility and flexibility, and a whole heap of qualifications, are prerequisites. The number of jobs for those with little education is declining with the spread of technology in industry. Because of the large number of people who are unemployed and the choice of candidates for a job, the best offers go to people with better qualifications.

Various solutions are being sought. The authorities themselves are taking measures such as reduced social security contributions for employers taking on certain categories of worker, and encouragement of part-time working

through financial incentives to employers. Such measures are now shifting the problem from one group to another. Moreover, a number of training and job creation initiatives for the long-term unemployed with low levels of formal education are being made by public authorities and the private sector. As long as they satisfy certain conditions, private organizations can receive subsidies from the Belgian Government and European funds. In recent years, an "alternative" range of jobs for the long-term unemployed has grown up in Belgium: these are known as social economy projects. The particular characteristic of these projects is that they set social alongside economic objectives. *Wonen en Werken* (Living and Working) is one of these projects.

The non-profit making voluntary association *Wonen en Werken* is located in the northwestern part of Leuven (Louvain). Leuven is a medium-sized town 30 km from Brussels. The town is a local centre and is known also for its university. Its many social assistance institutions attract the poorest people from surrounding villages. But the presence of students and the proximity to Brussels, which is also capital of the European Union, has forced rents up very high in recent years. This has had a disastrous effect, especially on the poorest section of Leuven's population. In Leuven also, the unemployment rate rose in 1994 to 12%.

The northwest is one of the poorest areas of Leuven. Besides crumbling buildings and slums, there is a heavy concentration of social housing. The residents of the area are mostly poor Belgians and migrants. There is a shortage of adequate housing at affordable rents. The area has many unemployed, usually for structural reasons. Many of the local residents have low levels of formal education and have not worked for a long time because of their lack of training and of positive experience of work. This is often accompanied by a lack of self-confidence and of social and personal skills. So there is nothing surprising in there being little room for them in a demanding labour market. Few jobs are suitable for their levels of qualification. Vocational training is not enough in itself to "fit" them for the labour market.

For this reason, six years ago, social workers had the idea of attacking both problems at once. Training for local residents with low levels of education who had been unemployed for a long time was coupled with the renovation of dilapidated housing. These buildings belonged to the *Heuwelhof* social housing association and were lived in — after the renovation also — by people on low incomes.

In 1988, the project finally took off, in collaboration between four associations. A dozen participants followed a training course, then lasting seven months, in carpentry or building. These men and women with no qualifications or at most a low-level certificate, lacked the work experience and attitudes that would have enabled them to operate satisfactorily in a work situation. Frequently, they came from families that had been poor for generations. Almost all of them had accumulated psychological and social problems such as drug-dependency, previous imprisonment, etc. Many of

these problems were linked with a perception of a future that afforded no prospects.

For the men, the training provided some access to the normal labour market. But for the women, it had to be admitted that the training did not lead to a traditional job. This was the result of problems with both integration and adaptation. On the one hand, it is difficult for a woman to get into the construction industry; on the other, the women who had followed the training course had little flexibility and mobility. Above all, we saw that the period of seven months was too short to solve their many problems, which were often deeply rooted. After the training, many went back to their former lifestyle.

With the support of the Ministry of Labour in the Flemish Region, *Wonen en Werken* decided to create specific structures for the women concerned. This is how *Mo-projecten*, small mobile enterprises, came to be accepted as experimental job creation schemes. They fell within the remit of social economy projects. The first mobility project, *Mo-project* for short, was *Mo-Rein*, a carpenter's shop that was started in 1990. But not all women wanted to do a "man's job". We looked for activities that were closer to their experience. Hence, one after the other, *Mo-Clean* (a cleaning business) was started in April 1991, and *Mo-Car* (mobile car-cleaning) in September 1991, later transformed into *Mo-Deco* (a painting and wallpapering business).

During this time, a special fund was created by the European Community: New Opportunities for Women (NOW). This fund gave particular support to projects that encouraged women's training and employment. *Wonen en Werken* started a project that was approved by the European Community for a period of two years, with a subsidy to cover the costs of training and child-care in employment projects for women. Within the framework of NOW, the *Leren Ondernemen* association (Learning Entrepreneurial Skills) was created. This set out to train the participants in the *Mo-projecten*. Under the conditions laid down in NOW, exchange at a European level was required. *Leren Ondernemen* therefore established collaborative links with projects in Lille (France) and Lisbon (Portugal).

The *Mo-projecten* still exist today but will soon have to take on partially the status of "social workshop". This is a Flemish Government experiment in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

An organization that is recognized as a social workshop will receive subsidies to pay the wages of its workers. Remuneration of administrative staff, and overheads (rent, materials, telephone, etc.) will have to be covered by the turnover from the work done. It is recommended that there should be one administrative staff member for every group of five participants. Moreover, six training projects for men and women are running within *Wonen en Werken*: carpentry, building, painting and wallpapering, electricity, dressmaking and cookery. Despite the fact that in the training for men, the emphasis is on access to the traditional labour market, we do not always succeed in getting our participants into work.

For this reason the association is obliged to launch job creation projects for men too. At the present time, 12 workers are engaged in two construction projects. In all, some 60 people are working on the various training and job creation projects. The administrative staff is comprised of the general coordinator, the administrative unit, the commercial unit, the "project developer" and the person responsible for follow-up. Each team is accompanied by an instructor and a tutor. The follow-up officer, whose job is to counsel participants during their career at *Wonen en Werken*, works for all the projects. He also plays an active part in movement into the traditional labour market, and he looks for structural solutions to the factors that hinder work and help poverty.

In what follows, we shall focus on the *Mo-projecten*. From October 1993 to December 1994, an action research project subsidized by NOW was conducted in these projects by the Department of Educational Social Work of the Catholic University of Leuven. This analysed the training process that was in operation and led to discussion of it in the association. We shall largely use that research as the source for this study.

## THE MO-PROJECTEN

Each *Mo-project* employs between four and nine women, most of whom come from the local area. They are women with low levels of formal education who did not complete their schooling, and are mostly single women with children. Most have had many negative experiences in their past, with institutions or with their families. Hence, they have a negative self-image. Some of them have difficulties in various domains: debt, dilapidated housing, problems with their children's education, relationship problems, difficulty in arranging their household affairs, etc. Bad health and a weak constitution are also typical of them. The complexity of their problems gives them little chance in the labour market. They form a quite tightly knit group, in which solidarity is thought important.

Most of the workers are under a "PRIME" contract (Regional Labour Market Integration Projects), some for an indefinite period, others for one year.<sup>1</sup> They are paid a minimum wage. At the same time, they are encouraged to look for work in the traditional labour market. Some on basic income support also take part in training projects.

Here is a description of the various projects:

- *Mo-Rein* is a carpentry business employing five women. They make and repair furniture, and produce and fit frames, doors, staircases, cupboards, etc.
- *Mo-Clean* is a mobile cleaning team made up of nine women. In small groups, they clean for a score of regular customers — offices and schools — in Leuven and Brussels. The cleaning is done several times a week for larger clients. For smaller customers, a few hours a week are enough. Each site has its set days and hours. The work is always done by at least two and at most five women.



- *Mo-Deco* is a painting and wallpapering enterprise employing four women. It is a new direction for *Mo-Car*, a mobile car-washing business.
- For two years, the *Mo-projecten* were complemented by a service project. This ran with women in extreme poverty, for whom the move into mobile job creation projects was too great. The project prepared the way for a tailor-made individual scheme of finding lasting employment. The project was closed because subsidies were withdrawn.
- In late 1993 and early 1994, two new teams started up: cookery and dressmaking training. These were established in response to requests by the women themselves to match their experience.

All the teams follow the same plan. The women work five days a week, from 8:30 to 16:30 hours; 70% of their time is devoted to work with each team accompanied by an instructor. The remaining 30% is used for the training given by a tutor. The tutors have a degree in social work or education and look after two or three teams. Most of the tutors are linked officially to a Basic Education Centre.<sup>2</sup>

The training is given in two practical and discussion meetings and in a group meeting. The practical and discussion meetings — two half-days a week — are largely functional and have a content that differs from team to team, according to the nature of their work. In general, the meetings focus on co-management of the small business or on improving the work done. Essentially, they are about management training (estimates, invoices, keyboard skills and filing), technical skills (learning to build a staircase, for example) and personal skills (learning to communicate with clients, exercises in using the main rules of orthography, etc.). Sometimes, wider social issues are also discussed.

In each team, half a day is reserved for the group meeting. This is carried out in teams according to the following common pattern. The points on the agenda are: planning work for the following week, recording the hours worked in the preceding week, assessing the work done and the degree of collaboration during the previous week, information (for example, on the purchase of a new vacuum cleaner) and matters for discussion (for example, how to arrange transport better to cleaning sites). The workers take it in turns to chair and act as secretary to the meeting. Each team works with a system of responsibilities. One person is responsible for the agenda, one for timing, one for the conduct of the group meeting, one for maintaining the stock of wood, and one for other materials.

## **Aims and Administration**

The basic aim of these projects is to fight against impoverishment by means of employment. Work is thus thought of as a way of attacking poverty among women. Also, work is regarded as a means of giving women a stronger say in many areas and of (re)integrating them into society. The first and the most obvious aim is therefore to create suitable jobs which pay and

are adapted to the needs of women with low levels of education who have been unemployed for a long time. In view of the wider aim — the struggle against poverty — the intention is to create innovations in various fields.

## **Complementary Support for Personal Development**

The general aim is not only to emphasize improvement in technical competence among the workers, but also the learning of personal and social skills, such as self-confidence, communication, basic qualifications, collaboration, independence, etc. As a project that fights against poverty, *Wonen en Werken* has chosen to link technical qualifications to the acquisition of psycho-social skills among participants. The overall aim is that this development should have an effect on the situation at home. What is learned must help to break the vicious circle of impoverishment.

## **Target Group Support**

The association gives particular attention to the support and make-up of the target group. *Leren Ondernemen* explicitly stresses work with women who have been poor for generations. These women are usually the driving force of their families. Frequently, they are left to deal with matters on their own when their men can no longer cope with the (mental) pressure of poverty. They are then forced to survive with their children in extremely difficult circumstances. Given their family situation, they can hardly fulfil the demands for a high degree of availability and flexibility imposed by working. For a clear understanding of the issue of impoverishment, it is necessary to begin with them.

## **The Local Area Approach**

The association stresses a local area approach. The intention is thereby to reach the target group and to activate it. Contact is sought with existing social networks. The project is also part of a larger aim of “developing the area” or the “local economy”. In collaboration with other social organizations, the association sets out to develop activities which will strengthen the area and its inhabitants.

## **Associated Conditions**

It is important to arrange suitable and well-thought out childcare. This provision has to enable the women to concentrate fully on their work and training. It is run in collaboration with community work. There is a day crèche for the very young. There is also an after-school group for children who are at primary school. On Wednesday afternoons and during the holidays, activities are arranged for children. A project to look after sick children will start in collaboration with community work. Because of the lack of a well-organized network to care for sick children, workers in fact regularly stay at home when their children are ill.

Secondarily, there is insistence on good working conditions. That is why the choice was made voluntarily to work office hours so that the women can be at home when their children are too. Care is also taken to use the best technical equipment, to look after staff well, etc. In this way, the women have the maximum chance of learning.

## **THE CONCEPT OF TRAINING**

Working with the target group requires a particular view of training and an appropriate methodological approach. It is important not to let the people involved drop out quickly. The following are the main principles of the concept of training.

### **Personal and Occupational Skills**

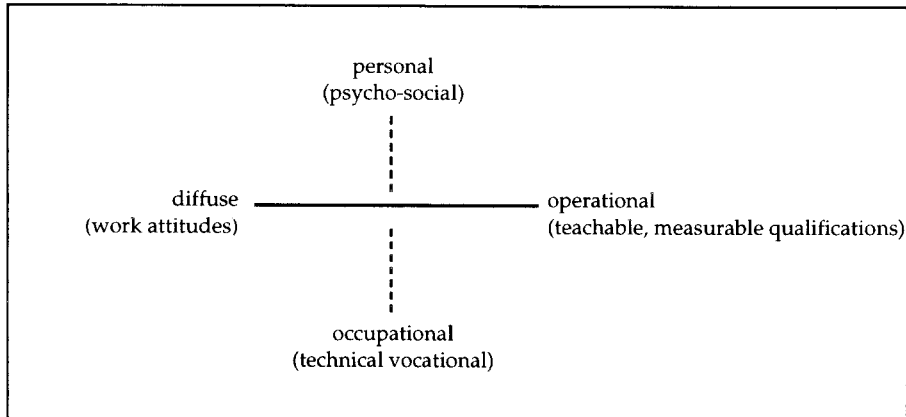
The basic objective of *Leren Ondernemen* is to fight against poverty. From this point of view, it is important that participants should be able to develop in a variety of work situations. Complex and varied work situations are deliberately selected, offering numerous learning opportunities. Optimum learning possibilities exist when there is a good relationship between the complexity of the task and the possibility of structuring it.

If a complex situation is well-structured, that is, in accordance with participants' experience, there are good opportunities of learning. In work situations, skills of different types are needed. Many of these skills can be acquired on the job itself, provided that the administration structures the opportunities to learn in such a complex situation. In some cases, this structuring requires time and space. That is why allowance has to be made for planning exercises outside work in the strict sense. Learning on the job and outside, concerns both technical skills and psycho-social skills. We thus depart markedly from the traditional practice by which technique is acquired on the job and psycho-social skills from outside work.

In our research, we developed a design in which the various qualifications learned within *Wonen en Werken* have a place. All the skills that are possible to learn can be found in a design which is divided into four parts, formed by two intersecting axes: personal (psycho-social) — versus occupational (technical vocational), and diffuse versus operational.

On the vertical axis, the skills that are directly occupational are situated at one pole, while the skills relating to psycho-social development are found at the opposite pole. On the horizontal axis, at one pole we find operational skills, and at the other, diffuse skills. By operational skills, we mean all the qualifications that can be formulated in terms of unequivocal behaviour and which are therefore measurable and teachable. By diffuse skills, we mean the qualifications that cannot easily be described in operational terms and which are also less easy to measure. These are qualifications that are not

always completely “achieved” and which are continually evolving (in a positive or negative direction). Besides, depending on the circumstances, they have a different content. Mastery of these skills is a prerequisite for acquiring and using operational skills adequately.



### SCHEME OF SKILLS IN FOUR PARTS

Hence we arrive at the following categories and definitions:

- **Operational occupational skills**  
Operational occupational skills are the qualifications needed to carry out the occupation effectively. They are specific to each occupation and are easy to describe and measure. Examples: knowing the characteristics of beechwood, how to paint a wall, how to use a sewing machine quickly; and having an idea of a team’s income and expenditure.
- **Diffuse occupational skills**  
Diffuse occupational skills are especially associated with the occupation, but are not easy to describe, teach and measure. We could therefore call them “work attitudes”. Examples: learning to make agreements and to keep them, being persevering, being punctual, being able to carry out a task independently, respecting materials and colleagues, and knowing how to receive and give criticism.
- **Operational personal skills**  
Operational personal skills are teachable, measurable qualifications which are directly linked to the psycho-social aspects of participants. Examples: having basic skills in mathematics, reading and writing, knowing how to use public equipment and the documents associated with it, and having psycho-motor skills.
- **Diffuse personal skills**  
Diffuse personal skills are qualifications that it is difficult to make operational and to measure that are directly linked to the psycho-social aspects of participants. Examples: having self-confidence, being capable of thinking about oneself, and being able to be autonomous.

In the women’s projects of *Wonen en Werken*, the training falls into four areas. The combination of psycho-social and technical vocational skills is what makes these projects original. They concern people who are vulnerable,

people who have previously missed the chance to learn in various fields. If the intention is to give them new opportunities through employment, ways have to be found of giving them the chance to learn in all fields. (See the Schematic List of Skills at end of chapter, which follows such a scheme).

In this way, these projects are distinct from classic basic education and from other vocational training. The latter specializes in one or two fields. Basic education as practised in Basic Education Centres concentrates on operational personal skills, and sometimes diffuse personal skills. In *Wonen en Werken*, those who collaborate in basic education depart from this traditional system. The tutors structure the complex work situations in collaboration with the instructors. They do so by developing instruments and plans and by suggesting exercises and appropriate follow-up to what is learned. The tutors not only intervene in the discussion and exercise meetings, but also in the group meetings. From time to time, they take part in work on the job in order to have an idea of the nature of the tasks and skills that are required and that already exist.

Other more official vocational training such as that provided by VDAB (the Flemish Work and Vocational Training Service) specializes essentially in the field of occupational skills. But not all vocational skills are taken into account. These are limited particularly to those which are necessary to carry out a specific job. Hence, less attention is given, for example, to cooperation and skills related to managing a small enterprise.

## Key Skills

It is hoped that the participants will also apply their "general" skills, as described above, to their home life. Work is in fact regarded as a stage in the struggle against poverty. Many of these skills are necessary to escape from the vicious circle of impoverishment and to improve their chances in society. That is why we want to work on the acquisition of key skills, such as, attitudes, views and capacities which are needed at work but are also the key to dealing with tasks, problems and challenges in various contexts. These skills are therefore of a general nature and are more or less independent of an occupation or a particular situation.

The participants' self-confidence is seen as a crucial key skill. Constant attention is therefore given to transforming the self-image, which is often negative, and to increasing the workers' self-confidence. In fact, we start from the idea that this skill is a precondition for acquiring other skills and for breaking the vicious circle of impoverishment. Other key skills are "knowing how to communicate", "knowing how to collaborate with others", "being independent", "being motivated", etc. These are qualifications found especially in the domain of diffuse personal skills.

## Functional Training

In order to cover the whole range of skills, *Wonen en Werken* starts from the functional needs of the job. All the skills are learned in an integrated manner. In other words, work is the doorway to acquiring different skills. The choice of this functional approach is justified by the preference and previous (negative) learning experiences of the participants, as well as by the needs of the occupation.

We start from the idea that *all work contacts are a dimension of learning*. In other words, on the basis of the work situation, vocational skills and more personal skills are learned. Besides learning the skills required to complete the specific tasks of the occupation (carpentry, cleaning, etc.), basic skills such as arithmetic and writing are used. This is done while learning to carry out specific administrative tasks such as drafting estimates and invoices. There is also work, for example, on communication, in which participants contact clients; on collaboration, in which they are given joint tasks on the job; and on responsibility, in which they are responsible for a site.

## Participation

The instructors and tutors set out to make the women play a large part. They do not want to take all the decisions themselves, and they thereby expect an increase in involvement in work and an improvement in participants' self-image. Moreover, they start from the idea that it is the participants themselves who best know what their needs, inadequacies and intentions are. Participation can thus improve the quality of planning. The administration also believes that participation provides training opportunities, by making it possible to acquire skills in different domains.

This model has a differing content in the various teams. The following is an example of the participation model as it is practised in one of the teams:

At *Mo-Clean*, the staff and the workers plan the following week together. During the group meeting, the women put on paper who will clean where. They take part in deciding on contracts and new clients. What's more, each woman is responsible for one or more sites. This means that she keeps in touch with the client, takes charge of the other women, is responsible for the materials and products on the site, and assesses the work. During the exercise and discussion meetings, a lot of attention is given to the collective management of the small cleaning business. In this way, the women keep a joint account of the results of the previous year, and work out the hours worked each month, the products used, etc. This gives the women an overview of the management of the enterprise and its future development. One of the workers also makes up the books each day. Another woman makes a note of everyone's times present and absent, etc. The workers also take part in decisions on the buying of new products and machinery.

Participation takes place within a definite specific structure and takes account of participants' potential. The danger is thereby averted that participation might lead to chaos or an absence of structure.

## Training Centred on the Group

Skills are worked on while on the job, as well as being learned and practised during meetings formally devoted to exercises and discussion. To this end, training is centred on the group. The weekly group meetings are also a part of the training. Work and collaboration during the previous week are assessed, plans for the following week are drawn up, decisions are taken and problems aired.

## Tailor-Made Training

Training thus takes place principally in the group. At the same time, considerable attention is given to differences in level between participants. Tasks are allocated which match the level and pace of each one, and account is taken of the weakest when explanations are given.

In order to give workers the chance to share responsibility for their work, methods that are suitable for the target group are developed. By means of clear plans, all the tasks are placed within their reach. In the cleaning team, plans are used which describe the work at each site and provide a list of the materials to be found there. In *Mo-Rein*, guidelines have been worked out for giving clear estimates. In *Mo-Deco*, a practical formula is used to calculate the quantity of paint needed for a given surface.

## Communication and Interaction

An earlier survey at *Wonen en Werken* showed that training cannot be confined to the specific times when technical and personal skills are learned. Training is implicit in all the activities and processes. We link training with the overall process of communications and relationships that take place within the projects, both on the job and outside work.

We also regard *communication as the basis of the whole training process*. We start from the idea that people learn from each other in formal and informal activities. That presupposes that training is a responsibility of both the tutor and the instructor. In communication, the dialogue between the participants and the tutors and instructors is vital. Both the participants and the tutors and instructors are in principle open to each other's ideas. Both sides learn from this. Good interaction has the characteristics of a communication in which the solving of problems and the performing of tasks are seen as collective responsibilities, in which everyone has the necessary information, others are allowed to express criticism, and everyone clearly states his or her principles, underlying values and norms when decisions are taken that affect others.

## Learning by Thinking about Oneself

Finally, the training process also contains an element of thinking about oneself. In order to make training deeper, it is necessary to learn to think about

oneself. The tutors and instructors, and the participants consider how they should act and how they can carry out tasks in the most effective way. They ask themselves, for example, how to cut a plank as straight as possible. Starting from actual situations, events, actions, tasks and disagreements in the project, they also ask themselves questions about how they react to a colleague, and to their own situation of poverty. These questions derive from actual work situations. It is not easy for tutors and instructors to meet the challenge of starting these discussions.

## **POINTS REQUIRING ATTENTION**

In implementing this concept of training, one runs into a number of problems. Tensions are inevitable. It is necessary, in fact, to take into account the participants, tutors and instructors, the locality where the project is running, the outside world, etc. The following are the main problems.

### **Necessary Support**

The organizers soon reached the conclusion that they needed to be prudent in formulating the aim of being a "viable" business. The choice of target group imposes certain limits. It is reckoned that permanent state support in the form of subventions to cover participants' wages will remain necessary for the management of the enterprise.

At certain times, a choice has in fact to be made in a project between the interest of the participants and that of the project. Should one choose to emphasize a participant's learning process, or should one stick to the value of the product delivered? This happens, for example, when a participant finds it difficult to meet the norms of quality and productivity. The choice is not easy. On the one hand, quality is important for the project and to the customer. On the other hand, the woman's self-confidence is improved greatly by the fact of her participation in the project. It is important to find the right balance between the two interests.

### **The Dilemma Over Worker Participation**

Participation is not always easily accomplished. In practice, we encounter quite a number of dilemmas. First of all, it is not always easy for tutors and instructors to surrender the "power" to make decisions on their own. This is especially difficult when they wish to defend particular interests. Sometimes one feels so responsible for something or someone (for example, a client) that one does not want to run the slightest risk. When tutors or instructors decide for themselves, they are more sure of the outcome.

Secondly, it is seen that work without participation is sometimes more effective. The question may in fact be asked whether the participants are equipped to make a sensible contribution through their participation. It takes



time and energy to enable them to do so. At the same time, such participation provides the participants with learning opportunities.

The following example will illustrate this dilemma:

In team X, in the first few years, the woman who was in charge for the week — always a different worker — maintained the contacts with clients. This worker therefore had a large say in accepting and planning jobs. When the new instructor arrived, things changed. She took back this responsibility. She was thus sure that jobs were properly accepted. Because of the pressure of time, the instructor often carried out a number of tasks herself, such as telephoning a supplier or clients about late payment.

When the participants arrive later on the traditional labour market, the transition will be a rude shock. Suddenly they will need to adapt to a system in which participation is not always permitted or required. And lastly, not all participants are always capable of participating. Some of them do not manage to do so. Here we run up against the limits of some participants' potential. Others prefer to carry out orders. Finding the right balance between management and support is important in these cases.

## **Tensions between Individuals and the Group**

The differences in level between participants cause a dilemma for tutors and instructors who are designing a technical or general training programme: should it be suited to the weakest and give the stronger ones less chance of learning, or should it be addressed primarily to the "better" ones? Each proposal reduces the possibility of learning for one of the two groups. Creativity and flexibility are two key words in this case. And this presupposes good guidance for the tutors and instructors.

## **The Importance of Practical Conditions for Working and Learning**

A year ago, during the cleaning team's discussion and exercise meetings, twelve of us were sitting around a table one metre long by a metre and a half wide. Under such conditions, the women had to make notes of hours of work, to use calculators and to write invoices. It is hardly surprising that everybody became a bit aggressive. To get to the cupboards where the administrative documents were filed, you had to go right through the building. When it was fitted out, later, we were able to move into a larger and pleasanter office.

This example illustrates the necessity of sufficient space and facilities for discussion and exercise meetings, for working meetings and work itself. Poor practical conditions stand in the way of involvement, people cannot manage to work, and it is not beneficial for the acquisition of skills.

## **The Need for a Global Approach**

Among this group of people, unemployment is not the only problem. The disadvantaged are faced with a host of problems in different areas: housing, health, relationships, etc. Tutors and instructors therefore also give attention

to these problems. Hence, participants are registered with the social housing association. Childcare is taken care of through the 't Lampeke community centre. The costs of childcare are covered.

*Wonen en Werken* deliberately chose not to provide individual help. However, an eye has to be kept on these situations and problems in order to identify them and, in agreement with the participants, actively to direct the latter to competent agencies such as the housing association, community workers, a social centre, social workers following up "families with multiple problems" at home, etc.

The organizers believe that job creation for the disadvantaged does not improve the structural nature of the issue of unemployment: there are still systems that help to cause or keep up unemployment in society. However, they are also seeking structural solutions to debt, health, employment, etc. It is the role of the follow-up officer to run such projects in association with third parties. *Wonen en Werken* is also a member of *Leuven Sociaal*, a group of a score of organizations in the town. These are seeking better harmonization among themselves in the fight against poverty. Moreover, the association belongs to OVERALL, a regional group of private training and job creation initiatives which defends the interests of the organizations and the long-term unemployed.

It is only by collaborating with others that a job creation scheme can achieve a global approach.

## RESULTS

The results of *Wonen en Werken* should not be sought in the number of women who have found work in the traditional labour market. The association would like deliberately to create an alternative range of work, in which these women might rather remain. Traditional employment is in fact only achieved by a small percentage of the women. Those who succeed usually find a job in cleaning or in hotels and catering, two sectors in which the hours of work are very flexible and hence barely compatible with family life.

The wider aim of *Wonen en Werken* is the fight against poverty. In terms of results, we find it more important to know whether there is a transfer from work to the situation at home.

There is without doubt a transfer. Simply, we do not know if this comes about in as straight a line as tutors and instructors had hoped. It is noticeable that the women become stronger in many fields. We do not know to what extent the participants also apply at home the skills that they have acquired at work. We have some indications from conversations with tutors and instructors, from interviews with participants and from observations. Some examples are as follows.

Participants are readier to telephone official agencies, even from home. When they have learned to read and write better at *Leren Ondernemen*, they also use these skills at home. A member of the dressmaking team makes

clothes at home for herself and her children. A participant in the cleaning team reports that she cleans much more thoroughly at home. Another woman says that she keeps her housekeeping in better order at home and writes down her activities in a diary.

These are skills that can be applied to other situations with some adaptation. They lie mainly among the operational skills (occupational and personal). Moreover, there are more general skills needed in the project that might also be used in everyday life, but are not immediately visible: independence, collaboration, responsibility, communication, self-confidence, logical thinking, etc. These are found rather among the diffuse skills (occupational and personal). The woman in the following example does not simply take home administrative skills but also a sense of responsibility and support for others. This is only possible because her self-confidence has increased through *Leren en Ondernemen*.

A woman recounts that she helps other women with housekeeping. Before, she always had to ask advice somewhere. She chases members of her family to make sure that they make their tax declarations on time. She has also found a system whereby she does not forget to pay her bills. And she is trying to pass on her abilities to others.

These skills are probably the result of the whole process. The fact that the women have a paid job and do not stay at home all day, have certain responsibilities, and are part of a group, helps them to acquire these skills. In *Mo-Clean*, the fact that they go to a "real" client also seems to be a significant motivating and self-image factor. The participants themselves say: "My self-confidence has grown thanks to the responsibility I was given here and thanks to the confidence and friendship that are offered."

## CONCLUSION

*Wonen en Werken* was set up to fight against the impoverishment of women with low levels of formal education who have been unemployed for a long time. This it has done by establishing small businesses for local residents. These projects are part of the social economy, in which solidarity is more important than profit; in which profit is not seen in terms of increased capital but of increased jobs. Our current economic system provides employment if this leads to a return on capital. In a social economy, based on solidarity, employment is not thought of as something to be minimized because of high costs (of social security) but as a value in itself. There is a growing number of projects that follow these ideas in Belgium.

However, these projects, which fall between the "profit sector" and the "non-profit sector", remain socially marginal. They are also in need of a legal framework: subsidies to compensate for lost returns to employers, and management support to stimulate economic development. The "social workshop" experiment is a first step in this direction.

Working provides workers with a wage at *Wonen en Werken*. The fact of working in itself encourages women's integration into society. At the same time, employment brings about a whole learning process. This is necessary if the vicious circle of impoverishment is to be broken. An income alone is not enough. We can call this process "literacy" in the widest sense of the term. Such literacy not only includes occupational elements and technical vocational skills, but also personal elements and development of identity. Key skills are always considered important because of the transferability of what is learned to other situations. If the learning process is to be deep-rooted, it is also necessary to be able to think about oneself.

At *Wonen en Werken*, work provides the opportunity to set this literacy process in action. The process also requires a different organizational culture. There is no question of regarding production as the most important objective. A balance has to be sought between the product that must be delivered and the process experienced by the participants. Moreover, if the learning process is really to grip participants, it needs to be distanced from a strictly hierarchical structure. Worker participation is important for the quality of the product, but also most definitely for their learning.

The fight against impoverishment demands in fact a global approach. Job creation schemes such as *Wonen en Werken* make a significant contribution to this. They go to the limits of their organizational capacities, and there is much to be done in many other fields: at school, at home, in the traditional labour market, etc. Collaboration and dialogue with others is necessary if the vicious circle of poverty is to be broken.

### Notes

1. This refers to paid jobs with a prospect of returning to unemployment on benefit. The length of time the job lasts depends on the age of the person concerned.
2. Flanders has fifteen Basic Education Centres. These are funded by the Ministry of Education. They are responsible for providing adult education to those with little school education. Four types of course are offered: mathematics, Dutch as mother tongue, Dutch as a second language, and social skills.

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*Diffuse personal skills*

1. *Self-confidence*
2. *Ability to be assertive and to defend one's interests in society*
3. *Ability to communicate with others (listening, speaking, expressing one's thoughts, knowing how and having the courage to give and accept criticism)*
4. *Ability to think about oneself (having knowledge, being prepared to think about oneself, ability to act reflectively)*
5. *Ability to be independent and responsible*
6. *Ability to relativize*
7. *Ability to think in the abstract*

*Diffuse occupational skills*

1. *Ability to collaborate (loyalty to colleagues and employers, dialogue, learning to draw conclusions and respect agreements)*
2. *Being motivated to work (desire for self-improvement, involvement, showing interest, perseverance)*
3. *Ability to be punctual (respecting appointment times, keeping order)*
4. *Ability to carry out tasks independently (taking initiatives, working independently, accepting and taking on responsibility, being able to plan work, taking the initiative to use tools, etc.)*
5. *Ability to show respect (respect for materials, oneself and others)*
6. *Ability to concentrate the mind (being able to concentrate on work, knowing how to acquire and use new information)*
7. *Occupational and geographical flexibility and mobility*
8. *Ability to check performance (being able to assess one's own work, being able to criticize and be criticized, being able to use feedback)*

*Operational personal skills*

1. *Mastery of basic skills: mathematics, reading and writing*
2. *Basic social knowledge*
3. *Knowledge of and ability to use public documents and equipment*
4. *Psycho-motor capacities*
5. *General personal knowledge*

*Operational occupational skills*

1. *Knowledge of technology, materials and tools of work*
2. *Knowledge of the occupation itself*
3. *Occupational skills*
4. *Executive skills (understanding tasks, being able to carry them out effectively and quickly, knowing how to record tasks completed)*
5. *Ability to give support*

**SCHEMATIC LIST OF SKILLS**

# CHAPTER SIXTEEN

## Economics with Humanity Social Work and Basic Education

Jean Stummer  
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### THE CONTEXT

In the mid-1980s, some new ways of responding to social exclusion and long-term unemployment were introduced in France by voluntary “intermediate associations” and placement agencies. The first of these made people who were having problems in finding a job available to community organisations, private individuals and companies. The user paid for the service, and the employees received wages. The second recruited people in similar situations and gave them paid employment for a maximum of two years in businesses producing goods and services that were sold on the market.

In both cases, the aim was to put people with no access to “classic” employment in touch with the labour market, by means of special terms of employment and other conditions. Both these types of organization were granted public funding to compensate for low productivity and the social work element, chiefly by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Affairs, with additional contributions that varied from situation to situation from local or regional community agencies.

In this context, the *Arche en Ciel* (“Rainbow”) voluntary association arose out of a meeting between a number of people who had been engaged in

social work and shared the belief that contributing to job creation could be at least as effective as treating the consequences of exclusion: that the offer of a job brought status and social recognition as well as financial independence.

*Arche en Ciel* was thus launched in 1986. It is a non-profit making association, with the approved status of "intermediate association" whose aims, as laid down in its statutes, are: first, to help to keep people who are registered dependent and/or handicapped at home by means of aids to everyday living, excluding medical and para-medical technical equipment, and secondly, to employ women who cannot easily find a job to carry out the tasks involved. The association is located in Chambéry, in the Savoie, a town of 100,000 inhabitants with quite high unemployment among women. We came upon the idea because of the evident need for widespread home services expressed by elderly people wanting more than anything else to go on living in their own homes.

In France, help for dependent elderly people seems at first glance to be well-organised and adequate. Medically, help is given by district nurses and municipal care services. The user has a choice, and these services are paid for by social security. In everyday life, the municipal and voluntary services, which have been running since the 1950s, provide around one hour's help per day which is suitable for people who have lost some independence and have close support from a spouse or family.

However, the increase in longevity and medical advances, together with a growing desire to stay at home and the geographical dispersal of families, had been creating new needs for over a decade. For people who were too dependent to get by with only one hour a day, but not yet requiring hospitalization or placement in institutions (which they do not want), the system had reached its limits.

Since existing services were no longer adequate, we stepped in to fill the gap in everyday support, as a complement and not a competitor to those services, with the intention of using this small supply of jobs to benefit women who were excluded from the traditional employment market by virtue of their age, their level of education or their personal problems. The fact that we employ hardly any men does not arise from any ideological principle on our part, but was forced on us by the inability of people who are often of advanced age to accept that such support could be provided by men.

After rapid expansion within a few years, the association today provides support to 400 elderly people per year, with the help of 200 employees. The volume of activity corresponds to that of 80 full-time jobs per month, but through part-time employment pays wages to some 120 persons per month.

Those receiving help pay the greater part of the cost, the remainder coming from public funds. The services to the elderly account for over 70% of the expenditure, the rest being divided between exemption from additional wage costs for dependent persons and direct operational subventions made by the state and local community agencies.

## WHY EMPLOYMENT?

In 1986 we thought (and we still think) that one of the best answers to exclusion must be a paid job: an appropriate and suitably adapted job that takes account of the difficulties of the people concerned, but a job all the same, whenever possible.

The value of work as a force for integration is today still at the heart of integration into society (this is not an expression of opinion for or against, merely an observation). Thousands of women whom we have met state clearly that they want to work, and work means autonomy and financial independence. The net income from work is obviously not the same as that of unemployment benefits and social security benefits, but from what those who are excluded say themselves, it is simply a question of dignity.

Work is clearly not “the only answer” that merits consideration and application, but it is the answer that we were able to give. These jobs have helped women, who are often on their own and in precarious personal and material circumstances, to finally stop worrying about their future (in so far they still could), which they saw in terms of insoluble money problems, emptiness and despair. By providing minimum material security, jobs have given many of them some respite from their constant and fruitless struggle, in which all their energy was expended in simply managing to survive.

We also hoped, as has been confirmed by experience, that such a stabilization would lead them to ask questions about their skills and abilities, and to find reassurance as to their capacity and desire to follow some form of training.

## WHAT SORT OF JOB, AND HOW TO FIND IT?

We began our work on the basis of several simple, and still valid, principles:

- opposition to the idea of “nice little jobs” (everything possible should be done to ensure that jobs are stable and worthwhile, and this is the case with help for dependent people);
- no requirement in advance for technical vocational skills since the jobs offered concern help with everyday life (cleaning, shopping, meals, company, outings, etc.);
- the most precise assessment possible of the real difficulties and capacities of those seeking work; and
- a progressive return to work (part-time to begin with) so that employees can once again become used to the constraints and responsibilities of working.

In 1986, the notion of “nice little jobs”, relatively unqualified service jobs with no security, was put forward as a possible way of alleviating rising unemployment. Providing caring jobs to people while trying to make them permanent, “real jobs”, has often been a difficult challenge, but it has been faced.



This demand for professionalism was first made of us by our clients: it is indeed inconceivable that anyone would want to care for dependent people without being certain of the quality of the service they were giving. The demand for quality, together with a true employee status, also enabled us to offer a moral contract to employees: a real job with a real wage in return for an obligation to perform their service properly.

Coming as it often does after years of training courses, and training in an occupation or in idleness, this sort of contract can swiftly turn people who were previously only "job seekers" into "service providers". And helping people who are enfeebled and isolated by enabling them to go on living in their own homes remains a gratifying and rewarding activity.

*A priori*, is a type of job that might be regarded as a "service job" carrying out low-value domestic tasks and therefore restricted to women; in short, a job as a "maid of all work". But this is not so because:

- it is not a case of carrying out tasks thought inferior and uninteresting in the place of a consumer who could perfectly well do them but is willing to pay to escape what is unpleasant or boring. It is doing what can no longer be done for want of strength rather than want of will; and
- home helps are in demand as much for their human relationship as their material value. Being there, being attentive, talking, listening, and putting an end to loneliness by being the only person the subject speaks to in a long, empty day goes far beyond the notion of a "domestic".

All the same, we mean a job and not a religious calling. That is, achieving the best possible balance between practical activity and affective input, which might be defined as technical provision made with benevolent attention.

The main way of guaranteeing this quality has been the manner of recruiting employees and supervising them in their work. From the outset, the people employed were selected by clinical psychologists, who were asked not to test or to exclude, but to assess the potential of a given person at a given moment in her (or his) life, in order to find out her capacity for relationships, ability to accept rules and working constraints, and the severity of her current problems.

The approach chosen was not psychometry and did not consist of batteries of tests to arrive at a total score of abilities and disabilities. What was asked of the psychologists was to listen and to hear, to pick up the breaks and fault lines in life histories, but also the determination, resilience and personal commitment. These interventions were more than simple interviews and needed the professional tools and distance of psychology: being (no doubt) extremely schematic and not placing oneself "in the position of the other person", not trying to "understand" her out of kindness, but assessing the situation neutrally without making any affective or moral judgments, and assessing her current state without anticipating the future.

It was perhaps a "cold", "clinical" approach in the dehumanizing sense of the term, but it was also a form of respect consisting in not forcing the interlocutor into the role of "victim of exclusion" or of someone (culpably?)

responsible for her situation, but in seeing her as a person at a given moment of her life, neither a "victim" to be cared for, nor a "guilty party" to be reformed. As it has been well put by the psychologist Sylvie Malan, who co-founded the association with me, it was simply a matter of trying to find out "... who is sitting opposite me today, without ever prejudging his or her capacity to surprise me, both positively and negatively".

From this type of assessment, the number of hours and degree of difficulty of work, was matched as well as possible to a particular person at a specific moment in life, in order to reduce to the minimum the risk of failure in the first job. For example, a home help suffering serious depression would not be offered a job with a significant weekly number of hours in the home of an old person in a similar state of mind; on the other hand, someone with a slightly aggressive personality would not be put in touch with an old lady who was excessively manic and authoritarian.

Gradually, over the months, the hours of work and the degree of difficulty increased, according to how each person developed. This was, of course, not always an ideal path in a straight line. Sometimes there were periods of stagnation or regression. Failures could not be avoided but the essential thing was not just to be satisfied with admitting them and excluding the person in question, but instead, to try with that person to overcome them, and here a good dose of determination was often necessary to combat the loss of self-worth and the deep feeling of incapacity associated with years of unemployment.

Recruitment was therefore not tied to specific characteristics, but the profile of a home help might be that of a woman aged around forty, living alone after a breakup with a husband in similar difficulties, and with too brief a school education, few qualifications and little vocational experience. Personal problems may be added to this, exacerbated by a life marked by rejection in the hunt for a job, which has been extremely difficult for such women over the last decade or more.

Whenever we could not employ someone, we tried where possible to find a solution with other partners, and this was achieved in the large majority of cases.

## TRAINING

We met hundreds of people leaving training courses of many varying types which they had not always — and that is the least that can be said — chosen for themselves: training which did not always produce results that matched the effort and resources that had been put in. This is quite obvious under such circumstances.

I am not putting training on trial, but merely the tendency to cry training for lack of power to meet demands for employment. It is a response which also offers the substantial advantage of removing those involved from the

unemployment figures. In France, some years ago, it should be remembered that the official solution to exclusion was to pronounce the magic formula "training" while invoking the "economic upturn" which would unfailingly come to solve everything. Reality has shown that things were not to be so simple, indeed far from it.

For someone suffering long-term occupational exclusion (and hence partial social exclusion), but still potentially wanting to find a job, the training answer to the demand for employment is felt to be an "answer by default" more than an opportunity worth seizing. Listening to what the people concerned say, and looking at their experience, we have seen that for a certain number, training was only an answer for want of anything better in this context. In such a situation, how can people be persuaded to regard learning some "knowledge" or other as anything but a second-rate occupational activity rather than as an investment which will bring personal rather than practical returns?

Listening to the people whom we interviewed, we observed that for many of them, their primary needs and demands, strongly expressed, were work and material security. We therefore reversed the usual scheme of training first, and starting a job second.

We started with employment, and could do so since the jobs we were able to offer required no technical skills but human aptitudes, the ability to make relationships, and a certain know-how (cleaning, shopping, preparing meals, etc.). We were convinced that such potential was always there, either immediately useable or in abeyance but renewable in the people concerned.

In the background, we were toying with the idea that home helps, when confronted with a job that was not easy would, when all was said and done, feel a need for training that they could immediately apply in their work rather than "undergoing" training that they saw as "theoretical" because it was disconnected from real applications. For the majority, this is what happened.

## THE TYPE OF TRAINING

During the association's early years, we replied individually to each employee who was wondering about some aspect of her work. We set immediate availability as a rule of operation to resolve the difficulties encountered by home helps. At the same time, we instituted short "training times" and regular meetings of employees in small groups with one or the other of us, simply to let them talk, ask questions aloud, and exchange queries and experiences.

These meetings very quickly became an occasion for interchange, for facing problems, in which the "old hands" could give the "newcomers" the benefit of their experience, a time when there was often meaningful discussion of old age, proximity to death, loneliness, etc., a time for reassurance free of judgment and criticism.

The short training times, two half-days a month and always in small groups, were then based on more exact topics (understanding old age, behavioural problems, keeping a distance from the people helped, etc.) with the assistance of specialists (doctors, geriatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, etc.). These visiting specialists came on a voluntary basis since the association did not fall within a legal framework allowing it to benefit from training funds.

Fortunately, we had a fund of interest and sympathy, and a circle of professionals that was sufficiently wide to let them contribute in this manner, outside any structured network. We were very pleasantly surprised, first by the number of people who agreed to give their time, and secondly by the level of attention that they inspired in the home helps, because of their competence but also doubtless because they were not demanding payment for their presence or their knowledge but were giving them for nothing.

We made no pretence of providing vocational training in the usual sense of the term. We merely wanted the home helps to be able to do their work better, with fewer worries, by bringing technical and psychological knowledge to bear on their often pertinent uncertainties, so that they could internalize this knowledge and apply it from day to day.

This constant "two-way street" between problems encountered, questions, immediate implementation of answers, and outcomes, helped to convince many of them that "learning" could be useful, sometimes even easy and pleasurable, and above all, possible.

After a few years, such a system was no longer adequate and we succeeded in finding our way around the administrative labyrinth of legal wording and funding in order to organize vocational training leading to the home help certificate (Certificat d'aptitude aux fonctions d'aide à domicile, CAFAD), a national certificate validating a recognized vocational qualification.

By "bending" the wording with the benevolent and indispensable cooperation of one or two officers in the relevant authorities, we were able to keep to the principle of training leading to a qualification while working. The employees were paid part-time (at most half-time) and spent the other half-time in training paid for by vocational training funds. This was a small heresy in a country where the law permits either training or paid employment, but not both together.

There was no question that these women, who would have to make the efforts demanded by training, were being financially penalized, but it was indispensable that they should keep up a part-time job for the sake of the interaction between theory and practice, learning and application.

The training was arranged in two stages:

1. a period termed "pre-qualification" to update or strengthen basic knowledge: reading, writing, comprehension and summary of written texts, personal expression, and reassurance about their ability to learn. The pre-qualification was highly individualized, giving each trainee the chance of personal support; and

2. a qualification period based on the content of the national CAFAD programme; each element of the programme was linked to the vocational practice of the trainees. The whole training cycle lasted a little over a year and was successfully completed by two groups of 20 or so persons each.

**First positive observation:** Only two trainees dropped out along the way, and the final pass rate in the examination, which was validated by a regional jury, was 100%.

**Second and far less positive observation:** This type of training could not be repeated, in spite of the results obtained, for a whole set of reasons associated with funding priorities and changes in the wording of legal provisions.

At the present time, we have been obliged to fall back on a minimum of knowledge acquisition arranged in the form of half-days on specific topics, however with the aid of paid professional experts, and keeping up payment to the women who make the effort to attend. And the volume of activity still corresponds roughly to 80 full-time equivalents.

Besides achieving the highest possible success rate in certificated vocational training, and an improvement in the women's material situation, these jobs have above all enabled women of all ages (from 21 to 50 years) and with low levels of education to realize what their potential is and to make use of it, and to change both their perception of themselves and the views of them held by others, by close family and friends, husbands and children.

Over these eight years, we have witnessed an evolution not easy to quantify by means of conventional tools for evaluating learning. It is more a personal evolution and an internalization of abilities than an accumulation of knowledge.

For example, I remember a single woman of around 40 years of age, the mother of two children, saying to me after four years of working in the association, that her children now derived greater pleasure from going to school and were doing better there. She explained that they had suggested to her one day, seeing her reading and writing at home as part of her training, that they should "do their homework together".

Listening to her, it was evident that she had acquired the habits and way of thinking of intellectual work and, probably more importantly, a little satisfaction and pleasure in learning. With respect to learning, when we began to talk about training within the association, the remark that often recurred was "So we're going back to school". The tone in which this was said almost always betrayed a mixture of the anxiety of recalling former difficulties at school, of failure and of joy at remembering a time that had also had its moments of happiness. And we know too that despite individual successes, exclusion often generates exclusion.

## SOME OBSERVATIONS

Despite the results obtained, there remain some questions largely associated with the excessive speed with which the association expanded. It has

been almost impossible to involve the employees in the internal running of the organization. They have two places on the board of management and staff representatives, but the move from being a “collective “ to being a “business” was too rapid to permit more direct participation in operations. Limiting development would have meant limiting jobs, and this was a choice we did not wish to make.

Eight years on, we face the problem of becoming an organization whose voluntary nature does not guarantee paid employees a permanent job or the same development possibilities as the public service sector, despite the applicability of a collective agreement in *Arche en Ciel* that protects the rights of home helps. In effect, we are providing a public service without the means to do so.

Today, the association faces serious financial difficulties, in common with many other placement agencies. Public funding is definitely being cut back even though an activity of this kind undoubtedly creates material and human benefits (although the latter may not be seen as an argument).

At this stage, there is a question mark over the durability of activities that link jobs, social work and training. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but here are some of the potential elements of a satisfactory answer:

- the least possible dependence on public funds, which are subject to the hazards and fluctuations of political decisions, or a variety of sources so that the whole enterprise is not endangered by one withdrawal;
- demonstration and quantification of the economic and human benefits of what is being done (we are without doubt never sufficiently convincing);
- provision of services and products of highest possible quality;
- attentiveness to the speed of development, and perhaps the “breaking up” of a large structure into several small units that can better involve the actors and retain a capacity for flexibility and innovation;
- acceptance of the permanent tension of being pulled between two conflicting principles: the maintenance of high-quality service at reasonable cost in order not to imperil the task, and the adoption of “rules of the game” which are most likely not to exclude the “weakest performers”. And there may be a great temptation to go for profitability (especially in the face of financial problems) and to select job seekers from among the most “productive”, with the risk of being transformed into another “exclusion machine”.

Stability is doubtless not attainable, and it may not be desirable, but it is possible to come close to an unstable but dynamic equilibrium, like a tightrope walker: will he fall off on the side of the excluded (thereby bringing down the very thing that was there for them), or will he stay upright? In the knowledge that the answer to social, occupational and cultural exclusion depends on the political choices that we make, we have to ask whether we are ready to make the investment, and at what level, so that we can inject some humanity into economics. Have we not sufficient reason to fear that the choice has already been made?

# Chapter Seventeen

## THE CHIC RESTO-POP THE REAFFIRMATION OF CITIZENSHIP THROUGH SOCIALY USEFUL WORK

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*This chapter is intended to be the testimony of the Chic Resto-pop, which is offered through us as intermediaries to those who are concerned about two major problems affecting industrial countries: rising unemployment, including long-term unemployment, and persistent poverty.<sup>1</sup> To quote the words of Pierre, one of the staff of the Resto, "Quebec faces not only a jobs crisis, but also a transformation of work," and in view of this transformation we must "not only reaffirm the principle of citizenship, but also guarantee citizens a basic income by recognizing the existence and importance of a new type of work, socially useful work." The Resto-pop works to this end.*

## **THE CRISIS OF WORK: A PROFOUND TRANSFORMATION OF CANADIAN AND QUEBEC SOCIETY**

The ills afflicting Canada and Quebec are essentially associated with the recent transformation of the Canadian economy. Not only is the Canadian industrial strategy of extracting natural resources and processing them to a minimal degree no longer adequate, but the new economic orientation that is being suggested, based on growth through the development of the manufacturing and service sectors with a high value-added factor, although creating decent jobs, is only doing so for a small proportion of the active population.

The new economy claims to be that of high value-added production, in which both service and assembly line workers must demonstrate readiness, flexibility, mobility and a high level of productivity within a company. Around a core of well-paid regular employees receiving significant social benefits, a growing number of people who are less well paid hover on the fringes, with no social security benefits and no permanent job status. These occasional workers are a pool of resources available to private, public and cooperative enterprises to expand or contract their operations in response to the economic situation of the moment.

At the level of the state, the new economy dictates clear choices. In the face of falling revenue, the state is obliged to reduce its expenditure, including its wage and salary bill, and to review all the social security programmes that have grown since the last war. In order to provide a firmer basis for the new rules of the economic game, most developed countries, including Canada, have opted for a neo-liberal strategy of supporting productivity and reducing the wage element.<sup>2</sup> Changes have come about without the introduction of any really valid policy of labour force development to address the thorny problem of the socio-economic integration of marginalized people and regions.

### **Hochelaga-Maisonneuve: The Example of an Area Badly Hit by the New Economy that is Organizing to Fend for Itself**

The villages of Hochelaga and Maisonneuve were built by French Canadian businessmen at the end of the 19th century. Shortly after they were founded, the villages of Hochelaga (1883) and Maisonneuve (1918) were incorporated into the City of Montreal.

Until 1950, the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve area was at the heart of the main manufacturing activities of Montreal. It had a French Canadian working-class population of 80,000 persons,<sup>3</sup> whose standard of living was rising



thanks to the advantages of the Fordian social contract. Earlier ills were diminishing. Unemployment was falling. Wages were rising. Epidemics had been checked, and school attendance was slowly increasing.

After 1950, the first signs of economic downturn were felt in this old industrial area. First, the number of people living in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve stagnated, and then declined. The population fell from 82,000 in 1950 to 48,000 in 1991, a demographic decline which was attributable to the seductions of the newly developed suburbs of Montreal. Secondly, between 1960 and 1980, the relocation and closure of a large number of local businesses, and the new requirements of the labour market in terms of vocational education and job qualifications meant that the bases on which a significant proportion of the local population had had access to permanent jobs crumbled away.

The huge job losses, as the following narrative text suggests, led to widespread poverty:

There are about 47,645 of us living in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve area, but 40% of us are living on the verge of poverty. There are many single-parent families here (46.3%). We had problems at school, and reading and writing are sometimes difficult for a number of us; more than 25% of young people don't complete secondary education.

Several thousand jobs have disappeared around here in the last few years. We know a lot of people who hide their poverty because they are ashamed. But nobody here likes the decaying streets, the yelling and the arguments. Any more than we like the insecurity and the difficulties that our families have to live with.<sup>4</sup>

## **THE GROWTH OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INITIATIVES**

While the exclusion of regions, businesses and individuals from the field of production and consumption is exacerbated by economic changes and the state's new priorities, exclusion does not, however, mean that the regions and people excluded give up. On the contrary, people are mobilizing and there is a convergence on two major demands.

Over the last two hundred years, a social movement led by religious, and latterly secular, organizations has grown up to fight for political rights (the franchise and individual rights) and economic rights (rights at work: trade unionism, and the right to work: job associations). Alongside the main demands relating to political citizenship, there has also been a set of demands focusing on the notion of economic citizenship.

Recently, over the last twenty years, demands relating to economic rights have grown rapidly, largely through reinforcement of the claim to the right to work. Social and geographical communities have in this way responded to the state's new priorities, demanding that their development become a collective responsibility. Moves have been made in the broad socio-economic arena of relaunching and revitalizing whole areas (older urban industrial dis-

tricts) and integrating target communities (young people, cultural communities, older workers, etc.).

Between 1960 and 1990, these two movements led to the establishment of a number of charitable, political and community associations in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, with the aim of helping marginalized people. The services provided vary, ranging from gifts of food and clothing, and help with housing, to support in finding a job or getting projects started, the provision of information, health and educational services.

Hochelaga-Maisonneuve has the oldest community radio scheme in Montreal, a popular history society that conducts guided tours of the area, among other things, and a variety of people's organizations grouped under a community education umbrella organization. Within the groups that have recently been established locally, we call particular attention to those which address the problem of integrating people with no jobs into the economic life of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve or Montreal. Among these community groups are organizations working on two levels:

- organizations providing services to the local community or to the whole of Montreal, including groups such as *Joujouthèque* (Toy Library) (1978), which lends out children's toys and opened a new repair workshop in 1993 under the name of *Luciole; Boulot vers...* (Jobs for...) (1983), a placement agency for unemployed young people; and the Chic Resto-pop (1994);
- planning/management and development organizations, including groups such as the Montreal East Development Corporation (1985), a community economic development body that looks at the planning and management of renewal projects in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve area.

## THE CHIC RESTO-POP

The *Chic Resto-pop* is a community restaurant. It was established in 1984 by twelve people receiving social security benefits. For the founder members, it meant creating their own jobs while providing a service to the poor people of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve.<sup>5</sup> The service consists of providing hot meals of good quality at low prices. The organization's goals are described as follows:

A large proportion of the families in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve are cut off from the labour market, and shut out of local economic activity. This leads to anxiety, insecurity, isolation and exclusion. We therefore aim to develop suitable jobs that will enable people to rediscover their skills and self-confidence.<sup>6</sup> The *Chic Resto-pop* is a non-profit making enterprise in which people train to work by providing their services to the population at modest prices<sup>7</sup>

The restaurant provides three meals a day, including breakfast since February 1994. Three years ago, a mobile canteen service was added: the *Pop mobile* serves free meals to young children in disadvantaged local schools. From 50 meals a day in 1984, the *Chic Resto-pop* was producing 250 in 1990, and 900 today. Demand is still growing. The *Pop mobile* provides 350 dinners a day in six local primary schools.

The *Chic Resto-pop* is a non-profit making association. The funding of the organization is split between income from public job creation schemes and from the "school meals programme",<sup>8</sup> income from sales (meals), grants and donations. Donations usually take the form of foodstuffs and materials for the organization's basic activities and administration. In 1994, the operational budget was a little under C\$ 800,000.

The organization's income enables it to employ 16 people full-time and to accommodate a hundred worker/trainees. The core staff are supervised by a manageress who reports to a governing board made up of community representatives. The administrative support staff is composed of four people (deputy manager, personnel officer, book-keeper and secretary/receptionist). A further 11 people are permanently attached to the restaurant and the mobile canteen. Two coordinators head the two restaurant work teams (the 7:30 to 15:30 team and the 11:00 to 19:30 team). The *Pop mobile* has no coordinator, but a team leader. Each service in the restaurant has team leaders for each main area of work, who look after the worker/trainees. The worker/trainees are under "modified work" conditions, which means "paid" work containing elements of employment training, job seeking, return-to-study counselling and individual support.<sup>9</sup>

As Jacynthe, the manageress of the *Resto* points out, "the overall work in the restaurant is divided into three main types of activity". The first type is administrative. This includes all the activities associated with the management of the organization and staffing — core staff and worker/trainees — with the production and purchasing of goods, with the selling of meals and the maintenance and development of a network supplying essential materials.<sup>10</sup>

The second concerns the operation of the business. This means managing production: everything from requisitioning of supplies to processing (food handling: sorting, cutting, storage) and including preparation of meals (cooking, making up plates and setting them out in the cafeteria); sales to the adult clientele; management of school meals (mobile canteen); maintenance of the restaurant and cleaning of the whole unit.

The third type of activity, which is our main concern in this chapter, relates to giving responsibility to worker/trainees and training them. This includes looking after staff in various ways: from psychological support to individual help with literacy, from preparation for work to training while working, and embracing training for specific operations such as participation in large meetings, serving customers (credit,<sup>11</sup> and information sessions on particular topics such as social security benefits, for example). Literacy education is provided by local literacy organizations. Academic education is provided in partnership between the *Resto* and a school board in East Montreal.

It should be noted that individual training is provided for staff of the *Pop mobile*. This is given by trainers from a popular education organization in East Montreal. This training relates to a number of topics associated with

supervisory work and caring for children of primary school age (the children are looked after during the whole dinner hour by the staff of the Pop mobile). The training topics are predetermined and varied, but are also adapted to the individual needs of staff. If specific problems are encountered by worker/trainees of the *Pop mobile*, a training session addresses those problems as a priority.

## The Clienteles of the *Chic Resto-pop*

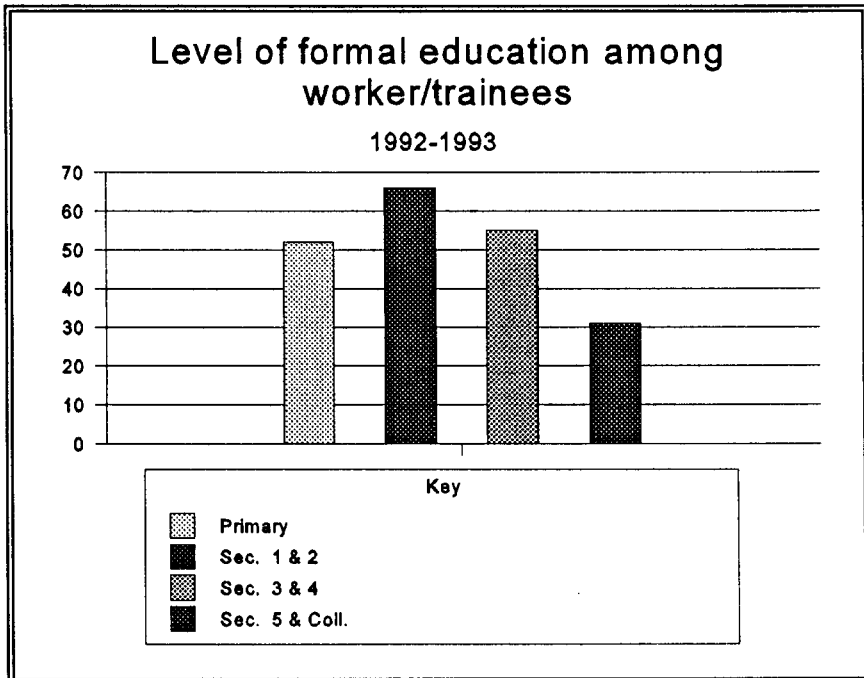
### Producers

The *Chic Resto-pop* presently caters for 105 worker/trainees, and these are continuously recruited. New people start work at the beginning of every month while others leave part-way through and half complete a work and training course varying in length from six to 15 months.

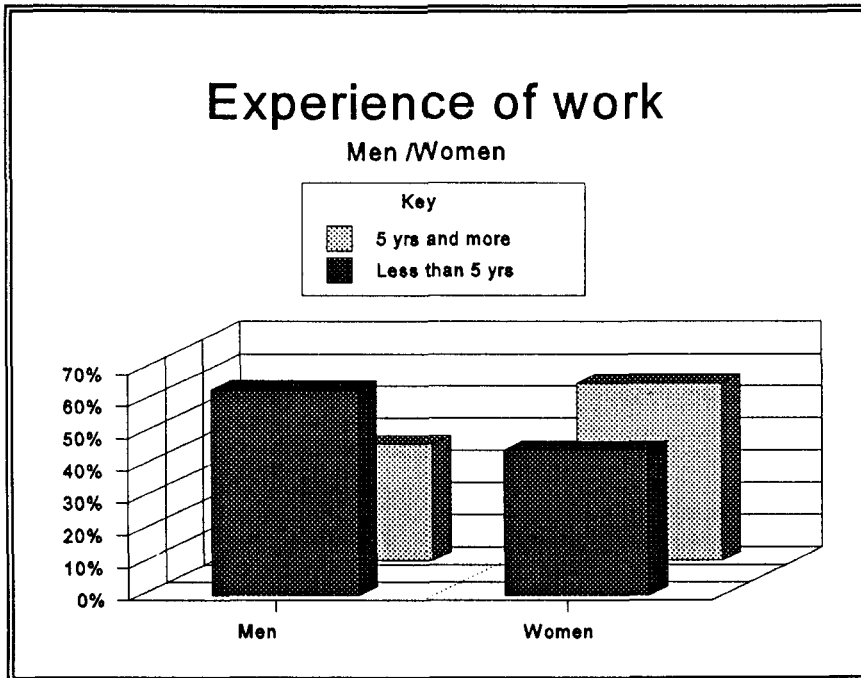
From the results of an internal study of the Resto conducted in 1993 among 219 worker/trainees, we can give the following sketch of its clientele. There are almost equal numbers of men (48%) and women (52%). Their ages range from 20 to 55 years: 31% are between 20 and 30, 36% between 30 and 40, and 33% between 40 and 55. Their level of education is very low: 26% had completed primary education, and 32% had completed secondary grade 1 or 2, so that 58% have a level of education of secondary grade 2 or below; 27% had completed secondary grade 3 or 4, so that 85% have a level of education of secondary grade 4 or below; and 15% stated that they had completed secondary grade 5 and started or finished college education (see LEVEL OF FORMAL EDUCATION AMONG WORKER/TRAINEES).

The work experience of the worker/trainees is both poor and extensive: 18% of the 196 persons who replied to this question said that they had between nought and two years of experience on the labour market, and 28% had between two and five years, so that 46% had five or fewer years of experience; 24% had between five and ten years; and finally, 30% had ten years or more of experience, so that 54% of the worker/trainees had five years or more of experience on the labour market (see EXPERIENCE OF WORK).

It is not therefore on account of a lack of knowledge of the labour market that these people are excluded, but because of the new knowledge and skills demanded by employers. And since the types of job which these people were doing are no longer being created, a different sort of worker is given preference. Finally, it should be pointed out that women are relatively over-represented among those with five or fewer years of experience (56% of women fall into this first group), while men are in the majority in the group (64% of those with five or more years of experience).



Because of the nature of the public scheme used, the worker/trainees must be persons in receipt of social security benefits. The average length of time in receipt of benefits varies from three to five years. In effect, 68% of the worker/trainees have been receiving benefits for longer than two years. If the length of time is compared as between men and women, it is seen that the women have been receiving benefits for longer than the men.



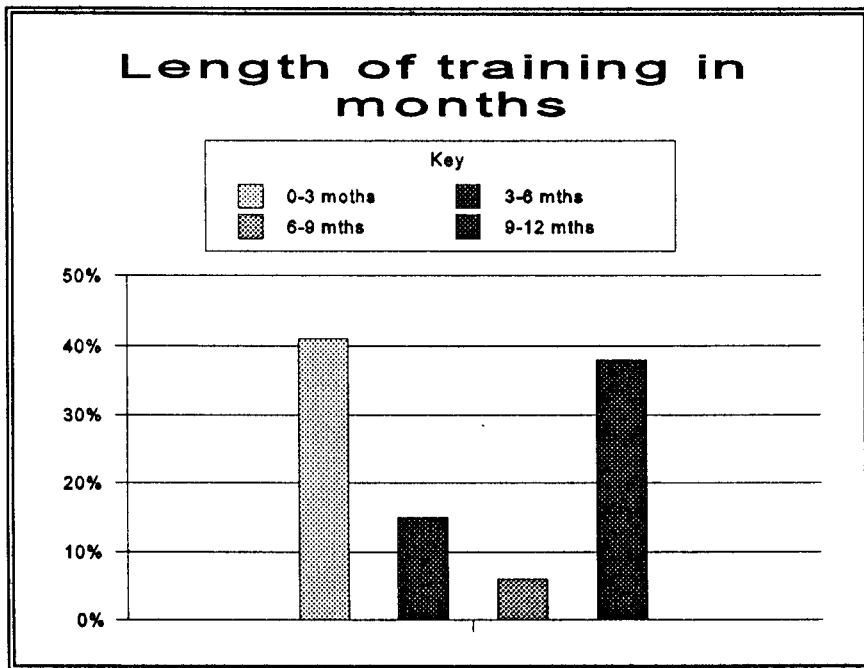
From a combination of data on work and length of time in receipt of social security benefits, we can foresee in the long term a balancing of the differences encountered between men and women. Since older workers with few qualifications or none at all are excluded from the primary labour market, they will have to enter the secondary labour market — the so-called service market, which is seasonal, part-time and irregular, poorly paid and non-unionized — or to prolong their period in receipt of social security benefits, if they are obliged to have recourse to such a programme of income security.

The profile of the currency of social security benefits among women clearly reflects the increasing difficulty of finding work as they become older or less competitive in terms of level of education and vocational training. With respect to both men and women, employers are currently favourably placed because of the high level of unemployment, and they can therefore raise their selection criteria in order to engage young adults rather than older workers with few qualifications, poor qualifications or none at all.

Faced with these realities of the labour market, an organization such as the Resto, setting out to increase the employability of its workers, cannot therefore limit its field of intervention simply to workplace job training. The organization must also consider what it has to do to help trainees find a real job when they finish their work training. In this respect, the Resto is interesting because of its desire to improve the working conditions for worker/trainees, including their status and the length and quality of their work and training. Worker/trainees, as Pierre told us several times, "aren't regarded as trainees but as workers". The organization is actively lobbying the state for recognition of the trainees as workers. It is asking that the Resto become the true employer and be given the sums necessary to grant its worker/trainees decent wages.

To sum up the characteristics of the Resto's clientele, it is made up of a varied population, but with similarities in being excluded: low levels of education, average work experience, long-term receipt of social security benefits. We may then ask how this clientele behaves during training, and above all, what happens to its members when their training is finished.

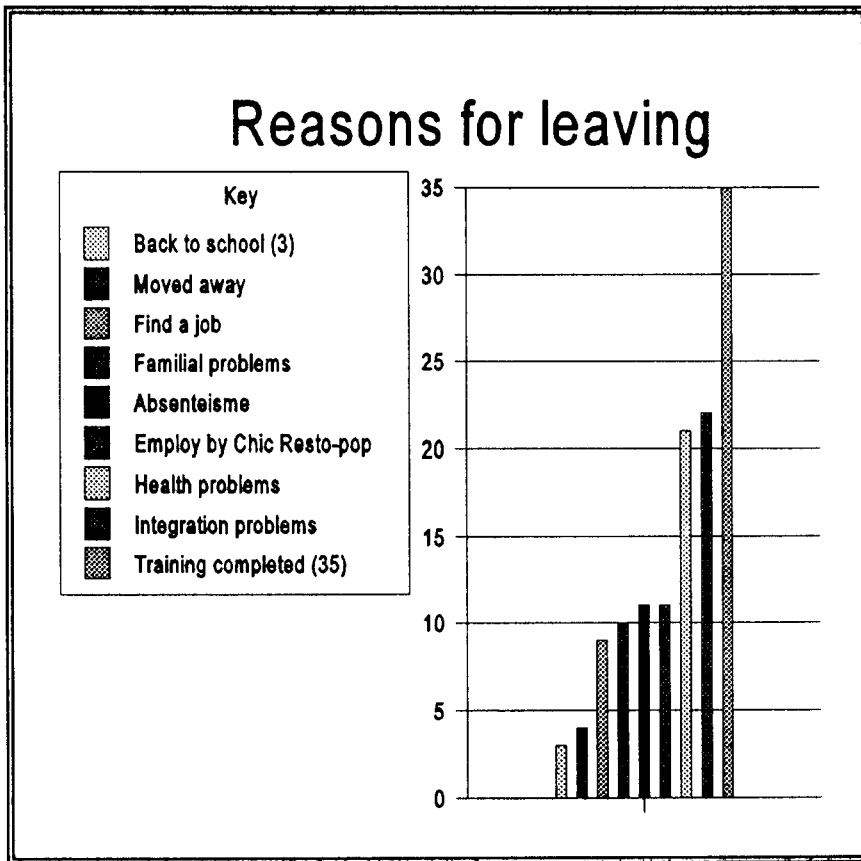
As a principal indicator of behaviour, we have data on the length of training for 152 people. These data indicate similar behaviour among men and women. Two significant concentrations can be seen at the beginning and the end of training. There is a strong tendency for people to leave the training in the early months, but once they have got over this key period, few opt out and the core remain in employment up to the maximum period (15 months). This situation therefore reflects a strong drop-out rate at the beginning of the training, a normal departure rate after the sixth month, and then a strong retention rate after the ninth month (see LENGTH OF TRAINING IN MONTHS).



In percentage terms, 54% of worker/trainees leave before the sixth month, and 46% after. Moreover, 41% leave during the first three months, which shows how difficult they find it to integrate into a working environment. With regard to skills acquisition, 50% of worker/trainees demonstrate that they are able and willing to integrate into a working environment and to remain in employment if the receiving environment offers the support they need to enable them to integrate.

The second behavioural indicator of the difficulty of integration via training at the Chic Resto-pop concerns the reasons given for leaving. These can be grouped into two categories: those reflecting integration problems in the training environment, and those reflecting the difficulty of integrating once training is completed (see REASONS FOR LEAVING).





Out of 126 respondents (26 did not reply and 67 did not have to answer as they were still undergoing training), 35 had completed their training, 11 had a job associated with the *Chic Resto-pop*, nine had left before the end of training to take up a job, and three to return to study. This means that 58 people (46%) saw some amelioration in their situation as an outcome of their training. On the other hand, 68 people (54%) had withdrawn from the process part-way through for various reasons, without their withdrawal necessarily leading to any betterment of their situation. For some people who left part-way through, their case was referred to another organization, in order to help them to deal with a problem such as drug abuse or alcoholism.

*Resto* staff<sup>12</sup> attribute drop-out behaviour to serious problems of social adaptation. In precise terms, they say that people cannot manage to return to a rhythm of responsibility, since working requires managing one's time

and the capacity to contain the stress associated with such management. This implies arriving at work on time, not being absent, staying sober, accepting the various tasks which are demanded of them, and getting on with the other worker/trainees and team leaders. According to Manon, a trainee at the Resto, when "someone hasn't managed to deal with his or her drug problem, is totally absorbed in his family problems or is convinced that he is good at nothing," it is practically impossible to keep him on.

The staff think that the people who do remain in work training, and hence in employment, and even wish to continue training after the 15th month, do so because "worker/trainees want to acquire experience of working continuously for more than a year". It is very important to stress the term used: *the wish to go on working and to do so in a framework that will allow those people to "reconstruct" their self-confidence, to perfect their basic skills and to acquire new or specific vocational skills.*

## Consumers

Since 1992, the *Chic Resto-pop* has been conducting an annual survey in order to gain a better knowledge of the people who use the restaurant. Generally, the people who come are men, and usually alone. They have an average age of 45 years and are receiving social security or unemployment benefits. Lastly, they consume on average between four and six meals a week (at mid-day or in the evening). It is, however, difficult to make an exact statement because consumption habits vary enormously. Nonetheless, the broad trend is that customers are in receipt of social security assistance and are alone, hence poor and isolated.

In this context, as Jacynthe reminds us, "the restaurant is not only seen as somewhere to get a cheap meal. It is also a place to make social contact, where you are among people in a similar situation." Mealtimes thus become times to exchange views and information. People become aware of *the social nature and social origin of poverty*. Information circulates, helping people to look beyond their own individual situations and to depersonalize the issue of poverty.

The main restaurant is sometimes used for other purposes: to distribute community information and for cultural activities. Local groups are encouraged to present information about the services they offer. This has applied particularly to the Committee to Help People on Social Benefits. The restaurant has also been used for performances mounted by *Faites de la Musique* [Let's Make Music] before that organization found its own premises.

## Workplace Training at the Resto

The *Resto* enables individuals to acquire three types of training. The first type concerns everything connected with the normal working environment. People become responsible by having to be present at set times each day of

the week and to carry out given tasks. Individuals must then relearn the rhythm and requirements of work: assiduity, continuity, constancy and balancing working time against time with the family. They must also, as Pierre expresses it, "learn once again to be in a situation where there is authority". In other words, "to accept being given orders and being under someone's authority. That is very difficult for people who reject or are rejected by authority."

The second type of training is vocational. In the course of the work training, each person must carry out all the work tasks found in the *Resto*. They are thus obliged to work on welcoming customers, preparing the restaurant, preparing and cutting up food, storing it, preparing meals and cleaning the restaurant. They therefore have to learn the trade of large-scale cuisine, as serving 900 meals a day is mass cooking.

In these types of training, learning takes place between equals. There is no specialist trainer, simply someone responsible for training as a whole. Worker/trainees are put in a work situation and are given the information needed by the other workers and the team leader. The person in charge of a team reserves time to advise worker/trainees and to give them particular knowledge about how to behave and to do things. However, it should be remembered that the philosophy of *the Resto* is rather to let knowledge pass between equals, that is, between worker/trainees.

The third type of training is academic. It was achieved after lengthy pressure on the Ministry of Social Security. This type of training gives 36 people who want it the chance to extend their employment after the 15th month, up to 36 months. This is possible on condition that the worker/trainee enrolls in a remedial education programme run by the *Resto*.

In such cases, with the help of the school board, the worker/trainees who enrol are assessed by teachers to identify their true level of education. People enrolled in the programme may then complete their basic literacy, and a primary or secondary education certificate. They do so at their own pace, following a personal approach, while going on working. The course is thus planned and adapted for each individual. The training process is organized on the basis of learning books to be completed by level and subject matter. The whole course is followed by grading tests on the basis of which the retention of knowledge can be checked, and a certificate recognized by the Ministry of Education awarded.

For Pierre, any evaluation of this programme should not only look at the performance of the worker/trainees. It should also be expanded to measure the impact of the learning process on the children of such people. Pierre says that: "It is certain that it will have an effect on the children, who will understand the value of school learning from the simple fact that they see their parents giving some importance to getting a certificate." Thus, the programme becomes a weapon in the fight against school drop-out (which is very high in disadvantaged areas of Montreal: between 35 and 50%).

Training at the *Resto* can be summed up in a few words: workplace occupational training for all worker/trainees using “on the job” methods; and for some of them, academic education provided by a public establishment but given outside the institution and in an individualized manner. How can such a comparatively simple approach be effective? The answer lies in a central feature of the approach — team meetings — and a humanistic attitude: in the words of Manon, “proving to people that they are capable of doing things, of success, and that they have the right to make mistakes”.

During team meetings and the general meeting for all workers, which take place once a week, and sector meetings once or twice a month, workers raise anything they like about their work or the organization. Everyone is open to criticism: “not only do they have to talk about the problems they have, but also to listen to others talking about the problems they may be making for the team or the organization”.

For Pierre, the team meeting is the time to speak out. Information is freely exchanged. Worker/trainees “have to relearn how to use their right to speak, to reaffirm themselves, to be criticized, and to understand that criticism doesn’t mean that they’re no good, simply that something’s gone wrong and can be put right. So meetings are places to learn and especially to appreciate the value of what’s being done.”

Besides this first feature, there is the evaluation of worker/trainees. Evaluation is done using a grid to measure technical knowledge of various tasks (knowing how to do things) and the personal skills required at the workplace (knowing how to behave). The evaluation form is filled in by the person in question, while another form is completed by the team leader and the training supervisor. A meeting enables both parties to “compare their perceptions, to talk about them and to arrive at a consensus on what is all right and what can be improved”.

The humanistic attitude that we noted at the *Resto* creates this atmosphere, which enables the worker/trainees, who have been “rejected by the system” that accused them of not being competitive on the labour market, to achieve high productivity. This humanistic attitude is made up of a number of elements including listening, comparing, dialoguing, and being responsible, open and democratic. The obvious continuing struggle to equip the organization so that it can provide such a framework makes the worker/trainees feel confident.

## **The Impact of the Resto-pop**

The impact of the *Resto-pop*’s activities can be measured on at least two levels. The first is individual; the second is collective and concerns the whole Hochelaga-Maisonneuve community.

*At the individual level*, as is confirmed by Manon, a trainee worker at the *Resto*, the work training has a real impact. Worker/trainees are obliged to

“test their will to go through with it”. If this is strong enough, then they can complete the first three months of work training. After this time, the Resto can provide all the tools needed for a return to the labour market.

The most difficult aspect of an approach which gives them control is to “enable people to find the will to go through with it. The first steps are crucial and are linked to the decision to begin a process that will allow us to change the way we live. This will is within everyone’s reach” regardless of the degree of personal difficulty, and “it is enough to awaken the will for it to take effect”. On the other hand, “not everyone takes the difficult decision to awaken their will, and to draw on it every day to climb one or two steps towards autonomy and independence”. This choice is not easy because “the starting point is that we’ve been destroyed by someone close to us, by drugs, by drink, or by a tragic event that we couldn’t come to terms with”.

For Manon, the road “towards autonomy is built of the various things [the Resto forces us] to learn”. “Force” in the sense of being confronted with a production situation in which “[we have to] deliver the goods, and to do so adequately without always having the tools that are needed”. Autonomy is therefore achieved through this ability to find oneself and, through the help of other workers, to find the solution to the many problems of everyday life.

Manon is in charge of the mobile canteen. She is proud of being a worker with a regular wage in an organization that she respects, as it has respected her needs and her rights, while giving her the confidence she needed to regain responsibility for herself, and her place as a citizen.

At the collective level, the Resto brings a significant number of benefits. The first is that it provides a high-quality service at low prices to a population that needs it.

The second relates to the management of the Resto. The people who work there are local and have shown, in the words of Annie, “that marginalized people can be more than clients of community organizations; that they can also be effective workers and managers”. At the present time, the manageress of the Resto only has a certificate of secondary education, and only one person with a university education — a worker-priest by origin — works for the organization.

The third benefit relates to the organization’s ability to make the state reconsider its way of thinking about how to deal with people on social security benefits. This is a constant battle, in which the Resto has had — and still has — to struggle to stay true to the key principle of its work: *enabling people to come off social security and become full-time workers*. In this respect, the Resto has shown that long-term social security recipients are capable of working and producing high-quality goods and services if the working environment provided for them has the necessary flexibility and is suited to their situation.

## FAITES DE LA MUSIQUE (LET'S MAKE MUSIC): A BENEFICIAL OFFSHOOT OF THE RESTO

In 1989, the *Resto* was approached by a producer of documentaries from the National Film Board of Canada. She wanted to make a film about an innovative experiment in popular employment. The suggestion of making a film was accepted by Annie, then manageress at the *Resto*, and the idea of making a film took shape.

The film that resulted from this partnership between the *Resto* and the NFB was an interesting concept.<sup>13</sup> It was not restricted to a visual description of what a popular restaurant is, covering conventional themes from the outside such as its history, way of operating and results. Rather, it became a sort of cultural happening in and through the making of a documentary film. Hence, there is a musical motif running through the document, in which the worker/trainees speak through song in order to explain their experiences. The whole work was made with volunteer musicians and worker/trainees from the *Resto*. The songs were written and sung by people at the *Resto*.

This experience allowed Annie to explore a new area of work, that of culture as a means of integrating unemployed people. "There was always music at the *Resto*," she told us, "if someone wrote a song, it was therapeutic, and singing it gave people a sense of their own worth."

As a follow-up to this experience, the *Resto* decided to launch a major cultural activity in 1992, the Festival of Music. More than 350 artists from the immediate locality, from Montreal, Quebec and Europe appeared over four days on six stages erected in the area. The event was a success, but too large in the eyes of the *Resto*, which thought it had "started with a small idea and given birth to an elephant".

Assessment of the festival after the event led to the conclusion that it was important to invest in culture as a means of integrating people into work, but it was decided to do this on a small scale and on the basis of a cultural organization. *Faites de la Musique* (FDM, Let's Make Music) was therefore born out of the ashes of the festival. Its purpose was to work on "developing employability and creating jobs in show business, all in the interests of the local community".

In line with the *Resto*'s past experience, it was decided that FDM would work with an adult clientele. The choice was made not to be associated with training supported by social programmes. Participants are therefore not paid during their work training. The training course can accommodate 20 people a year.<sup>14</sup> Once the training is completed, participants join a bank of resource persons who can take part in the production of activities paid for by FDM under contracts which the organization wins or out of services which it provides to the local population. These contracts and services cover both the production of shows, some of which are sponsored, holiday entertainments,

various courses which are offered, singing (an introduction for local young children), an adult choir and song-writing workshops.

The way of working at FDM is different from that of the *Resto*. The rules are stricter, particularly those concerning attendance, attitudes and responsibilities. The training is more exacting since it results in a personal (solo) performance, which is the first part of the course and leads to a collective performance (a show), which is the second part. "The requirements of the labour market are reproduced in a certain way, by demanding that people get involved so that they create a place for themselves in the cultural sector: you not only have to think about your show, to mount it and get rid of the hitches, but you also have to sell it and live off it." FDM thus helps people to realize themselves in different dimensions. Unlike that at the *Resto*, the training aims more at developing independent work and personal entrepreneurship than at work as a paid employee in a business; "they're forced to become independent".

Besides the technical aspect of the training — voice training, stage presence, musical training, etc. — FDM also aims at emphasising "the artist's social role, his responsibility as designer and maker of judgments, the importance of what he thinks and experiences. They also try to make the artist aware that he is addressing a public and must respect them. People are encouraged to put some substance into what they produce, and above all they make us produce ourselves before an audience, and they make the audience react to the show, so that there's a dialogue between audience and artist. So it's two-way education: the artists explains what he means, and the audience answers in a different way by saying 'That's good', 'I like that'.

The target clientele of FDM is different from that of the *Resto* because it is for people who already have some knowledge and skill and intend to work in a specific sector, that of culture. Existing skills that are still active can be built on, strengthened, stimulated and guided. The *Resto* is rather for a clientele whose skills are inactive or have been destroyed over the years.

## CONCLUSION

What are the lessons to be learned from the experience of the *Resto* and FDM?

First, these organizations represent new forms of solidarity. Double solidarity, since individuals are helped not only through the production of services *for* the community — food services and cultural services — but also through the production of services *by* the community of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, and more particularly by people belonging to the very large group represented by those on the margins of the modern Montreal economy. It is a solidarity that enables individuals to escape from isolation, to reconstruct a network of people who will help them, and to rediscover hope.

Second, the *Resto* and FDM clearly illustrate what we mean by a "socially useful economy": an economy which, in its community form, aims at giving people with no job the status of workers producing goods or services that are socially useful; an economy based on solidarity with a community orientation which brings a certain type of democracy to social institutions in the way in which it makes claims on the state and runs projects such as the *Resto*.

Can such projects be linked to the North American community economic development movements and the European local development movement?<sup>15</sup> Without doubt, both organizations arise out of a desire to initiate development *from the bottom up* by attacking the problem of integrating marginalized individuals into employment. Moreover, in the process, account is taken of the needs and interests of a community, while the human dimension is respected: by listening, helping one another, working at the right pace, following-up, and giving people responsibilities and a feeling of self-worth. These become key elements in a social approach to dealing with development on the human scale.

Nonetheless, a note of caution is called for. Development on the human scale can only be achieved if the individuals and communities that participate are moving towards a better quality of life. Otherwise, they are treading water, indulging in occupational therapy, managing poverty with no tomorrow. Hence, it is important to evaluate, and for the organization, to reflect on what it is doing. The *Resto* displays a surprising capacity for thinking through what it is doing. Both through the internal surveys that it has carried out, and through the conditions that it has succeeded in imposing on the state for the "management of poverty", the *Resto* shows that it is well aware of the dangers of such management, and distances itself from its corporate action in order to be highly critical and pragmatic.

Third, we may speak of a new form of social struggle, a struggle that starts in the field of politics but moves into that of economics. As we have seen, the worker/trainees of the *Resto* and FDM are paid little or nothing for their part in a project that enhances their employability. They make a personal investment that may be termed "economic militancy". On the other hand, there is one drawback to their militancy. The worker/trainees experience the *Resto* without really becoming involved in the everyday struggle that is needed by members of the organization to ensure its survival. This level of involvement only applies to the permanent employees and affects principally a small core of leaders. There is therefore little transfer of economic militancy into other forms of political and social militancy.

Fourth, projects such as the *Resto* and FDM take into account new social practices. This can be seen at several levels, and here we refer only to that of the educational approach. The staff have had to be innovative in the way they work with the worker/trainees. This innovation was not spontaneous but was built through effort, failure, reflection, experimentation and success.



There is therefore a place for transfer and replication of such projects. The success of the *Resto* and FDM is not cultural, in the sense of qualities that are intrinsic to an environment or to individuals. It is essentially the product of a community that has given itself a set of defensive and offensive tools to meet a socio-economic crisis situation on its territory. Apathy has not been allowed to build up in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, and has rapidly been dissipated by the leaders' desire to provide marginalized people with possibilities for social action that, to a greater or lesser extent, offer an alternative.

Hence there is one important lesson to be learned: Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, as an urban area that has lost its liveliness, shows that social action cannot be confined only to defensive forms of struggle, to protecting social advantages by maintaining the means of redistributing wealth through social transfer programmes. A community also needs the chance and the responsibility to launch offensive social action by investing in the mechanisms that create production and wealth. The development of an area through the creation of businesses is not a process limited to those with capital or to the state, but is also a matter for the community.

Fifth and last, the *Resto* and FDM reflect very real problems: funding difficulties, only partial state recognition obtained after a struggle, and no progress in integrating worker/trainees into the primary labour market. This brings us to the issue of integrating such projects into the formal economy. For the *Resto*, the struggle is one of winning recognized worker status for the organization's trainees. As far as the state and the private sector are concerned, they are satisfied to see a portion of the active population compartmentalized into losing qualified worker status "for life".

While the tension seen in the *Resto's raison d'être* is kept up, it is also the source of potential confrontation between the parties. Unless there is a real chance for recognition of genuine worker status for the employees of such organizations, and an opening-up of the labour market to accept and keep people who are trying to integrate in "decent jobs", there is a risk that the compromise that has been historically achieved with organizations such as the *Resto* will break down, giving way to more alternative forms of integration that are more out of touch with the dominant economy and polity.

The *Resto* and FDM are therefore sending an important message to Quebec society, that of the need to reconsider our social contract so that the principle of whole citizenship becomes a real possibility. This new social contract might admit that these organizations provide our society with new perspectives, those of the social usefulness of work and the necessary full recognition of worker status for the employees of such organizations.

## Notes

1. We give here the following definition of unemployment: a person who is able and willing to work but is without work.
2. Germany is an exception. Germany's realignment of politics there is reflected less in deregulation than in revised forms of regulation.
3. Hochelaga-Maisonneuve is part of the *arrondissement* of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve/Mercier. In 1991, this had a population of 130,000. The total average income in the *arrondissement* was C\$19,838, while the average for Quebec was C\$ 22,391. The percentage of households with a low income was 30%. If we were to take the area of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve alone as the statistical basis, the above figures would be lower for income and higher for households on low income.
4. Description of the *Chic Resto-pop* entitled *Hochelaga-Maisonneuve*, Montreal, 1994, p. 1.
5. They wished "neither to be volunteers providing charity or voluntary workers for the Association for the Defence of Social Rights, nor to spend our time in demos or occupations to raise the level of benefits". They wanted "to get off welfare and earn a wage". Statements collected in Favreau, "Local community development" in Favreau and Doucet, *Théorie et pratiques en organisation communautaire*, Quebec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1992, p. 87.
6. The *Chic Resto-pop*, *ibid.*, p. 2.
7. Company rules, p. 1.
8. Known as the Pagé Plan, from the name of the Minister of Education who started the scheme to counter undernourishment of children in schools.
9. Trainees benefit from a public development and employability programme, *Expérience de travail* (EXTRA, Work Experience). In Quebec, recipients of social security benefits are divided into two categories: those able and those unable to work. Those who are able are obliged to enrol and take part in employability development programmes such as EXTRA.
10. Donations take the form of food, dry goods and cleaning materials. The main donors are fruit and vegetable merchants (6 out of 14 major donors). These are followed by donations of cakes and biscuits (3), meat (2), groceries and cleaning materials (2) and pasta and sauce (1).
11. Customers are given a credit margin of five meals. In 1993, a loss of C\$ 7000 was associated with bad debts from this credit service.
12. The vast majority of non-trainee workers at the *Resto* are women.
13. *Au Chic Resto-pop* was produced by Tahani Rached, from the National Film Board, in 1990. It is a short film lasting 90 minutes.
14. Out of the 20 people who enrol, 13 or 14 complete the training course and join the cultural network based on FDM.
15. See Fontan and Tremblay, *Développement Économique local: la théorie, la pratique, les expériences*, Presses de l'Université du Québec, Montreal, 1994; and Shragge, *Community Economic Development, in Search of Empowerment*, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1993.

## **SECTION SIX**

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### **The Relationship Between Basic Education & Work in the Postmodern Context**

# Chapter Eighteen

## AN ALTERNATIVE LITERACY AND WORK: BRICOLAGE AND MASS MEDIA

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### FIVE THESES

The following analysis follows from a few theoretical and methodological theses that need to be clarified. These theses respect the current state of scientific discourse and the current state of social reality in general and Czech reality in particular. The concepts of structuralism and neostructuralism are the general theoretical and methodological framework of the following analysis. I draw other theses from the discourse on modern and postmodern pedagogy (and social science).

*The first thesis* states the existence of two paradigms of the current pedagogy and social science discourse — *the paradigm of modernism* and *the paradigm of postmodernism*. From this thesis another notion follows — that of a different status of our problem in modernism and postmodernism but also the idea of a different status of our problem in the discourse of modern style science and postmodern discourse<sup>1</sup>.

*The second thesis* states the existence of two paradigmatically different sources of literacy strategies: A modern *centred source* (which is the total of official sciences and institutions represented especially by the state and legal-

ized market) and postmodern de-centred sources (which means pluralistically scattered alternative knowledge, skills and institutions represented especially by non-state and non-legalized market and exchange relationships). Another notion follows from this thesis, that of the different effect and different functions of the official centrist literacy and alternative literacy (and the creation of their strategies)<sup>2</sup>

*The third thesis* states the possibility of *transforming cultural values into economic values* and the possibility of *transforming cultural functions into economic functions*. Another notion follows from this thesis, that of the possibility of transforming a cultural value called literacy into an economic value called *work* (or profit). The same holds for the strategy of literacy. This strategy, which is a cultural (educational) value in origin, may become an economic strategy (strategy of work)<sup>3</sup>.

*The fourth thesis* states the existence of an *alternative way* of transforming cultural values into economic values. This way was named "bricolage" by C. Lévi-Strauss. Another idea follows from this thesis — the idea of, from the modern point of view, marginal, but from the postmodern point of view, essential — sources of literacy as well as work<sup>4</sup>.

*The fifth thesis* states the existence of a new communication environment connected with the four theses stated above, *environment of mass communication*. In this environment, two types of mass communication are essential, television and the press. Another idea follows from this thesis, that of the possibility of combining alternative ways of transforming cultural values into economic values (bricolage) with mass communication (television).

As far as the contents of the fourth thesis is concerned, I must note that I consider it absolutely essential. I also consider the conclusions to which the analyses lead me, to be the picture of the very effective functioning of the "bricolage — *mass medium*" combination that seems paradoxical at first sight. Furthermore, the fourth thesis has its own fate in structuralistic (C. Lévi-Strauss) and neostructuralistic (J. Derrida) discussions. This fate offers two possible solutions to one problem, not mutually transferable and therefore much more effective.

Before I start applying these theoretical and methodological theses to specific research material, I must explain my understanding of literacy, which in the context of this particular project (literacy and work) requires a certain shift of accent, for instance, in comparison with the approach that I explained in the framework of the ALPHA 94 project.

## LITERACY

*Literacy* is a word which, in its Greek form, refers to *grammé* (line, letter). *Grammar* is then a concept which indicates the structurally functional order of a language system. Linguistic competence, which is revealed by linguistic performance, assumes the mastering (though intuitive) of grammar<sup>5</sup>. The

Latin equivalent of "grammar", *litteratura*, connotes this experience less obviously. This why I chose the Greek word.

The use of methods, principles and results of linguistic researches in the field of other social sciences and sciences about man has brought such indisputable implications that today we speak about a *paradigmatic turn of these sciences to language and communication*<sup>6</sup>. So far, pedagogical sciences seem to be the least affected by this turn. Nevertheless, the problem called literacy, or in some cases the problem called *creation of literacy strategies* calls for the use of results and methods of linguistic research. If J. Habermas could have successfully applied the basic concepts and procedures of Noam Chomsky's theories (*linguistic competence, performance*) to the whole field of social interactions (in the form of communicative competence, social = *communicative interaction*), it is possible to apply this procedure effectively even here, in literacy research.

Therefore, *I understand the process of achieving literacy as a process of acquiring certain cultural competence*, which in the particular community already exists or becomes a reality. This *process of acquiring competence* (analogically, the process of acquiring linguistic competence) is a *process of acquiring certain grammar*, in other words, the structurally functional order of particular ideas, values, standards and skills. Only one thing bears witness to successful acquiring or acquisition of this particular cultural competence: *accepted* (and therefore successful) *cultural performance*. It is not a scholastic examination of knowledge, but rather a practical performance, for instance in the cultural market.

Therefore, in connection with the topic of our project (literacy and work), it holds that the *process of acquiring literacy is a process of acquiring competence to transform the cultural estates* (functions, standards and values) *into economic estates* (functions, standards and values).

What estates, what acquisition, which contents of competence, etc.? These are other questions that do not relate to this formal definition. Whether they are officially centrist (see thesis 2) or not, whether they depend on mass communication (see thesis 5) or not, this is a matter of a particular *inductive* research. What I insist on *a priori* and what acts as a "*deductive theorem*" in the text, is: First of all, literacy does not relate to reading and writing, nor does grammar/*litteratura* relate to reading and writing. Literacy is primarily connected with the acquisition of "*socially effective communicative competence*", which may be interpreted as *competence based on mastering the particular grammars of social performance or work creation*.

Both social performance (offer, work, communication, etc.) and the performance of work creation (art, work, etc.) have their own grammar. Modern society and modern culture have "colonized" these grammars, and on the basis of modern pedagogical sciences and practices, they have reduced them to industrially manageable simple "recipes" of education. Many problems hidden behind the concept of "literacy and work" are due to modernization

and colonization processes of industrialism, and there is a question whether modern society and its industrialized and "colonized" pedagogy can solve these problems.

In an effort to avoid theorization on this topic, I just state that I am skeptical about these modern, official pedagogical concepts and particularly in connection with the question of *work mobilization and strategy*. I turn to alternative sources of pedagogical thinking and alternative sources of literacy. This means that the main interest of my research has focused on what are, from the modern point of view, marginal sources of literacy, and therefore also on marginal types of acquiring the grammar of social performance (in this particular case on the transformation of the cultural into the economic) and the grammar of work creation (in this particular case, work in its economic meaning of the word).

Focusing on marginal and alternative sources of literacy and ways of acquiring literacy has required *differentiating between paradigmatically different ways of acquiring the particular grammars as premises of acquiring the particular competence or literacies*. I have referred to the first way as *bricolage* (see thesis 4), the second way, modern centrist, as *science*.

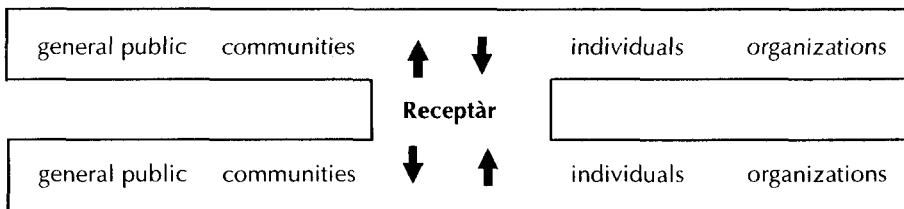
Therefore, I can conclude my introductory notes by stating: *the objective of my research in the framework of the ALPHA 96 project, Literacy and Work was to survey the particular work creation, distribution and acquisition of alternative grammars of social performance and work creation, and also the creation, distribution and acquisition of alternative strategies of literacy which lead to transforming cultural estates into economic estates.*

## THE RESEARCH ON RECEPTÁR

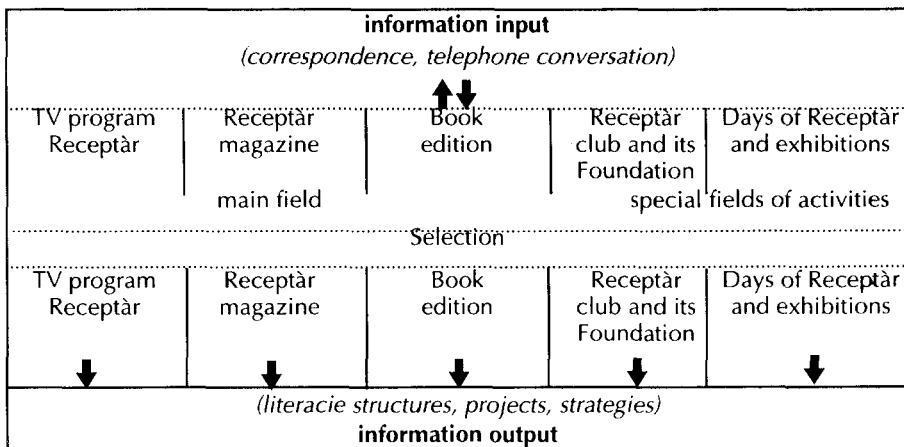
The activities of a complex institution called *Receptár*, (*Book of Prescriptions*) were the field and material of the whole research. In the Czech Republic (then still Czechoslovakia), this institution started in 1987 as a special TV program for hobby-viewers. Gradually it changed into a more complex organism that included the television program, a periodic magazine, *Klub Receptár* (*Receptár Club*) (which united its fans) with *R-Noviny* (bulletin of the *Club*), *Nadace Klubu Recept-re* (*Foundation of Receptár Club*), a book edition and a series of *activities* (*Dny Receptáre*, *Days of Receptáre*) done in various locations and regions.

This institution functioned from the beginning also as an **educational institution**, but its educational efforts were rather implicit and oriented on a phenomenon called hobby. The break in this institution's activities came after the political changes in 1989, and it s connected with the foundation of the *Nadace Klubu Receptáre* (*Foundation of Receptár Club*) which in its status in 1992 drafted principles for the educational level strategy of its activities. Since then, the educational activities of *Receptár* are *explicit, controlled, and programmed*, and they are not only hobby-oriented. Furthermore, these activities are multi-medial, not just unimedial as they were in the beginning.

These two things, self-confident educational strategy and multimediality, are the formal causes of the Receptár survey in the framework of the ALPHA 96 project. Nevertheless, the more important fact is the content cause of this survey and this is the use, distribution and reproduction of alternative literacy strategies and alternative literacies, for which bricolage is the most suitable name. Before we start with the theoretical explanation of this phenomenon and its further surveying in the Receptár case, I will draft the basic characteristics of this multimedial cultural institution, which substantially functions as a mediator of alternative ways of acquiring various cultural competences.



There is a mutual communication between an unspecified public, local communities, various individuals, hobby organizations, etc., on one side, and *Receptár* on the other. It is directed mostly one-way (toward *Receptár*), and its purpose is *mass exchange of selected information*. This information has a contextually pre-defined character; it is bricolage of both kinds (see Derrida's interpretation of Levi-Strauss's concept below). Information selection is done by the TV program creators, magazine publishers, edition publishers, Klub *Receptáre* activists and organizers of Dny *Receptáre* and exhibitions of *Receptár*. This process can be simply drawn as follows:



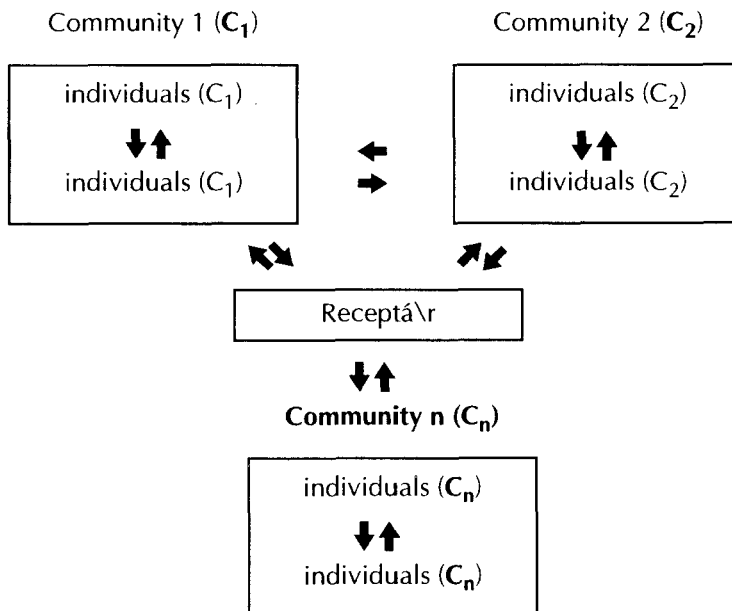


Information *input* is defined by a few hundred of letters per month and hundreds of telephone messages: the Receptár institution owns permanent telephone numbers and answering machines in all the larger towns of the Czech Republic.

Information *selection* is carried out by a team of employees. After this, they transmit the messages, which in most cases means original know-how connected with hobbies, improvement of housing conditions, enterprising and do-it-yourself activities, in the original meaning of the term, to one of the outputs (TV program, magazine, edition, etc.).

Information *output* has the concrete form of a TV program, magazine, book or paperback of the edition, and it is mass distributed back to the source from which it originated, to the unspecified mass of recipients (readers, viewers, etc.).

Considering the time of Receptár broadcasting (seven years), we can use the term "audience", because the mass of recipients has stabilized since then. We are talking about approximately one million viewers per week, and approximately 200 000 readers per month. If we take into consideration the fact that in the Czech Republic, there are approximately 10 million people, it is a multimedial institution with an extraordinary effect. The Receptár *audience* is then its own source of information flowing into this multimedial institution, and it is also, of course, the recipient of selected information. The scheme below describes the function and importance of Receptár as a mediator and database. The scheme compares the character and range of communication *without mass media* and with mass media:



There is intensive direct communication between communities C1 and C2, but (for instance thanks to the large geographical distance) there cannot be communication between communities C<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>n</sub> or C<sub>2</sub> and C<sub>n</sub>. Therefore, Receptár undoubtedly connects people who would never meet without its mediation.

Because of this, there is a *permanent informal group* of approximately one million adults, which includes the "hard core" of particularly active individuals, and then the remaining part of more or less passive members of the audience. This "hard core" represents a group of people who often on a regular basis mail their ideas, thoughts, know-how, etc., or who realize selected ideas and information distributed by Receptár. As the sociological probing in the field revealed, these people form approximately 10-15% of the Receptár audience.

So far, I can conclude the following:

**The Receptár audience, which is approximately one million people, activates every week a minimum of 150-200 thousand adults, and these people enter the process of exchanging alternative (and also other) information, the objective of which is a cultural mobilization.**

By "cultural mobilization" I mean any form of activity the purpose of which is either a passive acquisition of a new grammar of social performance or work creation, or straightforward *implementation* of possibilities provided by this grammar. Therefore, what matters is either acquiring another element of cultural competence, or its practical implementation. It is not difficult to replace the terms "social performance", "work creation" and "cultural competence element" by words that will characterize our project, for instance, "work offer," "working skills" or "know how ...".

Cultural mobilization performed by Receptár (or its various components) is among other things based on an exchange of really alternative ways, ideas, thoughts or know-how, for which the most appropriate name seems to be bricolage. This is not only because this word is even in its Czech form (kutilství\*) the most frequently used expression in the texts of television programme Receptár, Receptár magazine and even this institution's book edition; but also because there are, from the point of view of cultural anthropology and also of andragogy theories, important methodological and heuristic connotations that need to be referred to.

Now, one little note: I will use the bricolage term with two meanings: partly in its narrow meaning, when this term really closely describes interest activities and hobbies (in Czech: *koníčky*); and partly, in its wider, theoretical meaning, when this term describes a rationality type, a type of intellectual approach toward reality, a special type of cultural competence. In the second meaning of the word, my understanding of bricolage is identical with *alternative education*, and also with the *alternative way of life* (alternative considering dominant types and ways, that is, considering modern industrial and consumer types and ways). However, in this second

meaning of the word, we are getting into fairly complex theoretical and methodological problems.

## “BRICOLAGE”

An introductory word to these problems is the word *bricolage*. Lévi-Strauss introduces this word when he needs to explain the difference between mythical thinking and modern scientific thinking. He writes:

There still exists among ourselves an activity which on the technical plane gives us quite a good understanding of what a science we prefer to call “prior” rather than “primitive”, could have been on the plane of speculation. This is what is commonly called “bricolage” in French. In its old sense the verb “bricoler” applied to ball games and billiards, to hunting, shooting and riding. It was however always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle. And in our own time the “bricoleur” is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman<sup>7</sup>.

Here, for further purposes, we can emphasize the following characteristics of bricolage: **extraneous movement** and **game** and **means** not of a craftsman.

But the classic goes on with his characterizations: it is typical for bricolage that “it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal<sup>8</sup>.” Let’s note here **limited repertoire** and **unlimited tasks**.

“The “bricoleur” is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with “whatever is at hand”, that is to say with a finite set of tools and materials and is also heterogeneous because what it bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions. The set of the bricoleur’s means cannot therefore be defined in terms of a project .... It is to be defined only by its potential use... , the elements are collected or retained on the principle that “they may always come in handy ...<sup>9</sup>. Here we can emphasize: **instrumentality** and **means, may always come in handy**.

In these metaphors which will soon begin to function as concepts of heuristic power, there is an evident contrast between an *engineer* and a *bricoleur* or the contrast between science and myth or science and non-science. Lévi-Strauss admits that the person thinking/creating this way lives his existence on the very edge of modern industrial society, whose basic mode of thinking is the mode of “engineer” thinking, or the thinking that produces its instruments according to a project, hence over and over again, for special functions.

All the noted features of bricolage — deflection, play, means of a non-professional, limited means, unlimited tasks — can be understood as a task of the imaginary Receptár project. The characteristics of *instrumentality and anything can be used for everything* can then be understood as a “defining” of methods that can be used by those who want to implement the imaginary project of Receptár.

This means that the individual participants in the game called Receptár use alternative discourse creation as their program. In this game, “alternative” means the same as “drawing from a limited world of instruments that is always within reach”. At the same time, the alternative creation of these discourses is a *performance* (see Chomsky), which reveals the cultural competence that masters the grammar/literacy of the particular community. The Receptár objectives are to *provoke, identify and distribute this performance*. To understand this activity, we need to stress some other differences between the normally perceived project of literacy and the project, permanently set by the Receptár, which will bring to life various alternative ways of educational activities “from the bottom”.

Even now it would be possible for us to ask which side science and scientific rationality belong to, and we may as well answer *to the engineer's side, not the bricoleur's one*. But the answer is not at all as simple as it may appear at first glance. For the classicist himself adds that “the difference is therefore less absolute than it might appear”. It remains a real one, however, in that the engineer is always trying to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization while the “bricoleur” by inclination or necessity always remains within them. This is another way of saying that the engineer works by means of concepts and the “bricoleur” by means of signs<sup>10</sup>. A basic means for the *engineer* to get beyond the limits of a given set (of knowledge, methods etc.) is then called a *concept*, and a basic means for the bricoleur to reorganize a set (of knowledge, methods etc.) is on the contrary called a *sign*<sup>11</sup>.

Again we can emphasize here that **the basic working instrument** of bricolage is a sign and **the basic working instrument** of the *engineer* is a concept.

If we accept a structuralist semiotic alphabet we will add that under concept we must understand here a *special meaning of a sign*, for example even the meaning of the same sign used by the bricoleur, but the bricoleur is not on the contrary bound to any special meaning of this sign, and *gives the sign a meaning freely according to the intention of the restructuring of the set*.

Lévi-Strauss says that the difference between a scientist and a bricoleur is defined in a relative way, and introduces another structural contrast between the *structure* and the *event* besides the already introduced pairs engineer/bricoleur and *concept/sign*: “We have already distinguished the scientist and the “bricoleur” by the inverse functions which they assign to events and structures as ends and means, the scientist creating events (changing the

world) by means of structures and the “bricoleur” creating structures by means of events<sup>12</sup>.”

Again we stress the *bricoleur reorganizes, restructures, recontextualizes and the scientist organizes, structures and contextualizes*.

Meanwhile innovations of two kinds come into existence: *Discovery* (by re-grouping things which have already existed) and *Invention* (from what has been thought up). The ladder of structuralist contrasts which Lévi-Strauss has been climbing up towards his goal is not ready yet. There is one more thing missing: A connection of science or bricolage with a syntagmatic or paradigmatic way of treating signs and meanings. For this, Lévi-Strauss needs the expressions *play* and *ritual* or *play* and *system*, which are rather problematic. It is said that “competitive games should flourish in our industrial societies”, whereas “rites and myths, on the other hand, like “bricolage” ... take to pieces and reconstruct sets of events ... and use them as so many indestructible pieces for structural patterns in which they serve alternatively as ends or means<sup>13</sup>”. *Consequently, anything assumes any function in bricolage (or a sign assumes whatever meaning according to circumstances, purposes, context etc.), any instrument can become an object, or any object can become an instrument*.

It is the status of *play* which is debatable. Does Lévi-Strauss link it unambiguously to science or bricolage? It seems that the conception of play here is not the conception of *completely open* play (Wittgenstein’s type) but (as it is justified by Lévi-Strauss’ comments on the relation between symmetry and asymmetry in a game) of a *priori* conditional play. But such play should rather be linked to bricolage. This confusion was what Derrida took up later on. Before I proceed to his comments I will try to sum up as clearly as possible Lévi-Strauss’ opinions of the differences between systematically functioning scientific reason on the one hand and so-called bricolage on the other:

**sciences:**

- straightness
- specialization
- unlimitation of instrument
- anything has a unique function
- concept as instrument
- creation through realization of project
- inventive innovation
- discovery innovation
- system ?
- play ?

**bricolage**

- divergence
- non-specialization
- limitation of instruments
- anything can be for anything
- sign as instrument
- creation through re-construction
- discovery innovation
- inventive innovation
- play
- ritual

The task of the Receptár project is at first sight lead by the basic working instrument to which Lévi Strauss refers as a *sign*. Further, I will show, with J. Derrida's help, that a different approach is possible. For now, I will not go any deeper.

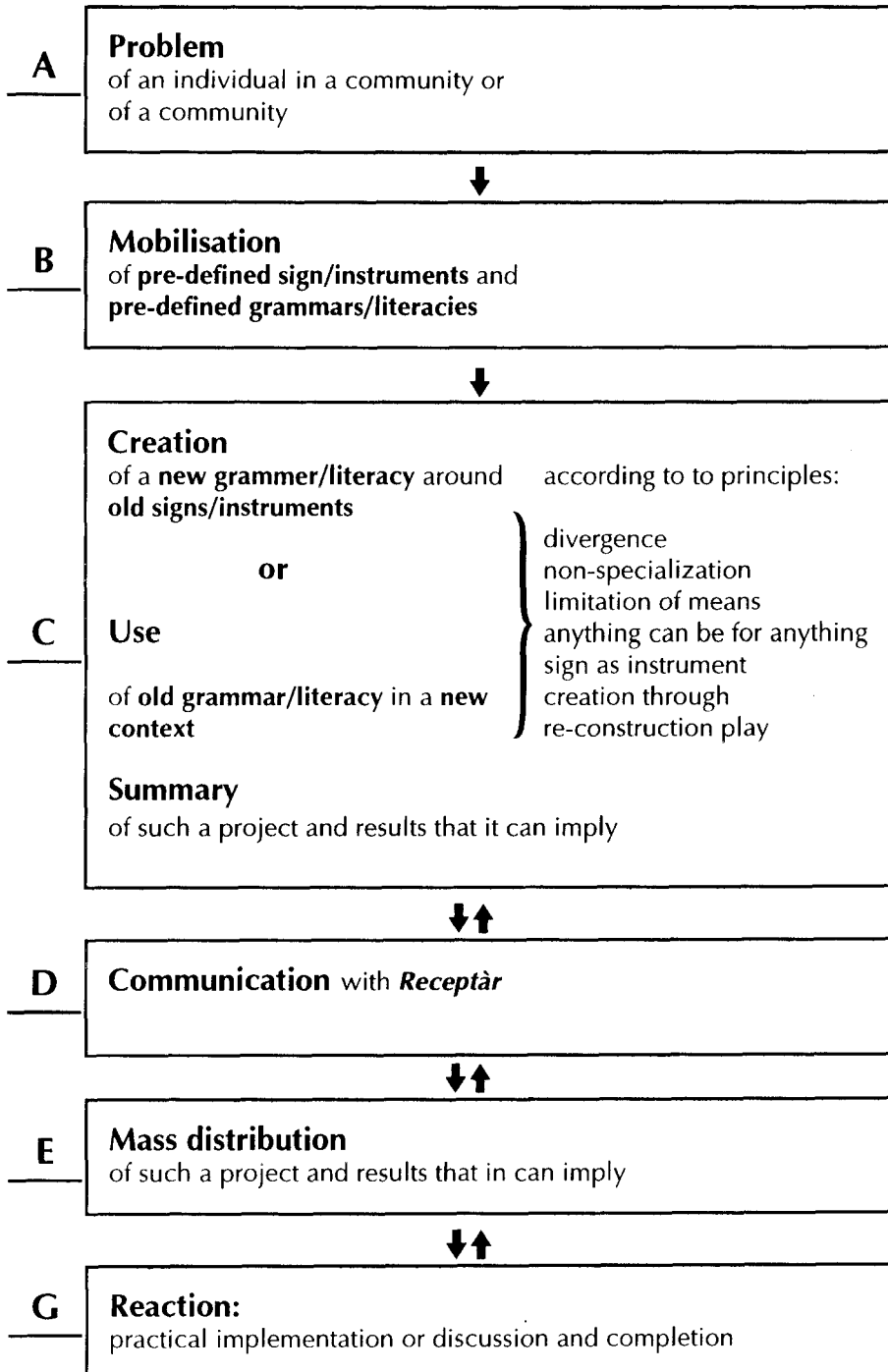
The *educational project* of Receptár unequivocally invites us to reorganize, restructure and re-contextualize either the known grammars of various skills, or to create new grammars which can be centred around the given sign. This will become even clearer when we use semiotics once again.

Eco emphasizes that a sign, sign function and sign production are in fact only three different names of one phenomenon; Lyotard says the same when he characterizes the relation of creation rules and the creation of a postmodern thinker<sup>14</sup>. In this respect, there is a difference between the grammar of a bricoleurs' performance and the grammar of an engineers' performance:

- a) *bricoleur*, rules of performance develop together with the performance, in most cases they are not set in advance; while
- b) *engineer*, in most cases, the rules are set in advance and the engineer follows them. They are set by the concept.

In other words, bricoleur creates a new grammar by a new context, and the task and the *universe of meanings* that are connected with the sign as an instrument are his only lead. An engineer creates a new grammar in a similar way, but unlike a bricoleur is the *universe of meanings* that are connected with the *concept* much more limited in his work, and at the same time, he carries *obligatory rules* of his activity/system. Bricoleur is not limited by anything, only by his imagination and the complex of meanings of the sign: therefore, he acts as an "interpreter of the old and the now originating" tradition, because a meaning is just a "cultural unit"<sup>15</sup>. In summary: the systematic engineer creates by the concept and given rules; bricoler the player creates by the task, and meanwhile, he or she creates the rules of a new way of handling the sign/instrument.

The Receptár way is mostly a bricoleur's way. Originally and in most cases, it is characterized by terms stated in the right column of the scheme stated above. These terms also define the *alternative discourse of adult education in a particular community*. By interaction with Receptár, this discourse transforms into an alternative educational project entering the mass exchange of further/similar/projects. We can define this project by the following scheme:



## MASS BRICOLAGE

The whole above stated scheme describes an action for which I can only offer a paradoxical name mass bricolage<sup>16</sup>. This is not just a matter of creation of an educational project by a *discourse* of a particular limited *community* (by a creation of new grammars/literacies on a basis of old signs/instruments or by re-contextualizing of old grammars/literacies according to new tasks), but also a matter of creating a number of further tasks and projects by Receptár *itself*.

This will cause a reaction in the field of various different communities and their contexts. By this, a wide field opens to further activities, mobilizations, new contexts and innovations. We can refer to this field as a field of mass — bricolage that creates numbers of *new projects of literacy*. **This is not a matter of official formal projects of literacy, but a matter of the results of real discourses of particular communities and individuals into which Receptár enters as a complex multimedial mass functioning institution with an excellent information feedback.**

It is clear that the most relevant actions happen in part C of the scheme. These actions, that lead into a “summary” as an alternative project of literacy, are described very accurately in the TV program of Receptár as well as in its periodic magazine or further texts. Its *content analysis* has unequivocally proved the character of the projects as projects based on a bricolage. For instance, the semantic formulas of these texts are profiled by the expression “bricolage” (kutilstv’) in most cases, and they are structured according to functions that define bricolage: The suggested texts’ key word is “nápad (idea)”, and it is immediately followed by the word “kutil (handyman)” (or derived words). The structure of semantic formulas in projects according to a function “new use of an old instrument” or “new use of a thing or material” is absolutely essential; without respect to their oscillation in specific editions of the magazine or the TV program it is possible to state that the appearance of semantic formulas structured this way is more than 50%<sup>17</sup>. Besides that: the *semantic portrait* of bricoleur him or herself is primarily built from activities of searching for innovations of all kinds until “the bricoleur finds peace”, that is, until there still are things to reorganize and re-contextualize<sup>18</sup>.

Bricolage is, in the strictest sense of the word, always inventive crossing the border of a given set of pieces of knowledge because it is always the restructuring and reorganization of given meanings in the same way as it is the restructuring and reorganization of events. And considering the fact that bricolage means (at least temporal) denial of the orientation and centrality of learning, scientific rationality appears to be partly the interplay and partly the sequence of system-conceptual or system-structural way of learning and bricolage.

The radicalization of the structuralist comment on the problems of bricolage begins with the question concerning the legitimacy of this difference: Is this contrast (*engineer, bricoleur*) **logically** justifiable?



Its legitimacy is not possible in terms of the structuralist thinking: for if we admit this contrast, we will admit at the same time both a certain origin and center of our logical arguments and the orientation of our theoretical work according to this center and conceptual and other nomenclature grouped around it. The structuralist step towards its postposition, that is, towards poststructuralist conception of *intertextuality*, does not allow such admission of *centrality* and *orientation*. A *labyrinth* (Borges, Eco) or an *encyclopedia* (Eco, Borges) of *intertextual play* (Derrida) does not have its logical origin or logical center. The play of mutual acts of differentiation which gives rise to the very possibility of the existence of text as text, and, consequently, any learning (which is only the reading of texts of the world) of a signal nature, cannot prove any fixed point with the exception of the points which can be conventionally agreed on. The idea of a text which is independent of such intertextual play is absurd. This is why Derrida can note:

If one calls bricolage the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is bricoleur. The engineer, whom Lévi-Strauss opposes to the bricoleur, should be the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax and lexicon. In this sense the engineer is a myth. A subject who supposedly would be the absolute origin of his own discourse and supposedly would construct it "out of nothing", "out of whole cloth", would be the creator of the verb, the verb itself. The notion of the engineer who supposedly breaks with all forms of bricolage is therefore a theological idea, and since Lévi-Strauss tells us elsewhere that bricolage is mythopoethic, the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the bricoleur. As soon as we cease to believe in such an engineer and in a discourse which breaks with the received historical discourse, and as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain bricolage and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of bricoleurs, then the very idea of bricolage is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down<sup>19</sup>.

It is possible to come to such a conclusion through the connection between, for example, Kuhn's conception of scientific knowledge and the conception of Lévi-Strauss as well as the connection between Lévi-Strauss' conception and Derrida's of intertextual differentiation.

Structuralist arguments are much more forcible though. According to Derrida,

...in effect, what appears most fascinating is this critical search for a new status of discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a center, to a subject, to a privileged reference, to an origin, or to absolute archia<sup>20</sup>.

The process of creating alternative strategies of literacies, as well as the process of creating alternative literacies, is in Receptár really de-centred in the above mentioned meaning: the whole active complex called Receptár has no center. There is only a number of newly beginning bricolage, which in a number of cases leads to the formulation of the *grammars of cultural competencies*. The competency of enforcing cultural competence on the job market belongs to grammars/literacies as well, and the act of entering the job market cannot bear bricolage as the basic procedure. On the contrary, the bricoleur suddenly has to accept the rules of industrialism and tap his or her bricolage to the industrial system<sup>21</sup>.

Receptár as mass-media institution is to be the main mediator of this act, or the main helper, in some cases. This seems to disqualify the status of bricolage as the alternative creating the alternative literacies. Does it possibly mean that the heuristically strong concept of bricolage suddenly appears to be a methodological mistake? Not at all, only the whole problem requires a couple of other methodological notes, thanks to which the image of bricolage and bricoleur as alternatives of literacies will be justified.

## TWO INTERPRETATIONS

The **absence of center** which consequently means also the absence of orientation of knowledge is, in my view, a **condition for essentially creative rational work** as the core of scientific knowledge which can, under certain conditions, result in the change of paradigm and an epoch-making cultural event (and Kuhn and those studying the problems of scientific rationality are not concerned about anything of less importance). I emphasize the *condition* so that there will not be a misunderstanding: it is not possible to shift the whole problem to one side, for example, to the side of bricolage. For both logical and practical reasons it is necessary to admit the existence of both of them. As for the logical reasons, Derrida has made a note the benefit of which has not been taken yet and may be dramatic from the point of view of the social sciences and the humanities:

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology — in other words, throughout his entire history — has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play<sup>22</sup>.

In light of these formulations even the very problem of the engineer and the bricoleur, the scientist and the non-scientist, appears different. This difference between the types of learner and also the difference between the types of rationality can be obtained only within one of the two mentioned types of interpretation and semiosphere in general — that one which believes in the center and in the orientation of the process of learning. Lévi-Strauss admitted this type of interpretation and did not abandon it: this is why Derrida has addressed a “rebuke” to him concerning the ethics of nostalgia, the nostalgia for the old times of cognitive (ontotheological) certainties of paradigmatic cultural type.

Even if we admit the play with the expression bricolage, then it holds true, even in the perspective of the presented Derrida’s comments on the two modes of interpretation, that it is bricolage and not “engineering science” that is *non-centred* and *non-oriented*, that it is a *play with signs* or a *play with concepts*. But the word *play* **cannot** be opposed to the word *system* or *ritual* (as Lévi-

Strauss did), and this is why there is a question mark in the middle of the last two lines of the above presented chart (it would now be added to all of the lines, for the given scheme is valid only within the range of *archaic* interpretation but not within the range of *an-archaic* interpretation).

I have said that “for both logical and practical reasons it is necessary to admit the existence of both of them”. In this sense Derrida concludes:

There are more than enough indications today to suggest we might perceive that these two interpretations of interpretation — which are absolutely irreconcilable even if we live them simultaneously and reconcile them in an obscure economy — together share the field which we call, in such a problematic fashion, the social sciences<sup>23</sup>.

Yes, an obscure economy of coexistence of various types of rationality in one cognitive model: this is, in my opinion, an heuristically better view of the problems of scientific rationality than — nowadays probably well explored — the problem of paradigms. Therefore I can (in connection with bricolage) emphasize again that in terms of the identical institutionally welded cognitive process we face the matter of **archaic interpretation of the world** and **non-archaic interpretation of the world**, both of them take their place within the identical paradigm.

All it needs is freedom for its games of re-structuring and reorganization of whatever by whatever. It is a sign of belonging to the an-archaic interpretation of the world, though. Here, rationality becomes a creator of much higher degree of freedom (creation) than is true for the archaic type.

But I have already stated that *both* are valid, and I will dwell on it. From this it is clear that both Lévi-Strauss and Derrida are substitutes: the first for the first one, the second for the second one — together they represent the both. Receptár is interested in both: bricolage and the *system* of solving various problems. It does so regularly and it also mixes up together both of those ways consciously, and again on the basis of bricolage or on the basis of systematic “engineering” literacy. In this cultural complex together with Lévi-Strauss we recognize bricolage and educational systematics as two antipoles; in Receptár together with Derrida we recognize bricolage and systematics as “the coexistence of various in one” in that obscure economy<sup>24</sup>. Does it mean then that our theses of alternative character of bricolage, and that one of bricolage as the alternative creation of literacies and as alternative creation of strategies of literacies, are being cancelled by that finding?

I associate the expression of “alternative” with a certain understanding of “rationality”; alternative rationality (compare Lévi-Strauss/ founded bricolage, and went from bricolage; official systematic rationality founded official strategies of literacy and official education connected with the system of industrialism). What is “rationality” however? What meanings are associated with the expressions of “literacy”, “alternative”, etc.?

## A THIRD INTERPRETATION

Derrida pointed to two possibilities of interpreting interpretation, one of which was neglected by Lévi Strauss, and in a way he *emancipated official and alternative literacies and strategies of literacy*. One can go even further, and another possibility can be offered, which is anchored in pragmatic readings of Derrida's commentaries:

The line between "rationality" and something else was traditionally drawn to merge approximately with the line between derivation and imagination. We are said to be rational as long as we keep logical space which is given in the beginning of research and as long as our conviction we hold in the end of the research can be supported by arguments referring to those ones we held in the beginning. ... Being pragmatists we must protest against the two traditional methodological questions .... "What context belongs to this subject?" and "What is the input we are providing to the context?" All the subjects are always contextualized for us. All of them are carrying their own contexts just as Riemann's space is carrying axioms with it. It is not possible to take a subject from its old context and examine it just itself to find out which new context could be appropriate for it<sup>25</sup>.

In such a situation any bricoleur behaves as the creator of an original context of the problem and original instrumental solution, which — always in a relatively new way — connects with a particular instrument/sign.

Indeed, bricolage is the fate of a thinking person, it means not dogmatically but freely thinking person, and a certain part of it, limited by a certain type of **recontextualization as bricolage**, is the work of the *scientist/engineer*. The pragmatically conceived recontextualization really is, in this perspective, bricolage of a kind. But it is also late Wittgenstein's *Sprachspiel* which always contains enough space for a prospective bricoleur. For it will always be true that it is necessary to manage with what this or that author has "at home", with what he has "at hand".

We are acquiring then three heuristically strong instruments applicable to the analysis of Recept.r. However, we also acquire three methodologically effective instruments, with the help of which Recept.r itself can be created!

*First instrument* — bricolage as literacy strategy and literacy, which is the *opposite* of the systematic (engineer, scientist) creating literacy and literacy strategy; the starting point is the concept of C. Lévi-Strauss;

*Second instrument* — bricolage/*system* as parallel, *complementary* and "in obscure economy" co-existing strategy of literacy and literacy; the starting point is J.Derrida's concept of double interpretation of interpretation, revising and deconstructing Lévi-Strauss' conception;

*Third instrument* — bricolage as *literacy strategy and literacy*, which is *not opposed* to the systematic (engineer) approach and does not respect even Derrida's conception. It is a *complete* bricolage excluding a different possibility of literacy strategy, but the possibility is founded on the *always-previously-give* contextualization/recontextualization of the object/sign, or on the always-newly-arising grammar of the bricoleur; the starting point is R.Rorty's conception or J.F. Lyotard's conception, revising both

conceptions, that is, C. Levi-Strauss's or J. Derrida's ones. I emphasize that all three types of approaches towards searching for those grammars/literacies are present on the side of a communicating audience of Receptár and on the side of Receptár as a modern institution. **They are present here consciously. They are self-confident ways of creating alternative literacy strategies and they are self-confident ways of alternative creating literacies.**

Unfortunately, the scope of this work does not allow me to adjoin a rich appendix describing basic cases of those three ways of creating literacy strategies which led towards both: creating jobs and producing new goods. At the same time those two matters — creating jobs and producing good — comprise one of the functions of all those three approaches, in which bricolage has the sovereign position. I can refer here to the results of my own research<sup>26</sup> and state that *those three types of transforming cultural values/bricolage and results of bricolage/into economic values today mean hundreds of proven jobs and dozens of new production procedures and new commodities at the official market of work force and commodities. They also mean thousands of jobs and thousands of new production procedures and new commodities as an alternative market of work force and commodities which is traditionally well developed in the Czech Republic.*

It is logical: alternative types of literacies and alternative types of literacy strategies create alternative type of market, and vice versa. In this we can see the alphabet of structuralism and neostructuralism and their theories concerning discourse and intertextuality. These alternatives are not — as I tried to prove theoretically — in complete opposition, and they cannot be excluded from the "official" creation of literacy strategies connected with work problems.

\* \* \*

Research in the framework of ALPHA 96 — *Literacy and Work* in the Czech Republic was meant to prove highly effective at connecting alternative ways of production and reproduction of literacy and literacy strategies based on bricolage with mass-media moderation respecting and methodically using bricolage. The subject of this research was the mass-media complex of the Receptár institutions, which enables especially the exchange of those alternative approaches towards solving various problems, work included. The practical results of the effect of Receptár at the work force and commodity market are extraordinary, and they are worthy of attention from people dealing with adult education problems and those dealing with unemployment problems, requalification and the strategies of entering an adult work force market and commodity market.

What is especially important to emphasize: **three ways of production and reproduction of literacies and literary strategies realized in the framework of communication through Receptár must be considered the creation of a particular educational project, and at the same time also the realization of**

such a project, and other transferable environment with a similar structure of modern industrialism and (post)modern culture. I think that this way of helping through the use of alternative ways of thinking and creating in the mass-media is still not used in a way the current social problems require<sup>27</sup>. In this respect the Czech Receptár can serve as an example and data-basis of particular literacy strategies for educators.

## Notes

1. *Comp.* Appignanesi, L., Lawson, H. (Eds) **Dismantling Truth. Reality in the Post-Modern World.** London 1989, or Lyotard, J.F. **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.** Manchester 1987.
2. This thesis follows from J.Derrida's works from the 60s, from his conception of difference and interpretation of interpretation. By applying this thesis, I want to show at the same time that Derrida's analyses are not only idea constructs which can be discussed in the field of philosophy or semiotics, but that they are also convenient methodological instruments for a particular sociological and pedagogical research.  
— *Comp.*: Derrida, J. **Speech and Phenomena**, Evanstone 1973 (chap. *Differance*), Derrida, J. **Writing and Difference**. London 1978 (chap. *Structure, Sign, and Play*).
3. Here I draw from the theoretical work of the Czech structuralist J.Mukarovsky, from his conception of social determination of transforming any value into an esthetic value, and on vice versa. — *Comp.*: Mukarovsky, J. **Studie z estetiky**, Praha 1971 (chap. *Estetická funkce, norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty*).
4. Lévi-Strauss, C. **The Savage Mind**, London 1968, chap. 1.
5. According to Chomsky, linguistic *competence* is represented by *grammar* (i.e. abstract structures), but we can assume linguistic competence only on the basis of linguistic *performance*. Research of actual performances is then searching for the system of grammars. In case of literacy the situation is similar: we can assume cultural competence on the basis of examining actual *performances* — however, to manage this competence does not mean to manage its grammar (i.e. abstract structures in which it can be expressed). Formulating this grammar/*literature* is in fact formulating literacy.  
*Comp.*: Chomsky, N. **Topics in the theory of generative grammar**. In: Searle, J.R. (ed.), *Philosophy of Language*, Oxford 1972, p. 73, and Chomsky, N. **Recent contributions to the theory of innate ideas**. In: *ibid.*, p. 123.  
As far as this conception of grammar is concerned, it is possible to use one of Wittgenstein's later conceptions; Wittgenstein, L. **Philosophical Investigations**. Oxford 1953, § 371.
6. Böhler, D. **Rekonstruktive Pragmatik. Von der Bewusstseins – philosophie zur Kommunikations-reflexion**. Frankfurt aM. 1985.  
In the field of pedagogical sciences this pragmatic turn can be seen in the works of Bernstein, Aronowitz and Giroux, especially.  
*Comp.*: Aronowitz, S., Giroux, H.A. **Postmodern Education. Politics, Culture, and Social Criticism**. Minneapolis 1991.  
Bernstein, B. **The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse. Vol. IV**. London - New York 1993 (1990).  
\*\*The bricoleur has no precise equivalent in English. He is a man who undertakes odd jobs and is a Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself man, but, as the text makes clear, he is of a different standing from, for instance, the *odd job man* or handyman. (trans. note)." Lévi-Strauss, C. **The Savage Mind**. London 1968, p. 17.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 16-17.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.  
For example, Derrida sums up C. Lévi-Strauss's thoughts as follows:  
"On the other hand, still in *The Savage Mind*, he (Lévi-Strauss) presents as what he calls bricolage what might be called the discourse of this method. The bricoleur, says Lévi-Strauss, is someone who uses "the means at hand", that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous - and so forth. " Derrida, J. **Writing and Difference**. London 1978, p. 28.
10. Lévi-Strauss, C. **The Savage Mind**. London 1968, p. 19-20.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 20.  
"Concepts thus appear like operators opening up the set being worked with and signification like the operator of its reorganization..."
12. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 32-33.
14. Eco, U. **A Theory of Semiotics**. Bloomington 1979, p. 316.  
Lyotard, J.-F. **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**. Manchester 1987, p. 81.
15. Eco, U., *ibid.*, p. 67.
16. The expression "mass bricolage" is not only the paradox - it is an *oxymóron*, actually. And oxymóron is a typical characteristic of "texts" of postmodern culture reality. It can be noted that connecting "mass-bricolage-mass medium" indicates the postmodern situation in which our problem (literacy and work) is found.
17. Important information on alternative projects of literacy can be obtained in an occasional edition of a magazine published under various titles in the *Recepty z Receptáre* edition. The content analysis of a typical text *\_ijeme v rodinném domku* showed that in approximately 57 pages, the word "nápad (idea)" appeared approximately thirty times, the word "kutil (handyman)" appeared approximately twenty times. Approximately 58% of bricolers' contributions focus on an instrument, object, or material function reorganization and re-contextualization.
18. Here, we can add that the overall structure of the *Receptár* also defines its texts, especially by the bricolage optics. The approximately thirty page magazine, with 12 editions per year (since 1993, there are 40 pages; part of it is a special appendix "for the enterprising") which is divided into 21 sections. From these, eight sections are explicitly hobby themes oriented, and approximately one sixth belongs to a 'do-it-yourself' information exchange. An identification of various communities' alternative educational discourses is, for instance, promoted by sections *Kdo to ví - odpov'*, *Kdo to vedel - odpovedel*, *Posta plná nápadu* or *Trzste nápadu*. These titles may raise a smile and doubts as to whether we can consider them to be alternative educational projects. Of course, not always. But the doubts will disappear as soon as we verify the effectiveness of such an information exchange in the field. As the empirical research revealed, the alternative *Receptár* projects were implemented at least once by approximately 50% of the participants, and approximately 10% of them have been motivated by these projects to some enterprise activity or to work which brought about savings. Comp.: Hubík, S. **Zpráva z vyzkumu odezvy na pusobenì Receptár**. Brno 1995 (manuscript).
19. Derrida, J. **Writing and Difference**. London 1978, p. 285.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
21. This stage of strategy of realizing literacy, tapping into market, is followed by E. Fulková of the Slovak Republic, in her research. After describing and analyzing revitalization of old cultural competence or grammar literacy she follows and analyzes the process of tapping the actual bricolage into the system and its institutions (educational institutions included).

22. Derrida, J. **Writing and Difference**. London 1978, p. 292.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
24. The research of Receptár (content analysis of TV program, magazine and editions) showed that both lines — bricolage and “system” , are present here but not evenly. As far as bricolage is concerned, this line of communication is prevalent in the topics of *re-contextualization* and *reorganization* (of functions, material, meaning). As far as *systematic* line is concerned, this one is prevalent as a *source of partial solutions* (steps) and *output grammars*. Content analysis of texts showed that the strategy of bricolage interprets system literacy as that restricted universe of instruments (modern scientific knowledge, technological procedures etc.) to which each instrument is appropriate only for realization of a small step in the whole strategy of bricolage. On the contrary, system strategy interprets bricolage as a substitute and complement where system opportunities are missing.
- To sum up, bricolage **remains superior strategy procedure for all communicating entities**, Receptár included. Compare columns: *Posta plná nápadu* and *Trziste nápadu* (here special types of bricolage are prevalent, for example, that ones focused on cultivation) and especially the column of *Rozjedeme to?* which in the column for enterprising people (*Receptár pro podnikavé*), brings strategically essential know-how (some of them have already been realized as production). *Comp.: Receptár na kazdy den, vol. IV. 1993 and vol. V, 1994.*
25. Rorty, R., *Zkoumání jako rekontextualizace: antidualistické pojetí interpretace*. Filosofický časopis, 1994, c 3, s. 361, 363-4. (Also as **Inquiry as recontextualization: An anti-dualist account of interpretation**. In: **Objectivity Relativism and Truth**. Philosophical Papers, Vol. 1, Cambridge 1991, pp. 93-110.– Quot. acc. the Czech edit.).
26. Hubík, S., **Zpráva z výzkumu odezvy na působení Receptáře**. Brno 1995 – chapter *Receptár pro podnikavé*. This part of the research report shows the effectiveness of bricoleurs’ entries at the official market and at an alternative job market. On particular case studies the report demonstrates the journey from a source of an idea through the idea and Receptár to the production and placement at the market.
- (This research, with the help of case studies, is to define precisely the analysis of communications on the special telephone line of *Receptár* (in several cities and towns of the Czech Republic) existing since 1993. Hundreds of thousands of telephone calls are a new source of information about the structure of bricolage sources, complementary to the correspondence of the Receptár audience and magazine contributions or TV contributions.)
27. As a majority of specialists in the field of education confirmed, “adult education must train people to become capable of effective solving of the problems in ... day-to-day life”; it can be said that “problems encountered in the modern world can no longer be coped, with only the mobilizing of the learning capabilities of young” and that “the second half of the century will certainly appear in the sign of the mobilization of the learning capabilities of adults”. Only few projects of adult educational strategies respect those ideas to such an extent as the Receptár project.
- Jelenc, Z., Krajnc, A., Svetina, M. **Outstanding experts on Adult Education. A Systematic presentation of the main stands proceeding from the investigation**. In: Svetina, M., Jelenc, Z., (Eds.) **Rethinking Adult Education for Development**, Ljubljana 1993, p. 315.
- At the same time the *alternative* character of Receptár meets trends of the (post)modern period in which “the volume of educational activities in an out-of-school context is greater than overall initial formal education probation”, and in which it is necessary to get to participate on social changes as many people as possible. Bélanger, P., *Author’s Answer*. In: *ibid.*, p. 33, 34.



# Chapter Nineteen

## BASIC EDUCATION TOWARDS SELF-RELIANCE & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Jean-Paul Hautecoeur

*Literacy education refers implicitly to a hierarchy in the forms of knowledge transmission... In many countries, populations which have been newly educated lose other forms of knowledge or wisdom and are incapable of producing or working; they have lost their capacity for sharp observation and accuracy in the perception and expression of the world; they have lost a culture of tolerance and social interaction...; they have lost a sense of global ecological balance, and the place of the human being in this global balance \_ thereby, putting numerous countries in a situation of 'paradoxical darkbackwardnes. ...Would it be appropriate to reconsider our definition of literacy, by returning to the source of the various forms of wisdom in the world?*

UNESCO. Consideration of the Results of the Deliberations of the Ad Hoc Forum of Reflection,  
Executive Board, Paris, 142Ex37, 8 October 1993, p. 11.

*"Since I've been unemployed, I look younger than my age..."*

LES FRERES BROZEUR, *Les frères Brozeur vous font une fleur*,  
CD, Samarkand AL007, Bruxelles, 1994.

## COMMON PRINCIPLES

On top of the documents accumulated over two years lies a copy of the journal *Transversales science/culture*, open at the page bearing the “Charter of transdisciplinarity”.<sup>1</sup> It is as if that charter had been one of the principles of our method of working, even though it was never discussed or collectively endorsed. I shall quote two paragraphs relating directly to education and the economy, the common ground of our research:

Education cannot give priority to abstraction in knowledge. It must teach contextualization, globalization and the creation of concrete reality. Transdisciplinary education re-evaluates the role of intuition, imagination and bodily sensitivity in the transmission of knowledge.

The development of a transdisciplinary economy is based on the premise that the economy must serve mankind, and not the other way round.

Alberto Melo, quoted in the chapter by Jália Carolino, gives the following version of the aims of education in relation to the economy: “People go where the money is: we have to try rather to do the opposite, to make money go where the people are.” Furthermore, in a seminar which brought them together, the researchers summed up their positions with regard to work. The following examples clearly demonstrate the commonality of humanist and civic values, which are a long way from reliance on economic principles:

- Some work is invisible. It is not even named as work. Invisible work such as child-bearing or “motherwork” are not even recognized or valued as work;
- work must be socially useful and environmentally friendly;“
- self-esteem issues are as important as economic ones;
- “real life” experience in the community is important for developing alternative economies;
- work has to have a financial/practical end but it should be more oriented to improving the quality of life; it should help people cope in an unfriendly environment; it should recognize cultural community values; and it should make traditional values accessible to economic benefits;
- work should ‘open our memories to find our traditions again’.”<sup>2</sup>

Our approach to research into what people do to survive did not divide education from work, the economy from culture, work from life, or life from our research questions and our own thinking processes. We set out to break with current training, research and working practices which bring about separation by means of regulations and the creation of homogeneous categories, in the interests of order, technical efficiency and profitability.

If it can be encapsulated in one idea, our project consisted in restoring broken links, uncovering them where they were hidden, and inventing them where there were none. We created value where none was recognized, or where it had been devalued or discarded as obsolete. We found means to give it currency, we established relationships, channels of mutual help, we gave it recognition and tried to live by it.

**It was a cultural project concerned with the economy of what is useful, in which work was seen above all as a vital act of participation in new market relationships.**

This was the starting point for our research team's exploration of a number of paths which were already marked out by researchers locally. The aim of our action research approach was to put the discussion in context, to find concrete answers to the questions asked, and to make links with other groups in differing circumstances in a spirit of cooperation and in pursuit of a common purpose: namely, to help people to survive in the short term, while strengthening their communities' will, ability and power to express choices; to choose their own way and to follow it for the long term.. And all this in the face of the world hegemony of the market economy and people's previous experiences of education, attempts to get a job, and exclusion from the ranks of the privileged.

Before coming to the questions asked, to an assessment of the overall results obtained and the education experienced at a local level, we should re-examine what we set out to do, and should evaluate whether we achieved it.

## FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH

We shall consider how the authors and activities were selected; why some regions are under-represented, and others totally missing; whether the papers included are in some way partial (in either sense); and on what premises they are based. But such questions show traces of objectivism and mechanical thinking about the construction of knowledge. I cannot help considering what Mechthild Hart wrote: *that what is at stake is nothing less than the creation and preservation of life, on a small scale admittedly, but with far-reaching repercussions.*

North America is in fact strongly represented in this volume, while Northern Europe is absent (although the question of education and work has been addressed there for many years with clear-cut results), Central and Eastern Europe are under-represented, and other regions which are regarded as belonging to the North are also regrettably absent. (The geopolitical South is not covered by the research programme on *Literacy Strategies*, which aims at cooperation between East and West.) However, a research team cannot be set up in the same way as participation in the general conferences of UNESCO, or with the same level of funding. It happens empirically, haphazardly, constrained by realism and subjectivism, as well as by its stated theoretical aims.

Empirically, because one project is being launched while another is finishing, and each follows on from earlier projects. Some members are selected by co-option using a pool of information and known networks. Hence there

is an obvious danger of creating a charmed circle, but this is also an advantage in terms of members' commitment and quality of work. Some members are selected haphazardly, through fortunate encounters either in person or "on paper". This does not break the circle, it widens it. Realism means considering the cost of communication and transport, time zones, the different methods and difficulties of communication (equipment, languages, cultural and political differences), and the lack of support staff. This accounts for the absence of countries in the southern hemisphere, the Far East and Russia and some of Eastern Europe. Subjectivity comes in because collaboration is voluntary: the unspoken factors of enjoyment, sympathy and *sapientia* play a large part.

As for the theoretical, ideological and methodological orientations which have some influence on the selection of member schemes, the guidelines are:

- transdisciplinarity and a bias in favour of transversality rather than discipline-based, technocratic and corporatist segmentation;
- a relatively unusual experimental field rather than a conventional programme;
- action research organically linked to local action and actors, and hence also close in principle to community solidarity, a socio-political approach and common sense or everyday knowledge;
- use of local prejudices, such as keeping away from the "major powers", appreciation of cultural traditions and minority cultures, however denatured;
- a political preference for alternatives rather than the mainstream, and a libertarian ethos in the face of the determinism of the markets in goods, ideas and people; and
- no group adherence to "politically correct" modes of expression, but observance of a code of good diplomatic relationships in international exchanges.

All this may give an account of the composition of the research team and the publication, but it does not justify some imbalances, in particular, the poor representation of researchers in post-totalitarian countries in spite of our good intentions and the energy invested (there were numerous defections). The obvious result is that Western semantics, history and references predominate in the questions which bring us together, and that there is little chance for other questions which are posed differently, however urgent and important they may be. Here is one example among many:

In Russia, there is the threat of an violent and disorganized social explosion, with unforeseeable consequences. The cause will not be growth but absolute impoverishment. It must be said that 1 per cent of the population manages all right, while 99 per cent face the question of survival and hence of exclusion. Russia is presently experiencing a state of anomy, the former social relationships have disintegrated without new relationships based on the market economy taking their place... While the spirit of enterprise was prohibited under the old regime, a whole clandestine network of all manner of goods was well established. This previously forbidden system has become the model, but it remains closely linked to criminality... Hence, criminality is not, as in France, a quest for a different status, "the last chance to get ahead", as it is sometimes called, but something quite different.<sup>3</sup>

It should not take us by surprise that illiteracy issues, among others, are not directly addressed by the authors from Central Europe, while they have

long been the object of great national concern and strategic funding in the West. "The problem" of illiteracy and "low levels of qualification" is not a *sine qua non* of developed societies or a normal corollary of "progress" but a social, ideological and political phenomenon created in the context of entrenched unemployment, growing long-term unemployment and systemic social exclusion. "Rich people no longer need poor people", Pierre Calame says abruptly.<sup>4</sup>

That can easily be rationalized to mean that eviction from society is the fault of illiteracy, that there is a clear break between good and bad levels, and that the last chance - more mythical than real — is education. Such arguments are taken up with conviction by education and training agencies which, as far as I know, have few equivalents in post-totalitarian Europe. (But where they do exist, they often borrow the same arguments uncritically and expect them to have the same effect: does that imply historical naivety or colonialism?)

Here is a typical example of such a victorious argument, put forward by a national basic education resources centre:

Companies that have invested in a training programme for basic skills benefit from lower wastage, lower internal recruitment, reduced leaving and turn-over rates and higher production. Workers who have benefited from the programme are surer of themselves, more inclined to apply for promotion, and carry out their tasks more effectively and exactly. Companies wishing to develop or to reach certified levels of quality believe that the improvement of basic skills is of crucial importance.<sup>5</sup>

A possible solution to the partiality of our analyses might be to share the coordination of ALPHA projects between two partners in East and West, with consequent exchanges. The best solution would doubtless be to run them from Central Europe!

There is another imbalance, that between educational associations acting as intermediaries and what canonical institutions (universities and institutes) say on the one hand, and what first-hand actors in local income-generating initiatives say on the other. The words of the latter are only transcribed directly in two chapters, plentifully by Wendy Desbrisay, and episodically by Mechthild Hart. Our "cooperative" work is almost exclusively carried out between peers, in contrast to the model of basic education as dialogue, which is both our method and our ultimate aim.

This situation obviously leads to a class ethnocentricity at the expense of the "locals", the grass-roots subjects of whom we claim to be the spokesmen, interpreters, ethnologists and sometimes even the saviours. If we read Desbrisay, Böcs, Chourin and others, it is not certain that the grass-roots partners are of the same mind as the "benefactors", which certainly confirms what Wendy Desbrisay writes:

Although at the beginning staff and students were equally hopeful and enthusiastic, as a group we probably did not have a commonly-understood vision. Even when we began the project, the staff hoped ALSO WORK would become a workers' co-op, while the students probably just wanted jobs...

I believe that there is a serious class gap between helping professionals and those who come, willingly or coerced, for their help. I see this as a crucial challenge in helping people get power in their lives. This culture/language gap makes it hard to discuss what we really want, what we believe, how we see things.

The cultural gap threatens to compromise some fundamental points in our argument about economic solidarity projects, community education, alternative working practices, etc. We have seen that the aims of venturing into education in an environment which is inimical to it, and more generally in situations of poverty, could be to escape from that environment, either individually or, preferably, with one's family. The longer-term aim of strengthening "community" links and resistance to dismemberment is likely to be shared only by those who intervene from outside. These issues were taken up by the researchers at the first seminar:

The intentions of researchers were often different from those of participants. Researchers were often looking at a community development process that questioned the hierarchical structure of work. The intentions of the participants were often to escape from the bottom of the hierarchy ("to become the boss") but not necessarily to challenge it. Researchers often assume that social change is the goal of participants.<sup>6</sup>

Another example of the standardization of what we say shows how distorted our view of transdisciplinarity is: the physical monotony of our style of expressing ourselves, with honourable exceptions (Semenescu, B'cs, Gowen, Hart, Desbrisay), but lacking narrative passages, imagery and revelations of people's inner thoughts, even distant echoes of the humanities. The charmed circle keeps to its disciplinary background, which is so rarely transgressed. A different picture appears on the front cover, and that is all. (And that is an original, designed separately in accordance with the guidelines given to all the authors. This might be a call to subversion in the next issue of ALPHA!)

Nevertheless, the concern for diversity in writing was expressed in the seminar to which we just referred:

The use of personal stories or narratives that are 'down-to-earth and full of meaning' can make documentation inclusive as opposed to academic. Can narrative play a role in the documentation of your project?<sup>7</sup>

Let us hold over the question for the next research team, and leave further textual commentary to the critics. Instead, let us turn to the initial research questions in order to assess the answers that were obtained, and examine the premises underlying those questions.

## PREMISES

The research centred on the following questions:

1. What economic initiatives do grass-roots organizations use in order to find local solutions to the problems of poverty?
2. How does vernacular basic education (ordinary knowledge and know-how) serve such initiatives? What new skills are needed to make the initiatives viable and durable?

3. What types of work organization provide the structure for these initiatives? On the basis of what priorities, values and projects? Is it possible to see in them the emergence of new or alternative forms of socioeconomic education outside the "market approach"?
4. What is the place and role of cooperation between educators and intermediate organizations, and how can they usefully approach such cooperation, in combating poverty, social exclusion and resistance against the degrading conditions of unregulated employment?

Either the first question was naive, or the research was poorly oriented. The fact is that almost without exception we followed up intermediate organizations which aimed to create education and training, a social economy or opportunities to enter society through employment, rather than grass-roots income-generating organizations (except in Mexico and Quebec). The information gathered on basic education and the evaluation of activities is therefore at second hand, as has already been pointed out with reference to the fundamental questions about the research.

In ALPHA 96, the organizations represented fall into three types:

1. research institutions,
2. organizations associated with local action, and
3. support organizations, either non-governmental or public.

Their aims vary. Most operate in the mixed field of work and education and training, pursuing objectives of action research and innovation in the social, economic and educational arenas. Some operate particularly in rural areas, with the aim of regional development and revival of the land (Portugal and Hungary). Others have broader aims of social change through popular education, changes in the way of life, and cultural and political action (Chicago, Toronto, Romania and Hungarian Gypsies). The latter have largely economic objectives: either through experimentation with a different approach known as the social economy (Belgium, France and Quebec), or through the encouragement of entrepreneurship using traditional methods, in the context of societies said to be "in transition" (the Czech and Slovak Republics).

Interventionist organizations are also distinguished by the people with whom they work: relatively well-integrated groups or organic communities (families, villages, urban areas); individuals and more or less unintegrated ("excluded") groups; sociological minorities (women, Gypsies, blacks, autochthonous communities, immigrants); target social environments (urban leaders, enterprises); or undifferentiated mass populations (the audience of a national TV channel). Most of these organizations are variously supported by the state, but only two are public agencies (Czech TV and the Romanian Institute of Education).

Let us see how the different standpoints of the organizations with regard to combating poverty are expressed in what they say about the key topics such as the crisis in basic education. Which are the recurrent topics on which

they agree, and on which do they disagree?

## THE CRISES

On the issue of "the crisis", there is a clear distinction between East and West, and different points of view are expressed among the authors from Central and Eastern Europe.

In the West, the crisis is principally economic, its epicentre being employment. It manifests itself in the scarcity of jobs, in the devaluing and undervaluing of paid work (the term "end of the waged society" is heard), in the abandonment of the right to work, and in the deregulation and normalization of casual, even underground employment. Long-term unemployment is becoming entrenched, and one work replacement scheme follows another. It is rare to hear of a return to work. The commonplace upshot of the crisis is the growth of poverty, in both extent and intensity.

The crisis has affected the old social mechanisms of compensating for inequality: in the work environment through the loss of trade union power and the end of the old forms of legitimacy (seniority, skill and representation), and outside work through the erosion of social advantages, and especially through the gradual withdrawal of the state from what are called "passive" social programmes. Public programmes to cope with unemployment through training, employability and work experience have proved to have little effect in returning the "beneficiaries" to lasting employment. The liberal policies of most states favour encouragement to work and training on the job rather than interventionist measures to share work, to regulate the market and to create jobs which are of service to the public. These policies have the general effect of reinforcing the gap between the active and inactive populations.

Above all, the crisis of work has shattered a whole set of images and cultural practices that were thought immutable: the right to work, social and occupational advancement, the relationship between education and social position, a number of privileges associated with age (for both old and young), recognized criteria of competence at work, craft traditions, familiarity with the world of tools, production and communication techniques, etc. At school, while "the level is rising", drop-out rates and the "level of despondency" are also on the increase. The gap is growing between those with qualifications and those without, for whom training no longer offers the hope of mobility, only the confirmation of their low classification.<sup>8</sup>

Some of the authors nonetheless recall that not all the "problems" are attributable to the crisis, notably the long-standing exclusion barriers of racism, sexism, ageism and social position. The crisis in paid employment disguises the question of the hidden, unrecognized work of women as mothers, which is also a constant form of resistance against destructive forces in environments of extreme poverty.



While the economic crisis affects wages and prices everywhere, especially those of manual work and raw materials respectively, traditional multiple activities in the non-monetary economy are becoming reactivated in very different forms, particularly in the economic role of women. Illiteracy and low levels of education have relatively little to do with practical initiative, organization and quality of work outside the primary market, and even in some enterprises.

In the West, then, there is a crisis of post-industrial societies which Adela Rogojinaru rightly calls a crisis of discontinuity of the capitalist system: we are said to have reached, or indeed already to have passed, a limit to the productionist model in which destruction exceeds production, in which there is a vain search for the anthropological purpose of work, and market processes impair rather than strengthen social ties.<sup>9</sup>

In the post-totalitarian societies, the crisis is seen differently as a crisis of history, compounded by the effects of the globalization of the economy and of the internal transition to the market economy. Totalitarian regimes are said to have "betrayed modernity" by subjecting the whole social organism and even private consciousness to ruthless and systematic backwardness.

The former regimes created a cultural void and destroyed traditional ways of life, reducing the population to a state of withdrawal into passivity and ignorance of public affairs. According to Daniela Semenescu, people can be described as illiterate, rendered culturally and psychologically apathetic; according to the Hungarian team, people can be described as shorn of possessions and responsibilities and kept collectively in an employee state of mind; according to Adela Rogojinaru, people can be described as perverted by collectivist centralization and the dissolution of traditional values. According to Attila Böcs, the Gypsy minority, which was relatively integrated, albeit by acculturation and assimilation under the former regime, is today dramatically excluded from the most fundamental rights and benefits and reduced to "catastrophic" survival conditions.

The crisis is also perceived as a profound moral, cultural and social breakdown. It appears difficult to maintain the energy invested in reconstruction because of economic uncertainty and institutional poverty, and even of the survival of centralized authority.

This picture holds true for Romania and, to a lesser extent, for Hungary. The points of view of the Czech and Slovak authors are considerably different. (Unfortunately, those of our collaborators in Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia and Ukraine remain more or less unknown.) According to Stanislav Hubík and Emilia Fulková, the former regimes did not destroy popular culture, which was transmitted by traditional means that were tolerated and even supported by the political elites and some institutions such as the cultural centres. Alongside the centralist structures, and indeed because of the state of impoverishment in which they kept most people, parallel, semi-clandestine economic structures developed, networks of commerce and solidarity which

became the seeds of new micro-organizations in the civil society. This inheritance is now a model for the postmodern venture so dear to Hubík, which is a cross between the liberalism of the market, institutional centralism and the semi-clandestine “third way”, which is the background to the successful Receptor experiment. (In the preceding ALPHA 94, Balipap argued in a similar vein.)<sup>10</sup>

Two more examples, drawn from the *Fondation pour le progrès de l'homme* during a seminar on exclusion, confirm this different view of the crises in East and West:

[In Czechoslovakia] until 1989 it was forbidden to be unemployed. But at a time of financial hardship and absolute political oppression, it has to be realized that society was quite homogeneous and marginalization almost non-existent thanks to the existence of numerous sorts of cooperation, notably within families. When marginalization appeared, it could not be regarded as a consequence of economic growth, which is more or less zero in my country. Up till now, people had little, but that little was guaranteed for ever. Nowadays, nothing is guaranteed any longer. (Jan Keller)

[In Hungary] in its own way, totalitarianism guaranteed cohesion, by implementing very conservative policies based on exaggerated nationalism. Today, crime is rising, life expectancy is declining in Eastern European countries, especially among men, the birth rate is low and the death rate high: all these problems are directly linked to the collapse of social ties and traditional values. (Janos Ladanyi)<sup>11</sup>

It is to be expected that questions of education will be treated very differently in post-totalitarian countries, at least basic education, which is all too often associated in the West with social movements such as the fight against illiteracy, and with social policies to deal with unemployment and get people into work.

## KEY TOPICS

On what topics is there agreement between the authors, irrespective of their geographical location and organizational position?

The major topic is probably that of the community. Although this has several different meanings, according to who is writing and how it is used, there is common ground which is both utopian and traditional. And between these is the mythic: the disarray of modernity and present-day breakdown.

The community is seen as the antidote to the central, collectivist or bureaucratic state, which may be parasitical or impotent. The state only offers a limited field in which it is possible to function democratically and to exercise citizenship on a human scale. The community possesses a cultural depth, typified by history lived on known ground, and by a common memory and a sense of belonging, of identity. It is also, in a more “virtual” sense, a dense network of communications and exchanges, not organized from a centre but built up of interindividual, intercultural and voluntary projects which share a set of ethical rules, or a similar opposition to the predominant codes of interaction.

The community is also an organic social formation which harks back to the clan, to ritualized relationships and links of obligatory solidarity; or it may be a contractual formation, having artificial organizations and being made up of groups with explicitly common interests and goals. It relates either to a non-monetary and multi-faceted type of traditional economy, or to a proposed economy of the "third type" which strictly obeys neither the laws of the market nor the model of socialist planning, nor the "DIY" (do-it-yourself) informal economy, but becomes established in the interstices between all of those and thereby creates value, which it redistributes more fairly. Some authors refer to an economic model dubbed CED or "Community Economic Development".

Cutting across the theme of the community and that of work, there appears in almost every author's text an ethical slant which could be called humanism, if that term is not too hackneyed. The pragmatic moral standpoint adopted in the economic initiatives and the action research is expressed by such terms as "quality of life", the value of utility, autonomy between individuals and solidarity or cooperation, embedding action in either traditional or present-day culture, horizontal communication and democratic interchange, individual dignity, etc. Virtues of citizenship are given as the basis of a moral code for a future community life, and an ethical social contract as an alternative to the erosion of spirituality and morals — denounced with one voice — that is to be found among both former and present regimes, which are dominated by the politics of planetary economic destruction and near criminality.

Is this predominance of social ethics simply a feature of the universalist tendency of reform-minded educationist? Or, on a wider scale, is it that of a cross-cultural postmodernism based on communications and no longer on confrontation (the class struggle, relationships of strength, the dominant and the dominated), which is libertarian in its deconstructed disorder, and in which is seen a "natural" *modus vivendi* — a "real life" — while former orders arise once more in disturbing forms?

The two interpretations are complementary and not exclusive, as Stanislav Hubík would say, and the mixture of the two gives rise to a third: what we call basic education could well be a mixture of action research, urban movements, new, sensitive and more spontaneous relationships instead of hierarchies, technical and technocratic colonization and new religions.

In the conclusion to the report of the seminars, David Greig quotes a text by Gustavo Esteva which transposes the part utopian, part realist imagery of our discussions on the topics raised to a district of Mexico City (Tepito):

Tepito has been transformed into an economic success. But the soul and substance of the community is not in sales and profits, it is a weave of social relations — a way of living, a way of being, of talking, of dancing, of loving and dreaming. The economy is constantly subordinated to the cultural currents of the barrio and strictly limited to the areas and conditions where it has a proscribed function... It would be criminal to fall into the trap of idealizing the conditions these communities suffer, exposed as they are to economic exploitation, cultural aggression, social discrimination, and political subordination... But

the sociocultural substance that Tepito symbolizes and illustrates...form of direct community governance [and] its convivial lifestyle also defines a moral and political substance that...gives room to alternative ways of urban existence that deserve serious consideration.<sup>12</sup>

Another topic on which most authors concur is the global approach to problems and action, a methodological preference already indicated whenever transdisciplinarity is mentioned. Besides being a style of research, it is a shared view of the world that aims to cross borders and divisions in order to reunite, to make links, and to work on relationships and communications rather than on separate precepts: intercommunication instead of isolated literacy teaching.

Such a view applies as much to income-generating as to educational activities, being based on a general economy of social transactions known to anthropologists under the name of "total social phenomenon" (M. Mauss). The very notion of work (to which we add the attribute "cooperative" when referring to our own), is understood as a vital activity in the biological sense, an original condition of monetary exchange, an archetype of the creation of value and its re-creation in a threatening environment. The work done by mothers, recalled by Mechthild Hart, notes that once the violent sexual union is accomplished and separation follows, it may embrace the desire for continuity in the face of the forces of destruction.

The global approach can still be seen in the following extract from our seminar discussions: "In the dominant structure of work, life and work are seen as separate. Dignity and cultural identity result when work and life are combined." The concept of a DIY economy which enabled us to distinguish scientific method and canonical knowledge from muddling through and popular knowledge, and school education from vernacular education, arises out of an unsegmented approach that sees possible relationships between disparate elements, and impromptu associations favouring creativity rather than reproduction. A final example is the global vision of Attila Böcs, who considers all age groups and the entire community in his attempt to link cultural history to the difficult conditions of survival which undermine it.

Instead of pretending that all the authors reached agreement also on the proposed direction for basic education, which appeared to be achieved at the outset of the research, we shall have to examine the texts. In this case, the different contexts and institutions to which the authors belong may be the reason why there is a wide spectrum of direction and action.

## **BASIC EDUCATION**

"Go where the people are", Alberto Melo said, perhaps as the final stage for researchers who know where they do not want to go, but not yet where they are going. (The first stage might be experimentation; the second, deconstruction and criticism, with all the arrogance and isolation of science; and the

third a clean break and a new, more human, encounter with...people.) It is a long road. I cannot resist seeing what Michel Serres has to say:

The weak and the simple, the poor and the illiterate, the whole gentle crowd who are so despised by the learned, regarded by them as nothing but the object of their studies, those who are excluded from canonical knowledge, often focused on black holes, doubtless because they are not blinded or overwhelmed by them, or maybe because they are intrigued by them in the way that the sun delights philosophers.<sup>13</sup>

An encounter with the weak and simple — for such a meeting to become feasible, we need subjectively to remove the distance between us and objectively to recognize ourselves as illiterate, “focused on black holes”. A journey into oneself, into one’s own history, is a precondition for recognizing what we have in common and what we could do together. The book is not closed in advance.

That is the intersubjective sense of the “basic” in what we mean by basic education, a common ground of what we have called horizontal exchanges. It implies a mental transformation, a search for value where there is supposed to be none, and an approach quite opposite to that of educators who, impelled either by the system or their own convictions, reinforce the distance between themselves and their public by confirming right at the beginning the verdict of their “clients”’ incompetence. This “basis” obviously is real; it has its own history, which has been distorted and discarded. Those who chronicle the business world describe the surplus work force which is to be eliminated from successful companies as facing “extinction”. Together with that superfluous “human capital” goes their capital of knowledge and disregarded know-how, which is also to be eliminated. That is what the experts usually mean by “illiteracy”: de-activated actors, whose knowledge and experience are declared to be obsolete.

The cultural capital which is devalued in the current skills market is the inheritance of basic education: the skills proper to a group in its own context of life and work, which individuals transmit by private means and improve or impoverish when the context changes. They do so through the ordinary, misunderstood practices of transmitting knowledge, the division of work between the experienced and the novice or between men and women, through learning situations, the tools used with a greater or lesser degree of ritual, and through pragmatic solutions to problems which make considerable allowance for imagination and creativity, and hence often break the rules.

In the complex, intercultural and shifting reality that is characteristic of the postmodern, basic education becomes more of a mixture of what is inherited and what is newly constructed, with greater fluidity and variety than it used to have, a cross between ready-made goods, ephemeral messages from the media and traditional formulae: it is a “patchwork”. Moreover, it is not uncommon for education to be corrupted, with fractured memory, associations, sense and solidity, as many reports have testified. This cannot be

ignored, but neither should it be assumed to be universal (see the description of the Tepito area).

In the implementation of local income-generating projects, such ordinary skills and the relationships that they can create are of key importance - that was our strong assumption. "Poverty", Enrique Pieck writes, "generates its own conditions for survival", meaning principally that all resources are mobilized and play a part, especially those thought to be lacking (ingenuity, useful knowledge, etc.). Sheryl Gowen shows convincingly that everyday know-how could, successfully and far less stressfully, rival the post-industrial organization of work that aims at total quality by shedding workers. For his part, Stanislav Hubík demonstrates that popular recipes can be put to work with ingenuity by a national mass communications company, thereby creating exponential numbers of services, goods, jobs and relationships.

## DISTORTIONS

The opposite of DIY (do-it-yourself) patchworks is exogenous, institutional basic education, which is centrally defined (by the state, universities and schools) and imposed on the "periphery" by education and training agencies aiming at entry into employment, or in fact at standardization. In normal times, the two types of education can coexist without being mutually exclusive, can even intermingle and borrow each other's methods. This can jeopardize the pre-eminence of legitimate knowledge, as Roger Sue remarks:

Learned knowledge then frequently runs up against the composite knowledge of the public. Ordinary, everyday knowledge. ...Education gradually shifts from merely democratizing knowledge to constructing 'democratic knowledge' that is more closely linked to what the actors have learnt and do. The nature of knowledge itself becomes a matter for negotiation between the actors. This is doubtless a more efficient method of education and access to real knowledge. It is an exciting task, but daunting to educators who have thus lost their points of reference and their certainties.<sup>14</sup>

In our seminars, we spoke about the dichotomy and opposition between the two types of knowledge — in fact, between social groups arranged by occupation, and so-called informal or shapeless groupings. Legitimate knowledge seeks to expunge vernacular practices, which cannot be accommodated in the spirit of the system; in traditional DIY and transmission there is a mistrust of institutions.

Marginalized communities use of a traditional approach of bricolage/transmission \_ which is not the same thing as official literacy or education — often results in alienation from formal or official education systems. Indeed, again and again, researchers commented not only on how a process of bricolage/transmission achieved positive results in their projects but on how such a traditional and community-affirming approach was tacitly or actively discouraged or suppressed by official literacy initiatives and policies. It seems that despite the "success" of traditional and indigenous bricolage/transmission approaches, there is a reluctance or even hostility to such an approach on the part of official literacy providers. Where is this reluctance or hostility coming from?<sup>15</sup>

The dichotomy becomes acute in crisis situations, when financial problems and unemployment are likely to be blamed on illiteracy, at least in the West, and the solution is likely to be seen in literacy and regulation basic education, which becomes restricting, or simply compulsory, for the people termed "beneficiaries". When such programmes are implemented with the moral conviction that typifies literacy campaigns, and when the atmosphere of crisis is such that half the adult population are designated illiterate (see the monograph by J. P. Hautecoeur), there is a danger of a mass offensive to restore order, both in ideology and, of course, in certain strategic sectors such as schools and subsidiary institutions and associations.

That leads, as has been seen, to a return to rigour in schools and in language, selection and exclusion in the labour force, a reinforcement of law and order in the face of criminality, marginality, indeed cultural differences, and so on. In the ruling classes and the integrated middle classes, crisis and exclusion are perceived above all as a dangerous threat to stability. People are afraid. First of all, action is needed in the field of morals, of (hierarchical) morality and imagery: less attention to real work than to the value of work. Such offensives are distilled into education policy, with reform agencies setting guidelines for institutions and the civil society and gradually replacing the earlier so-called "passive" social programmes. These are said to have encouraged dependence on public support, to have discouraged work, impoverished the state and undermined morality.

In these routine present-day happenings can be seen an insidious form of exclusion by consensus, resulting from the arrangements made for the social treatment of unemployment and implemented by the professional staff involved. It consists above all of persuading the "weak and simple" that they are so through ignorance and that they can do nothing better than learn the tune before joining in the song. Here is how Matéo Alaluf reports on such a process of self-categorization within a broader strategy of rejection and restoration of order:

In order to benefit from some schemes... individuals have to develop behaviour which allows their situation to be recognized initially as one of unemployment, then as long-term, and finally as low educational achievement. Similarly, the policies which are implemented help to create groups which correspond to them. The state creates the norms and criteria, and hence the self-categorizing behaviour by individuals who see themselves, and gain recognition, as long-term unemployed.<sup>16</sup>

We can face a problem with national programmes in our search for the evidence and applications of vernacular basic education if our collaborators come from such non-autonomous training agencies; if education defines its own public for purposes of management and control, rather than going to people on their own ground. "Learners" are likely to show the classic marks of exclusion: illiteracy and low levels of education, lack of skills, and especially psychological blocks, inability to adapt to different situations, a negative self-image, alcoholism, etc. These perceptions stress the individual, as recruitment and classification would also have done. The observation

environment is the course location and the group of students, not their places of origin, their living and working environments, whether or not they were illicit or not recognized as such.

The "learners" have little basic education, but long experience of difficulty, failure, suffering and negativism. While andragogical theory confirms that one should build on people's learning and experience, theirs are so unstructured and they are so lacking in aptitude that some sort of work, group or project therapy appears called for. The real actors are not reached, nor the projects and initiatives which they are, it seems, capable of designing and running.

In this discussion (which did not go far enough in our seminars), the positions typically adopted by the authors were of several kinds:

- Individuals and groups are encountered in the environments to which they belong, and are relatively well integrated, despite what may be extremely violent conflicts; working skills are seen as effective and solid, and using them as a base, it is possible to reinforce the ability to act, to consolidate the organization and transform their lives, etc. (Gowen, Hart, Pieck, Carolino, García and Fulková).
- In Romania and Hungary, traditions have been abolished from history and vernacular knowledge from memory. Individuals and groups are deprived and impoverished, but the renewal of history has created the potential to act, to choose, to start businesses and to sort through the ruins (Semenescu, Böcs, Balipap, Kovcs and Makolt).
- Some authors are far removed from local action or so taken up with theory and methodology that they forget the actors and the everyday scene (Hautecoeur, Rogojinaru, Hubik, even Stummer, Smyers-Wildemeersch and Ahern, who is closer to the ground).
- Others, closer to action and work training, in daily contact with learners, students and student workers, focus on the shortages, the difficulties and stigmas (Desbrisay, Fontan and Shrage, Chourin). However, Wendy Desbrisay lets some actors speak quite fully, and they only partly confirm the picture of neglect which would have been the reason for their being selected.

This problematic aspect of basic education has only concerned what we have termed the cultural heritage, the existing cultural capital, and the skills and experience acquired. We now have to ask what capital, what added value, what new forms of education and training have been added during the experiment and may prove decisive for the results of the activities and the lives of the individuals and communities involved.

## INTERCULTURAL ISSUES

What gaps in vernacular education lead to inadequate performance in the income-generating initiatives, or even to inability to join an enterprise? These gaps are observed by the researchers and other outsiders, and are not expressed according to the way in which the "actors" perceive them. They are remedied in accordance with the aims and models of the intermediate associations, and not always in ways which the actors might have intended (the



actors not in fact really “acting” if they are only students). But it seems that the actors do not always have the desire, the ability or the support to be expected from family and friends to change the circumstances in which they have to act, which may remain obscure.

The upshot, as we have seen, is conflict, dependency, failure, drop-out, many short-term and tiny experiments, but also some more solid activities and joint action by the actors and the outside professionals to change models and practices, the local environment and conditions through strengthened communication, etc.

These major intercultural issues, concerning the conditions under which grass-roots and intermediate organizations can cooperate, will remain unresolved as a result of our research. The authors give answers which differ greatly according to their points of view, ideologies and utopian visions, the environments in which they work, their institutional allegiances and, above all, the “reasons” for their work. These fall schematically into three types:

1. **Pragmatic:** close to popular cultures, local and regional traditions, to the “everyday world” of urban areas and villages such as Tepito, to poverty certainly, but also to the subterfuges used by the poor to get by, and to a harmonious coexistence which other, artificial communities cannot recreate. Work, whether “small jobs”, clandestine work, second-hand dealing or contraband, or simply services, has no separate category, status or particular moral value, nor yet an “educational objective”. It is rather a series of laborious activities intermingled with play, sorrow and pleasure, thieving and giving, profit and loss, learning, of course, and skilled work. This small world has its own teachers and trainers who can protect livelihoods, and even attain “total quality” and excellence! Why do outside educators become involved? To unlearn and make new links: an experimental “job” of communication or civic engineering.
2. **Normative:** I shall be briefer, as many clues have already been given. This relates to the usual round of institutionalized training, which can only lead to schooling, to recognized skills, and thence to work in the primary labour market: at worst to “social and occupational reintegration”, that is, to conventional admission to training and recognition of incompetence. These are the good reasons given by managers and executives, and are merely rationalizations. Most reports throw doubt on whether such schemes relate to reality, even if certain authors still give them some credence. They can give “participants” a sense of belonging, and that is one of the main aims of such provision.
3. **Alternative:** it has been observed that the market now excludes numerous strata of workers and would-be entrants, and that it only works for a minority, contrary to the neoliberal creed which has already been termed the “single way of thinking”. There have also been many experiments with unconventional economics, which have created jobs, value, goods and useful services and some monetary added value, but which above all recreate relationships on a human scale and the preconditions for reproducing the primary resources, both natural and spiritual, that are indispensable for life.

This is the bare minimum. Under a more generous economic system, that which preceded neocapitalist destruction and still hovers on the edge of it, there would also be an “element of devilry”, the creation of excess energy which is the source of sumptuary expenditure and pleasure.

Present-day society, Georges Bataille wrote 50 years ago, is a vast fraud, in which this truth of riches turns deceitfully to misery. The luxury and the deep “potlatch” of our

times both amount to wretchedness, which matches the wretchedness that is spreading scornfully over the earth. Genuine luxury means complete scorn for riches, the sombre indifference of those who refuse work and lead lives that are both splendid but quite ruinous, and a silent reproach to the laborious lie of riches.<sup>17</sup>

This element of devilry can still be found in older communities in which the arts, festivals and sacred images consumed more energy than was produced by subsistence economies. In some present-day cultural research there is a major movement in favour of such creative sources, which are rapidly being dried up by mass tourism (through the arts, new participatory ethnography, etc.). In most of the alternative economies that we have encountered, in the attempted reforms and the toying with utopia, this element is missing. It may be on account of excessive concern with morality, or it may be merely obliterated by the dreadful spectacle of neocapitalist consumer ethics, or yet again be destroyed by the obsession with technology, methods, procedures and structures. Other causes are possible. It is a significant topic which is left quite unexplored in our research.

In ALPHA 96, the ongoing alternative activities are based on either the community economy model (in English, and with a strong emphasis on independence) or the social economy and solidarity (in French, and with a strong emphasis on the state), or possibly on a mixed economy, "a hybrid mix between a non-monetary economy and the market and non-market economies".<sup>18</sup>

Although there is a danger of alienation, and even misunderstanding, between the "advisers" and the participants in these enterprises, this is not due to the effects of exclusion, but to the difficulties of experimental testing, for which some people are relatively well-prepared and ready, while others are less well-prepared and hence remain sceptical and cautious. I recall the remark of the Hungarian team about such pragmatism: "the people of Jászszentlászló found it easier to reject the establishment of model farms at the suggestion of outside experts than the implementation of their own ideas".

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The gaps observed during our work in vernacular basic education and in deprived individuals can be summed up in the following points:

- **common psychological problems** (a poor self-image, lack of confidence, loss of will, stress) and interpersonal problems (team work);
- obvious **shortfalls in vocational and technical skills** due to lack of experience and information, and to want of educational and training opportunities, especially in the fields of organization and management;
- some **difficulty in communicating** using multiple transcultural codes in certain situations of formal, hierarchical, written communication;
- **a return to subordination and obedience** instead of initiative and leadership, refusal to take initiatives and responsibilities in situations demanding individual or shared decision-making;

- **difficulties in thinking and acting cooperatively** and as a community, which are regarded as a lack of democratic culture;
- **a consciousness marked by myth and mysticism**, with no ability to distance oneself through critical analysis and no vision of structural relationships and the potential for change;
- **impoverished human and capital resources**, information and relationships, due to isolation;
- **low levels of school education**, absence of recognized qualifications, relegation to low status, no social or even civil integration, and marks of disassociation such as tattoos and other signs of a “visible minority”; and
- **an unstable environment** which is destructive rather than supportive.

Educational organizations attempt to improve what they judge to be inadequate performance, and to remedy the gaps in resources by a variety of measures called by several authors “new basic education”, but also by counselling, advice, help, support, community development, popular education, the provision of real work in enterprises, etc. To this end, they try essentially:

- **to strengthen self-esteem**, a “key skill” in the view of *Wonen en Werken*, and to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships in the group projects;
- **to improve occupational performance** by providing working situations and training services;
- **to stimulate communications** with the world outside, to introduce people to new communication techniques and jargon, and to clarify the codes and procedures of contemporary communication;
- **to accept management responsibilities**, to take part in business meetings, to take decisions and manage a worksite team;
- **to establish active relationships** with the local area and community, to receive and provide services, especially for mothers and children, and to take part in events that strengthen solidarity such as strikes, meetings and festivals;
- **to let people analyze and evaluate**, individually or collectively, their own actions, family situations, outside information and memories, particularly through the use of discussion groups, enquiry, action research, and protest;
- **to facilitate the local economy, investment and access to grants**, to create organizational infrastructures, resource centres, databases and links between people and the mass media;
- **to intervene in ensuring that people’s status and rights are recognized**, and to make long-term investments in schooling, vocational qualifications and career planning so that policies and programmes can be changed;
- **to improve and change difficult and intolerable environmental conditions** and ways of life, to help people to discover their forgotten or unknown heritage, to revive certain traditions, to open links with community networks, etc.

If one had to summarize some of the principles of the andragogical approaches recommended by the authors, the following might result:

1. To seek to discover how individuals and groups work in their own contexts and cultural categories: their basic education, their own evaluations and ways of transmitting knowledge. That means: being available, unlearning, meeting and mixing with the available resources, and pooling projects, skills and goals, while keeping to one’s own overall purpose — a large measure of freedom.

1. To seek to discover how individuals and groups work in their own contexts and cultural categories: their basic education, their own evaluations and ways of transmitting knowledge. That means: being available, unlearning, meeting and mixing with the available resources, and pooling projects, skills and goals, while keeping to one's own overall purpose — a large measure of freedom.
2. To proceed primarily through action, actual projects based on participants' desires, needs, solidarity, skills and beliefs. To undertake real work leading to real, living results. To go directly to what is urgent.
3. To "learn the hard way", as it is called in *ALSO WORKS*, from mistakes, from experience and one's peers, and to respond to the need to observe, understand, communicate, try out, rectify and decide; to use a situational methodology of self-learning in interaction, interlearning or "mutual self-learning".
4. Such Spartan strength is not given to all, not available everywhere, and not easily mobilized. Internal strength - attentiveness, confidence and will - can be reinforced by an environment which encourages potential, by being present, by helping one another, and by regularity. This vital principle runs through all the others.
5. In the present deep crisis in our history, it is of decisive importance for the success of local enterprises to build networks of community solidarity, and links between these networks. Community organization is learnt through participating in organizations, through providing services and exchanging them between organizations.
6. However, a culture of democracy is also acquired by other ways of perceiving and thinking than current practice: by critical teaching or a deconstructivist method that aims to identify objectively the systemic obstacles to communication (sex, class, age, race) and the relationships of power that underlie what is happening, and to analyze the changes that come about through cooperative and community experiments.
7. Education and training are not only a process that is endogenous to an individual, a group or a community; they also presuppose openness to outside contacts: a global communications strategy, without which local experience can remain isolated and futile. "Global" means that it can be understood by the main actors in the partnership, but also that it embraces different orders of technology and policy, and both the short and the long term, including memories of the past.
8. From this point of view of transdisciplinary action, a fetishist role of "trainer" is incompatible with the expected versatility of the actors and the outside workers involved. In the functional division of labour, there may be complex permutations between persons, roles and functions, between action, research, education, training, execution, decision-making, etc. Since the aims of any activity are complex, experimental and manifold, there can be no single, universal arrangement.
9. The conclusions to be drawn from these principles must remain problematic and uncertain. There is a tension and an imbalance, as has been indicated by several authors who have chosen the alternative rather than the norm, the vague and peripheral rather than the black hole at the centre, and democratic exchange, negotiation and ad hoc agreements rather than the laws of the market or the courts. **It is surely those designated in any given contract who own the project, the meaning of the activity, and the definition of its aims. That, I believe, is what is meant by self-reliance.**

## RESULTS

In broader terms, what are the results of these activities that share in combating poverty and social exclusion?

In economic terms, if these initiatives are evaluated by market criteria, the results are patchy: few jobs created, uncompetitive products and services, questionable productivity, considerable losses, infrequent durability, still unstable working conditions, and in some cases little difference from moonlighting. Nonetheless, some enterprises with a firm organizational base do show remarkable results, in productivity, number of jobs created, quality and strength of training for a parallel service sector. In Central and Eastern Europe, a number of activities are creating a new competitive market sector for their products, with a potential for commercial expansion.

In terms of the fight against long-term unemployment, of real employability and entry into the primary labour market, it has to be admitted that no progress has been made. Worse, the chance of escaping is in most cases reduced. Even when there have been long-term aims of a return to education, of vocational qualifications and "career planning", people finish up without a job, in debt and with a temporary job that does not even take them off social security (Patricia Ahern). At the *Chic Resto-pop* and the *Arche en Ciel*, which can in many ways be seen as success stories, people are disillusioned.

Unless there is a real chance of recognition of genuine worker status for the employees of such organizations, and an opening-up of the labour market to accept and keep people who are trying to integrate in 'decent jobs', there is a risk that the compromise that has been historically achieved with organizations... will break down, giving way to more alternative forms of integration that are more out of touch with the dominant economy and polity. (Jean-Marc Fontan and Eric Shragge)

Eight years on, we face the problem of becoming an organization whose voluntary nature does not guarantee paid employees a permanent job or the same development possibilities as the public service sector, despite the applicability of a collective agreement in *Arche en Ciel* that protects the rights of home helps. (Jean Stummer)

However, if these activities are considered in the light of their own objectives — surviving, working differently, raising the quality of life — then there are many encouraging results. Most people have gained in dignity, even if many of them still depend on social security and training and employment agencies. Many women have broadened their horizons, widening the circle of their contacts while avoiding losing their local roots. Child-minding and educational services for children, as well as modified working hours, will from now on be regarded as normal working conditions.

Participation is almost everywhere improved, strengthening both the individual and the group ethos of self-determination and solidarity. Productive work is in every case accompanied by qualitative work — research, education, training and interpersonal communication — which creates added spiritual and cultural value that is highly regarded, useful and transferable. Domestic and craft traditions have been reintroduced into everyday life, with a new potential for additional income, local work, social recognition, etc.

In the short and medium term, on a small scale and the personal level, in those projects which require few new skills and have modest ambitions, there are visible and lasting changes, and satisfaction is expressed. Where the aims are more remote from participants' customary life style, "years of work were not sufficient" (Wendy Desbrisay). The "spontaneous comments" of partners reported by Jorge García Orgales carry a similar message, as do the conclusions of Attila Böcs and Adela Rogojinaru.

It is obvious that alternative networks and fields of work are growing up, less dependent on the free market and on state programmes, in a quest for durable solutions to the crises of work, of the welfare state and of neocapitalist destruction. The aim of such organizations is not to offer a faint hope of finding a job and becoming integrated ("vocalized learning"), but rather to open up areas of useful work where neither the market nor public services operate (personal care services, restoration of the cultural heritage, environmental management and maintenance, sorting of waste, cooperative building, etc.); to gain entry into the open market and reduce the clandestine labour market through a community economy in which cultural links set the limits of free exchange and regularize employment; and to create new local and regional solidarity by widening collective participation (voluntary work, information agencies and festivals) in order to coordinate local development and make use of all resources.<sup>19</sup>

Many organizations in the civil society, and occupational organizations, are working to this end, frequently in a state of tension, as we have noted. While the institutional environment is not propitious for the widening of such activities beyond the level of experiments, and conventional politics are largely opposed to them, contacts are being made with the aims of changing public programmes and opening them more directly to citizens' organizations, and of gaining recognition for the public utility of many of these spontaneous initiatives, which are in turn becoming increasingly structured and are acquiring legitimacy.

This sector of work, which has developed both within public programmes and outside them, is looking for a stable, independent place somewhere between the public sector and the deregulated market, and for state support — for the promotional allocation of which no proper model has been found, nor usually the political rationale. The next ALPHA project will set out to examine the links between local basic education activities and the institutional environments that affect how they develop.

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# CONCLUSION

Jean-Paul Hautecoeur

Most of the authors met at a final seminar in spring 1995 in Slovakia, to sum up collectively the cooperative research that we had done at a distance. In conclusion, I shall attempt to give a faithful summary of that meeting.

Basic education and work must be understood and implemented in accordance with the cultures and living conditions of the persons concerned. Their aim is to improve the quality of life.

Grass-roots and intermediate organizations which run independent economic, social and cultural projects are often in competition, divided and isolated, or they are dependent on government structures. It is therefore necessary to bring these organizations together in a fraternal organizational network that goes further than organic grouping. Priorities for development are:

- creation of a network structure for these organizations,
- development of a theoretical basis for practice, and of common strategies for providing information, claiming rights and planning activities, and
- coordinated representation, participation and negotiation in relations with governmental organizations and NGOs.

Financial support from the state is indispensable at the initial stage and in the subsequent stages of developing alternative enterprises. It is legitimate because such enterprises provide public services which are not (or are only partly) the responsibility of public agencies, because they have an experimental function, and because they create jobs which are not, or are only partly, self-financing. New regulations governing these sectors of activity are called for to guarantee them a legal existence, a sufficient degree of autonomy outside the market economy, a margin of possible freedom of movement outside segmented institutional sectors, and a safety net for people on temporary contracts.

At the local level, it is recommended that the authorities and intermediate bodies should be made more aware of, and better informed about collective enterprises doing useful public work, and should become more involved in their activities.



As regards cultural projects to revive traditional occupations and to increase appreciation of the historical heritage, specific support from public authorities is recommended for non-competitive and non-profit making enterprises.

It is suggested that plain language should be used in communications between public bodies and experts, on the one hand, and grass-roots organizations on the other.

In order to improve participatory action research, local partners expect researchers to be better acquainted with the issues of community development and parallel economies, to be able to suggest how the various parties can participate, and to propose specific contracts.

The following research topics are suggested:

- the formalization of vernacular basic education, the transmission of knowledge on a larger scale, and its transferability,
- the systematization of the methods of local and community development, based on local organizations' own knowledge and strategies,
- communication and dissemination of such information in networks, and
- methods of evaluating projects.

# Alpha 96: Basic Education and Work

Edited by Jean-Paul Hautecoeur

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