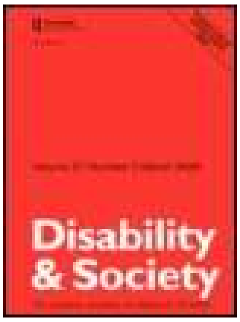

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CARFAX

Class and Disability: influences on learning expectations

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ABSTRACT *This paper describes some findings from in-depth interviews with 10 adults with disabilities, most of whom had strong working class connections. It places the findings in the context of feminist post-structuralist theory. Whilst the research is not directly to do with gender relationships, the theoretical framework highlights notions of difference, cultural value and meaning which play a significant role in the power relationships between dominant and subordinated groups.*

The interviews invited participants to tell their life story with regard to educational experiences. Analysis of these stories indicated that expectations, rather than ambitions, had influenced most people's educational activities as adults. The combination of poor childhood experiences, class and disability attitudes, had a powerful influence on personal goals, which appeared to misrepresent real potential or real interest, once stimulated.

The extract here is part of a larger research project which is looking at differentials amongst three different learner group cultures. The research is concerned with the mismatch of expectations among university continuing education providers and those of under-represented groups.

This paper outlines some preliminary findings from research which started in March 1993 with three groups of new adult learners. It looks at some themes resulting from exploratory interviews with the learner groups in the context of feminist post-structuralist theory. My analysis argues that the combined effect of social class and disability experiences for one of the interview groups, creates a culture of expectations which position the self in relation to formal adult education, rather than creates a negative attitude to learning itself. First, I shall explain the background to this study, how the interview groups were selected and the theoretical framework which is now informing the research. The paper will then focus on findings from a group of adults with physical disabilities, most of whom were from working class backgrounds.

Background to the Study: identifying who to research and why

Lancaster University Department of Continuing Education initiated an outreach programme three years ago, which aimed to increase participation in university adult education by people who are disproportionately under-represented in its mainstream

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courses. Whilst no one definition describes such adults, they are generally distinguished by virtue of their early school leaving age, minimal academic qualifications and manual or blue-collar occupations (Woodley *et al.*, 1987; McGivney, 1990, 1992; Sargant, 1991). Furthermore, their socio-economic status and qualifications are frequently a result of educational disadvantage linked to gender, disability or race issues (Kaushal, 1988, Dadzie, 1990; Barnes, 1991; Metcalf 1993).

Whilst a number of theories link participation to emotional, psychological and cultural influences as well as practical issues (for example, McClusky, 1963; Miller, 1967; Jarvis, 1987), writers such as Cross (1981), Sargant (1991) and Maguire *et al.* (1993) highlight the need for research evidence which examines these factors in detail, particularly in relation to cultural sub groups. The outreach programme provided a specific context for some unanswered questions.

The context was university education as a distinctive and essentially separate cultural entity which had to match the needs of a variety of outreach contacts with their own cultures and life values. The need to build a relationship between university learning, and the experience and values of such diverse groups was the impetus for generating the research questions. For instance, how have people acquired their belief systems and perceptions of education? How do they perceive universities in relation to their own learning potential? What is the effect of university intervention into the learning lives of these groups and are there distinctive cultural values towards education and learning which might inform future practice?

The research questions highlighted two issues. First, the need to adopt an appropriate methodology for obtaining my data and, secondly, the search for a theoretical framework which would help me conceptualise my findings. With regard to methodology, McGivney (1990) emphasises the need for a personal approach when obtaining information about educational participation issues. Furthermore, life history research has recently been promoted as a useful means of understanding current values in relation to past experience. Indeed, Thomson's own conference paper (1993) at the 1994 SCUTREA conference affirms this view:

> The process of remembering could be a key to understanding the ways in which certain individual and collective versions of the past are active in the present. (p. 98)

Whilst the factual accuracy of individual memories can raise questions concerning truth and validity (Thompson, 1978), most proponents of life history research see its very interpretive value as a demonstration of how people give meaning to their lives (Thompson, 1990; Usher, 1995). In particular, life history is seen as a useful starting point for helping us see how people position themselves in relation to the social context of their lives (Sparkes, 1994). The knowledge which the interviewees displayed as a result of their experiences and social context would form the basis of my study. Therefore, for this initial stage, the collection of life histories in relation to education themes and values was my starting point for the research focus.

The life history research model also helped me focus on the theoretical context for my analysis. Life history research is concerned with individuality, the dynamics of change and how knowledge is culturally and historically situated (Sparkes, 1994; Usher, 1995). Theoretical perspectives on notions of difference, interpretation and meaning, and the questioning of normative values are located most firmly in feminist post-structuralist literature. There are indications that current critiques of disability literature are beginning to make similar connections between these concepts and the power relationships involved in objectifying (and thereby devaluing) disability as 'other' (for example, Wendell, 1989; Morris, 1992; Shakespeare, 1994). Furthermore, questions concerning normative notions of adulthood and their incongruity with disabled people's lives (Corbett & Barton, 1992), highlight the need to create a framework for viewing disabled people as a marginalised culture on comparable lines to the way race and gender are conceptualised.

Feminist Post-structuralist Theory

Space does not permit a detailed exposition of the wide ranging literature on these topics. The following paragraphs outline some key themes which are informing the theoretical understanding of this research in progress.

Whilst gender issues are not the main focus of this research, the connection between the study and feminist poststructuralism lies in their shared emphasis on deconstructing common assumptions about truth and reality, by reconstructing alternative realities from the viewpoint of marginalised groups. The literature located in feminist post-structuralist theories claims there are alternative realities and truths, particularly in relation to gender (for example, Weedon, 1987; Weiner, 1994). It also stresses that these realities and truths are often not recognised by dominant ideologies or cultures. In particular, notions of common sense and rationality are expressed by the dominant cultures through culturally specific discourses of language and normative practices (Rabinow, 1984). These discourses are influenced by power relationships and historical changes which may serve to reconstruct reality over time and in different contexts. Dominant power relationships, however, are usually sustained through the particular, objectified and legitimated role of institutions and societal laws (Bourdieu, 1993; Rabinow, 1984; Wuthnow *et al.*, 1984). The result is that alternative cultural values and forms of knowledge rarely receive recognition or representation in institutional or legal structures and practices. When such a comparison is applied to education, the result is marginalisation and exclusion for some people (Jarvis, 1992).

The research claims that these arguments are applicable to a range of cultures and groups. It sought to investigate what forms of discourse were historically contributing to a disjunction between university continuing education courses and the learning interests of marginalised adults. The research groups were selected partly for their limited, previous participation in formal provision through educational institutions and also because each learner group represented a culture which is statistically underrepresented in university continuing education.

The Process

I chose for my study three adult communities who had received some continuity of experience with the outreach programme and with whom positive relationships were forming. They all completed an initial questionnaire asking for statistical details and listing possible reasons for attending the outreach courses. Two groups were interviewed by role model contacts, who could relate more closely than I to the social and educational backgrounds of their learners. As I was the most consistent course tutor for the third group, disabled adults from a social services day centre, I became their interviewer, though the views of disabled tutors were also recorded.

The empirical data is drawn primarily from the three outreach learner groups, consisting of 10 working class older adults from Portside; 10 disabled adults from Wyrevale and 10 Asian women from Loamshire (the place names are fictitious). All three groups have been interviewed again since this paper, along with key community contacts, tutors and staff in Continuing Education Departments.

Twenty-five of the 30 interviewees were women. This fact perhaps facilitated the adoption of feminist literature, though gender issues were often dominated by other forms of difference. All interviews were taped and transcribed. The Asian women were interviewed in their mother tongue and their responses translated by the interviewer into a second tape for transcribing.

Analysis of each interview group initially resulted in three broad coding classifications. These were: cultural norms (including historical timespan influences, expectations and educational goals, gender, race or disability issues); feelings about themselves as learners (including self-image and personal priorities affecting learning activities); and university images (including who goes to university and why, and responses to teaching received on the outreach programme). The findings indicated that, for different reasons, each group was functioning in a culture of accumulated experiences and belief systems which confirmed different expectations, rather than justified their exclusion, from today's higher education climate. The concept of educational value and universities depended, for some, on defined boundaries. Others developed new concepts of education in relation to how they felt subsequent experiences valued them as people.

This paper only discusses findings from one interview group. The following extract from the first interview analysis assesses responses from adults with disabilities at Wyrevale Day Centre. It analyses their experiences and how they position themselves in relation to work and education in the contexts of their schooling and disability, and their present connection with the day centre. The findings highlight the interviewees' struggles against imposed realities, and how they reconstructed their own realities to accommodate and survive the different definitions of themselves which have been constructed by dominant discourses.

Wyrevale Interview Group

Commonalities for this group were their experience of disability (three were born disabled), long-term unemployment and a relationship, for all but one, to the Social

Services run day centre. The interviewees participated in a variety of personal development courses through the outreach programme, with the opportunity to attend one or two short courses on topics of general interest, such as local history. The majority were aged between 40 and 55 years.

Most of the Wyrevale participants had working class roots, though one attended a private, Methodist school. In contrast to the interviewees from Portside, their initial unskilled work experience rarely extended into positions of responsibility. For the three people born with cerebral palsy, this was a direct result of poor school and employer attitudes. All three were able to walk as teenagers though two spent considerable time in hospital during their school days. Carol, the least severely affected, went to grammar school, while Gillian and Paul eventually attended special school. In spite of their different learning opportunities, these three shared similar educational and subsequent employment struggles compared to the other seven respondents, who acquired their disability later in life. Aspects of the interviewees' stories are presented thematically. These are supplemented by my comments on the implications of the accumulated picture of their lives.

Disability: family, school, work and other agencies

Perhaps the most noticeable impact of disability on each respondent is the way their lives were shaped by institutional interventions (school and hospitals) which ultimately helped define their patterns of behaviour as adults, their awareness of entitlements, and even access to knowledge and the curriculum. Each can provide an example of this. At school, Carol's headteacher wrote to her doctor concerning her developing difficulties with writing. On doctor's recommendations she left school irrespective of her academic potential: 'They said if I had a job to go to, it was really pointless to take the exams, because there wasn't the pressure on people then'. The professional and medical perceptions of physical disability here clearly overrode any perceptions of academic ability, even though Carol's condition was relatively mild.

Gillian's example shows how the legitimated rationality of school and medical institutions extended into her family's consciousness. At the age of 14 her parents rejected a belated offer for Gillian to attend mainstream school, believing she had received all the education necessary for a disabled child. In this instance, it was Gillian's parents who sustained a stereotype perception of her disability: ('They used to treat me like a wee kiddie ... treated me with kid gloves') compounded by lack of information about their daughter's potential. Their loving and caring attitude did not translate into belief in her learning potential. [This experience confirms a recent survey by Pilling (1990) where she reveals that adults are more likely to 'escape from disadvantage' through parental ambition, than through good family relationships.]

Paul received similar expectations from teachers of his educational capabilities based on his physical condition. At primary school he was often left to his own devices at the back of the class and gradually slipped behind the other children because of endless operations: 'I don't think the teachers were really interested in helping me'. Even though he is 11 years younger than Gillian and in an era where

'O' level and CSE exams were commonplace for all schools, Paul was not given these opportunities at his special school: 'I think a lot of the staff thought that when people left the school that would be it, they'd just do nothing with their lives'.

For disabled children, then there is a medical assumption that operations and hospitalisation over-ride educational priorities. The unjustifiable and long-term effects of medically reprioritising disabled children's development needs, irrespective of their educational potential, is a recently well-documented issue (see, for example, Oliver, 1990; Barnes, 1991). Neither Gillian nor Paul speculated on the usefulness of their hospital visits, though both reflected on what education they might have had in a mainstream setting. Although childhood medical observations were not challenged, as adults they began to construct alternative realities about continued medical interventions and their work capabilities. A number of examples illustrate this point. First, Paul was dismissed on health grounds from his trainee commi chef's post after completing more than two years in the company: 'The medical board said I was unfit for work for that company although I'd worked for them for two and a half years'. A second example occurred after several years of different jobs and a spell of unemployment. Paul's unemployment benefit ran out and his doctor suggested going over to invalidity benefit: 'So then I went ... for a medical and they then wanted to know why I was working in the first place because in their opinion I shouldn't have been'. The effect of these experiences and representations of truth appear to contradict his own sense of reality. His comments in the interview suggested he had begun to question the dominant discourse of meanings for words such as 'rights' and 'access' with regard to his own ability to challenge other people's interpretations. He commented on the long-term effect of such contradictions on his confidence.

> It knocks it because they're not giving you the chance to do what you want to do, then if you fight for your rights they think you shouldn't fight for your rights. (Paul).

Criticism of social and medical perceptions of disability as a cureless ailment, rather than a physical condition are increasing (for example, Corbett & Barton, 1992; Swain *et al.*, 1993). This can be explained as the effect of domination positioning perceived deviance as 'other'. Usher & Edwards (1995) refer to how 'knowledgeable (expert) discourses' form the basis for power strategies and enable experts to intervene to the extent that individuals 'desire' to comply and cooperate' (p. 14). Whilst historical progress on attitudinal change is slow (for these interviewees the experiences range from 48 years ago in Gillian's case to as little as 12 months ago for Henry, who was recovering from a stroke); there are indications that many of the interviewees initially struggled against such objectified definitions of themselves. Henry cited two examples of his struggle to regain some sense of independence since his stroke. First, an attempt to take up driving lessons was thwarted by someone telling the hospital. Secondly, his insistence on walking, rather than be wheelchaired to his social services transport to Wyrevale was also threatened:

> At night time when the ambulance came for me I said to them 'I walked

> in this morning, I'll walk out now'. I got up and one of the nurses shouted at me in a guttural voice 'where do you think you're going...' and she said 'Sit down!'. And I was a bit taken aback but I stood my ground. (Henry)

Disability attitudes, like gender issues, can be seen to stem from professional agencies, which are then filtered down, through discursive processes, to work attitudes and family perceptions. Carol, Paul and Gillian all cited prejudice amongst employment agencies as well as employers towards their conditions. Their initial struggles give credence to Foucault's claim that power and resistance are interdependent (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p.147). Repeated experiences over time, however, eroded their ability to sustain an alternative inner reality to the imposed regimes of truth. In Carol's case this has had a devastating and permanent effect on her personality: 'I used to be sort of really free and easy person and um full of vim and "oh I can do it!" ' until she submitted completely after her unfair dismissal by new management and subsequent failure to get a job elsewhere: 'The doctor said they'd taken all me confidence away'. For Paul and Gillian the experience was more gradual. Both cited different, but equally obstructive, situations. For Gillian an imposed green card system for disabled people, provided by the employment agency, prevented her from getting a job for two years. Her economic survival ultimately depended on her ability to construct alternative discourses and life patterns from those on offer in order to access the same work opportunities as the rest of her family. Eventually, Gillian bypassed the system and created her own boundaries for truth, based on her experience of reality, rather than the institutionally defined one:

> One particular day I forgot the card and I never showed it and I told a bare faced lie. I told them that I went to mainstream school and then I got the job. (Gillian)

By withholding her green card, she deprived the agency of the knowledge which gave it power over her. As a result of withheld knowledge the balance of power shifted sufficiently for Gillian to obtain a job.

Disability and Day Centres

Whilst there are many other individual stories from the interviewees, it is worth noting the effect of the one common denominator on nine of these people—that of Wyrevale Day Centre itself. The centre depicts the role of institutions in the form of pastoral and disciplinary power. Wyrevale is managed by professional employees of the Social Services Department. Participants are fetched to and from home in adapted vehicles, and provided with a meal and activities between 10.00 am and 3.30 pm each day they attend. Eight of the interviewees had been attending for anything between four and 18 years. In each case, their attendance had symbolised a critical stage in their lives—the prospect of permanent unemployment, a submission to dependency and progressionless existence: 'There's nowhere else to go' (Carol). Management at the centre has changed in the last few years, resulting in increased involvement by educational institutions. Nevertheless, the centre reflects the culture of marginality and segregation which the majority of respondents struggled against during their earlier life. It seems to perpetuate the role of 'no-encouragement' which most of these adults have been trained to accept from an early age. These observations are reinforced by documentation from Barnes (1991, 1993), and Corbett & Barton (1992). For instance Barnes (1993) emphasises the highly segregative aspect of day centres in their professional structure and philosophy of 'enlightened guardian model of care' as an alternative to unemployment (p. 170). Any activities are explicitly voluntary, with an occupying, rather than developmental, goal and centre clientele belong disproportionately to 'overtly disadvantaged minorities' (*ibid*). Corbett & Barton (1992) relate the day centre model of care to the legacy of segregated schooling where participants were 'conditioned' to not making independent decisions' (p. 140). Even where users form user committees and activities are provided, the style can be more one of 'manipulative control' (Barnes, 1993, p. 174). All these factors applied to Wyrevale Day Centre and seem embedded in their historically situated, institutional model of care. In Foucauldian terms the centre manifests an interplay of power relationships through an objectified discourse which asserts helping and liberation from individual isolation. It is a discourse which makes helplessness acceptable when associated with disability, thereby creating a climate of self-management of one's own dependency. As a result, overt oppression is displaced by the apparent function of helping and providing activity choices. This form of hidden power has been described as a 'matrix of emancipation/oppression which functions as a form of legitimated regulation of post modernism' (Usher & Edwards, 1995, p. 14). It is perhaps significant that even though at least four admitted to being bored at the centre, all valued the environment. Later interviews have suggested this was partly because the participants had created, amongst themselves, their own culture of acceptance for each other—which the outside world has found so hard. In its own way, this again reinforces the acceptability of institutionalised empowerment. The symbolic role of Wyrevale seems to legalise the dispossessed status of disability, an image of low socio-economic status and a culture of dependency, with limited self-advocacy or opportunity for autonomy. Many of the interviewees described past attempts at autonomy during their period of disablement. Yet all were confronted with alternative messages which seem eventually to have led them into a community which reinforces their earlier negative images of capability—from schools, employment agencies and even family. The role of institutions in legitimising dominant norms and values is epitomised here in its representation of disability as deviation and 'otherness'. The contrasting effect of disjunction between the presented reality of Wyrevale and an individual's experienced reality of struggle becomes a confusing experience for people whose perceived access to adult education is through more institutions.

Society then has for one reason or another placed the people being interviewed, into an almost non-existent state, resulting ultimately in a complete cessation of paid work. In keeping with Barnes' identification of overtly disadvantaged groups with such centres, there did also seem to be a link for this group between disability and limited school qualifications, with a tendency amongst the respondents towards unskilled job histories. Furthermore, amongst those with acquired disability, poor family, school or religion related experiences accounted for six out of seven life stories. Whilst poverty, family death and lack of confidence were a feature of the Portside interviewees' stories, none of them suffered additional disadvantages to the isolating extent described amongst the Wyrevale group. Where the disability itself seemed less severe, then frequently the Wyrevale people's personal circumstances have shown an acute contrast to the happier and more 'family orientated' stories from Portside.

Although disability circumstances do have a practical influence on involvement in adult education, the above comments also indicate that the majority of the group also shared a range of working class discourses and expectations which influenced their perceptions of themselves and the role of education in their lives. Some of these were psychologically weakened by poor early relationships, rendering them susceptible to the intervention of dominant power-knowledge strategies. These are now explored in relation to school, work and the family. As a result of the power-knowledge formations which position working class adults as 'other' in relation to education, the individuals constructed their identity around desires and expectations based on those discourses provided by the experts, the educators.

Working Class Expectations and Educational Goals

The Department's outreach programme attempted to challenge institutional procedures for accessing learning by offering a discourse of meanings which recreated the idea and value of formal learning. The procedural strategy was to identify criteria which made overt connections between the learner and course content; for example, by inviting participation rather than wait for independent decisions through impersonal publicity and locating course content directly with the experiences of the participants. The curriculum was provided on the basis of attempting to reference itself against truths and norms which were already determined within the socio-economic context of the participants' lives—through school, home and work. This meant accepting the possibility of an imposed consciousness which had already negated the possibility of learning or work for people with disabilities (Preece 1995). The interviews sought to validate these assumptions and expose the present day context for the participants' own versions of truth—how they distinguished between forms of knowledge which they had acquired, and forms of knowledge which seemed to have authority and status within the education system.

The respondents' own words helped explained the origin of these values. Several people, indicated, for instance, that official education was viewed as something external to their lives. Some simply excluded themselves from its accessibility: 'I thought they were all, you know, toffee nose jobs—just posh people—you know like Eton, Harrow, Oxford, Cambridge' (Dave). More significant are the associations the respondents did make between what is valued as education and the learning which they themselves undertook. These often stemmed from family and school expectations.

Perceived school expectations of these interviewees seemed, for whatever reasons, very low. There appeared to be no recognition of formal learning as a valuable activity in its own right or of its work-related value. Carol was pushed out on professional advice into 'a job', in spite of obvious academic capabilities, and Susan's own mother was discouraged by her headteacher from giving any attention to last minute schooling:

> Before I left school—I broke me leg at school—and I was off school from Christmas to Easter. So me mother went to see the headmaster and asked him could I have some homework and he said 'no, what she hadn't learnt now she wouldn't learn with homework. (Susan)

For Dave, from the age of 13 his approved school concentrated on work experience, allowing only one day a week for more formal education. Few had any perception that people might continue study beyond school: 'In them days people just didn't go to college' (Joan) and from Tony: 'There was no such thing as O levels and A levels', while Susan said: 'You just left and went out to work' and Mandy commented: 'There was no talk or encouragement for further education'.

When asked about their parents' attitude to education there was a mixed response. In some cases, parental attitudes followed the advice or expectations delivered by the school. The emphasis was on supporting your child's entry into his or her first job. In other cases, there is some indication that parents encouraged a career or work training. Tony's grandparents supported and encouraged him to serve an apprenticeship like his forefathers. Henry also followed family tradition into farming. However, only Paul, the youngest, actually mentioned any direct parental enthusiasm for him staying on at school.

Current attitudes to education then, seem to stem from preformulated conceptions, linked to socio-economic issues, reinforced by professionals, peers and family. Desire for work, rather than education was a rationale supported by the experts. At least three people echoed almost word for word how easily jobs were available during the 1950s and 1960s: 'You could walk out of a job on Saturday and get another one on Monday' (Carol, Tony, Dave). The link between work and education was, for most of the Wyrevale people, very tenuous. Only June did work related training as a home help and Tony completed his apprenticeship. Henry also reported attending a number of sales reps talks in farming technology as part of their attempt to sell new products. For the rest, factory work offered limited prospects, though June and Gillian cited some opportunities for learning different skills. In fact, June eventually became 'key girl' which meant she could replace any person's job on the conveyor belt: 'I worked my way up as far as I could go in the factory'. There were indications of changing perceptions about the connection between education and work, however. For instance, Carol and June made the distinction that: nowadays you need more qualifications for different jobs' (Carol); and one of Henry's reasons for attending the outreach courses was work-related. Otherwise, though, any recognition of this potential link, even now, was offset by an awareness of the overriding effects of the disability label: 'Once you've got a disability nowadays they don't want to know' (Carol).

Although Mandy and Susan did talk about encouraging their children at school, few respondents showed any consciousness of how further or higher education systems function, even when their own children developed professional careers. Mandy and Joan were bemused by the idea that further and higher education courses might be different: 'Would they not be very similar I would imagine? ... there wouldn't be an awful difference in them surely, would there?' (Mandy), while Dave and Susan stated they thought any kind of further education was just for snobs. Others, like Gillian and June felt it catered only for young people. With this kind of expectation, it is hardly surprising, then, that many did not seek out information themselves. It is interesting to note that where there were indications of parental support for education the respondents did, indeed, as adults attempt to attend college. June did some home help-related training, Tony tried a disability awareness course and Paul started a photography course. Whilst Gillian had no apparent support from home, she did receive a raised awareness of her untapped potential through the offer of an 11th hour mainstream education. Although she never made it to college this experience, coupled with her sons encouragement: 'They're always telling me, "go for it mammy" ' did increase her motivation to learn. The indications from some of these findings suggest that whilst power-knowledge relationship and subjective identities are constructed within frameworks of legitimated exclusions, the result is a continuum of expectations which are dependent on historical interaction and changing discourses for recreating truth. The indications also are that discourses can alter with the result that individuals can re-invest their expectations for self.

Compared with the Portside respondents many in this group seem, on first reading, to be further removed from and less interested in the notion of education and learning. As adults they had previously demonstrated little initiative to attend formal education and six of them stated they: 'never even thought about it'. Yet their personal stories indicate two possible contradictions to this theory. First, more so than in the Portside interviews, this group talked about desired practical careers and preferences for practical subjects at school, such as hairdressing, catering, and art and craft. Whilst physical disability would inevitably have prevented some career choices such as becoming a policeman, the other aspirations were simply not met, irrespective of physical impairments. The notion of what is publicly valued educational material, reinforced by the objectified messages of the experts, has influenced how the Wyrevale people related to formal provision in later life. In some cases, when boundaries of legitimate learning were crossed, this resulted in self-imposed denial. For example, Paul revealed a list of first aid qualifications which he omitted from an earlier questionnaire of achievements. When asked why, he stated: 'I didn't think that would qualify, actually, that's why I didn't bother'.

These arguments are further demonstrated in the way the professional perception of disability itself places most of these people in a world where activities are presented in a vacuum without progression links. The criteria for education and learning was a mystery which most of the Wyrevale participants were still grappling with as outsiders looking in. One example may help to demonstrate this confusion. Nearly all the Wyrevale group used one dominant phrase when discussing their early education: 'We weren't encouraged'. Yet when discussing their disability, they used a different phrase: 'You've got to fight' (Carol, Paul, Dave, Gillian). A picture emerges of people expending large amounts of energy fighting for survival against a lifetime pattern of attitudes which discourage acquisition of the very skills which could ease their struggles now. In such a climate it is irresponsible to say these people were not interested in education. Their discourses of struggle have constantly been refracted against externally legitimated boundaries for power and knowledge.

The implication is that individuals with these kinds of experiences may be unlikely to instinctively seek out formal learning unless it is presented in some other guise. Nevertheless, given the experience of achievement, their motivation can be stimulated.

Perhaps another significant difference for this interview group was their accessibility to discursive forms of intervention by individuals who encouraged them to learn. Most of the Portside group were able to identify educational encouragement at some stage during their childhood. There was a significant number of the Wyrevale group who identified much more recent contacts as their first source of encouragement. June, Dave and Susan cited the existing Wyrevale management, Tony referred to a college outreach visit two or three years ago and Gillian placed emphasis on the combined encouragement from her sons and the university outreach experience itself to stimulate her long-standing, but latent desire to: 'better meself'.

Furthermore, if, as the Portside respondents indicated, for working class adults educational values are linked to the collective values of family and peer support, then this group were isolated in every sense. Wyrevale was their main source of collective relationships, because many lived alone, or at least in isolation because of transport problems. Even more recent work and training opportunities were not available because most had been unemployed for years.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted a number of issues concerning adult education provision for under-represented groups. These relate to how knowledge is defined and valued, how truth is determined and the influence of life experience in creating meaning. For example, educational practices which rely on self-direction and forward planning will exclude adults who are expecting to be invited to learn, and whose socio-economic situation or personal circumstances require minimum forward planning.

The paper has demonstrated how each individual adult has developed alternative meanings and interpretations as strategies for survival. The resultant effect for some disabled adults is that they have accumulated combined school, work and institutional experiences whose boundaries reflect the excluding, rather than including reference points of dominant cultures. The post-structuralist theory of discourse and power structures as rational forms of management can show how disability is contradictorily norm referenced, and adulthood inappropriately defined in relation to many disabled people's experiences of independence and autonomy. The combined effect of individual experiences means the interviewees absorbed images of educational value and access to learning which positioned them in ways which contrasted overtly with institutional procedures for course provision.

Moreover, Education for many at Wyrevale was seen in a total vacuum without more conventional working class links and without existing role model peer pressure. These expectations inevitably had a consequent effect on their self-esteem (and ultimately their self-regulation), rather than their ability to learn or their enthusiasm once they experienced the possibilities. The overall impression gained from the Wyrevale group was that the possibility of learning, as an activity to which they could contribute, was a new concept. The accumulative effect of disciplinary and pastoral power at school, work and social levels provided knowledge which contributed to exclusive, as well as indistinguishable, images of further or higher education. Their experiences resulted in distorted self-images as potential learners, in spite of a keen interest in the learning process offered to them through the outreach programme. The implications of encouraging education for 'non-participants' are documented (see, for example, Further Education Unit, 1990), but often as a checklist of needs, rather than in connection with researched documentation of accumulated experiences and values. This paper hopefully demonstrates the value of identifying appropriate education strategies in response to in depth discussion with underrepresented or marginalised groups. One such strategy might be to problematize some of the presented-as-given understandings which shape educational provision and assumptions about adulthood—by listening to potential participants and working with the understandings manifested by them.

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