

WE MAKE THE ROAD BY WALKING¹ – COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE BUILDING AND ACTION

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ABSTRACT

The current tendencies in most European societies can be characterised by the strengthening of power and control on a societal level as well as in education. In working life processes of de-qualification of work are spreading to wider areas and branches. The question we raise in this paper is whether there is any potential in adult education that can counterbalance these tendencies. We therefore scrutinize three radical traditions, those of: the Myles Horton at Highlander, the Paulo Freire pedagogy and the Swedish Research Circle. We conclude that there are some important common elements that must be present for the critical and empowering potential to be realised. In each of the three cases the collective knowledge building characterising the work clearly either includes or inspires action. So there is an obvious connection to the growing Participatory Action Research (PAR) paradigm that could be strengthened by using insights from radical adult education.

BACKGROUND

The market orientation in practically all educational areas seems to be spreading with an ever increasing speed all around the world. In principle this means that education is more and more treated like a commodity. This has opened up for profit hungry transnational companies who can buy and sell schools any way they chose in order to get as high return on their capital as possible. The tendency at universities is increasingly being characterised as what has been labelled as “academic capitalism” (cf. Delanty, 2001, pp. 115-129). An important part of this change, not least in Sweden, is the increasing bureaucratic control concerning the everyday work at all educational levels. In Sweden, for example, the separate National School Inspection Authority has recently been established to increase the control in schools.

These tendencies have been identified and described already many years ago by researchers like Harry Braverman and Basil Bernstein.

Braverman's (1974/1977) classical book about the degradation of labour during the 20th century could very well be a description of current processes in working life. His observations of what was going on almost half a century ago are also valid now. The only difference worth

¹ Horton, Myles & Freire, Paulo (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. Eds. Brenda Bell, John Gaventa and John Peters. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

mentioning would be that the changes are much more rapid today. Another important circumstance that Braverman points to is the extensive and unnecessary education for an increasing number of jobs that only demands adaptation. This description certainly is not less accurate in the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century.

Basil Bernstein's concepts from his writings in the 1970ies, *Class, codes and control* and 1990ies (Bernstein 1996) are fruitful in discussing the changes in society - and even more in the educational sector - that has happened during and after his research. His main concepts about *power and classification* and *control and framing*, developed from the 1960ies and on, have been used in many contexts and can still be useful in order to understand the situation today. In the chapter "Aspects of the relations between education and production" (Bernstein, 1975, pp. 174-200) he emphasises that it also is important to note the relationship between class and codes:

"Class is conceived as the fundamental *dominant cultural category*, created and maintained by the mode of production. It is the basic classification which creates the social relationships of production. However, the realizations of this dominant social category vary in time. That is, the *form* taken by the social relationships of education has changed over time." (p.175)

In this context he also notes the possibility of both "the dependent and relative autonomous features and relationships between education and production" (ibid). At this time he discusses the many different faces that education can take and also puts forward that a *code* is determined by the values of classification and framing: "A code is a regulative principle, tacitly acquired, which integrates relevant meanings, the form of their realizations and their evoking contexts" (p.180).

Different codes, classification and framing change and give also the possibility to different practices in production as well as in educational settings. In any society though, the origin of the dominant code of schools is repeating the dominant cultural category: "In capitalist societies this is class. Class structure and relationships constitute and regulate both the distribution of power and the principles of control." (p.181)

Bernstein also emphasises that "education is dependent upon production but also possesses a specific independence or relative autonomy in the constituting of its codes" (pp.191-192). Thus, he notes that: "if the systemic relations of education are strengthened, it increases the penetration of power relationships into education" (ibid).

In the book from 1996 Basil Bernstein summarises many different research projects, conducted by himself and colleagues around him. In a chapter named "Thoughts on the Trivium and Quadrivium: The Divorce of Knowledge from the Knower" he discusses what this break meant in the 1990ies and we can easily see the relevance of this:

"Today throughout Europe, led by the USA there is a new principle guiding the latest transitions of capitalism. The principles of the market and its managers are more and more the managers of the policy and practises of education. Market relevance is becoming the key orientating criterion for the selection of discourses, their relation to each other, their forms and their research. This movement has profound implications from the primary school to the university.

This can be seen in the stress on basic measurable skills at the primary level, vocational courses and specializations at the secondary level, spurious decentralization and the new instruments of state control over higher education and research.” (Bernstein, 1996, p. 87)

In a research project, developed at Stockholm University 2001-2006 (Härnsten & Wingård, 2007), a group of eleven researchers scrutinised the gender structures in university education, partly by using participatory research. Among their very apparent observations was that:

“*The power* over universities is conducted by both the state and the private sector through the current economic system. Here resources allocated to the already well known are favoured, to that which colleagues and the right receivers appreciate and feel comfortable with... Research grants are given to already established and secure environments that are not too challenging ...” (p. 73).

They further noted the following:

“*The control* that is exercised over the operation of universities is lacking corresponding examples in modern time. The state is controlling the activities through all regulations, evaluations and decrees that emanate from a number of different levels in the system. This results in a rigid and incredibly time-consuming procedure in the activity. The time that today is used to design, scrutinise, make transparent, publish on the Internet, control and so on, all course descriptions, curriculums and study plans is appalling. The time of the teachers and researchers can to a considerably less degree be devoted to meeting the students in an open and mutually constructive spirit.” (ibid)

But, in the project the researchers also found this:

“There are undercurrents also within the academy that are based on different and – in our view – considerably more interesting perspectives. We who have had the privilege to work in this project are convinced that pedagogy – as science and as practise – can be extremely exciting and not least important for illuminating what is considered as relevant knowledge, who decides this and, not least, how is it produced.” (Härnsten & Wingård, 2007, p. 76)

It is issues like these that is governing science and education (*bildung*) from a democratic perspective and what we as researchers and teachers have to develop. Similar ambitions have earlier also been expressed by e.g. Taylor, Barr and Steele (2002).

The observed tendencies in most educational activity has made us more and more interested in finding examples that are demonstrating the possibility to work against the currents.

THREE RADICAL ADULT EDUCATION TRADITIONS

The question we raise in this paper is whether there is any potential in adult education that can counterbalance these tendencies. We therefore scrutinize three radical traditions. Myles Horton at Highlander was partly inspired by the Scandinavian folk high schools and created a similar kind of school. This Highlander tradition has been an important force for both the labour movement and the civil rights movement in the United States. Paulo Freire developed in South America the well-known liberating and empowering "pedagogy of the oppressed" that has been influential all over the world. In Europe the research circle tradition, with its heritage from the Swedish labour movement and popular education, was developed in the 1970ies as a tool for cooperation between trade unions and universities. What is the potential in these three traditions for collective knowledge building and action? What can be discerned by looking critically at the theoretical foundations and the practical operation of each of them? We use a selection of a few examples of important writings from each of these traditions and analyse the theoretical and practical aspects that have been most significant.

MYLES HORTON AND THE HIGHLANDER TRADITION

Myles Horton (1905-1990), one of the founders of Highlander Folk School in 1932, is an important North American educational thinker who worked very consequentially according to his ideas. He got inspiration from a number of radical intellectuals like e.g. Reinhold Niebuhr, Jane Addams and John Dewey. Some of his radical friends persuaded him to visit Denmark in order to learn more about their Folk High Schools. It was also with practical and economic support from friends that he was able to find a place in the Appalachian Mountains in Tennessee and start the Highlander Folk School building on many of the characteristics of the Scandinavian Folk High Schools.

Education "from the bottom up, to help powerless people empower each other and become collectively involved" (Horton, 1976, cited in Jacobs, 2003, p. 257) is the idea that has been practised in Highlander. Horton explains in an interview in 1986 the reason behind this: "We were interested in building a democratic society and were going to use education as one of the means to changing society." (Jacobs, 2003, p. 34) He further stresses that Highlander is not a school but educational (and Horton points to the basic meaning of the word educate that is to "draw out instead of pour in"). According to Horton: "The purpose of Highlander has always been the same: to try to contribute toward a genuine democratic society through radical social, economic, political, and cultural change in this country." (ibid) He immediately explains that by democracy, he means it "in the full philosophical sense of people governing themselves and working out the system that make that kind of relationship possible".

Frank Adams who has written about the idea of Highlander notes that "...Highlander sought to educate people away from the dead end of individualism and into the freedom that grows from cooperation and collective solutions" (Adams, 1975, p. 208). The same author observes that Dewey, whose thinking Horton was inspired by, claimed that "civil and political democracy were meaningless without equivalent economic and industrial democracy" (Adams, 1975, p. 13). The kind of society that Highlander was aiming at was:

"...a society organized on the basis of voluntary association and mutual cooperation, rather than limited democracy and authoritarianism. The ideal of

educating for citizenship in a fully free democracy is vastly different from the ideal of educating to serve a state..." (Adams, 1975, p. 205).

Horton admits that Highlander from the beginning had the explicit goal to contribute to a revolutionary change and to achieve economic democracy as well as a political democracy (Jacobs, 2003, p. 34).

When Horton (in a text from 1973) is developing his thoughts concerning democracy he writes that "a range of hitherto unfamiliar decision-making methods" should be developed and that they should "involve all those affected by the decisions being made" (Cited in Jacobs, 2003, p. 248). He also notes that education "is too important to be left in the hands of institutions and experts". Radical educators, he suggests, should spend "half of his work time in the community" (p. 249). According to Horton the only way to work for radical changes in the educational system is "for educators to make alliances with as many likeminded people as they can". (p. 250)

In the same text from 1973 Horton acknowledges the influences and inspiration from similar contexts and what the lessons are:

"We have learned from the folk schools in this country and abroad, from Paulo Freire and other like him, and from the great popular movements of this century that people become motivated when they are personally involved in processes relating directly to them and their life situations." (ibid)

Among other sources that have supplied a background and been useful at Highlander, Horton mentions Marx that provided a perspective and at Highlander "we've always accepted a class analysis of society, and we know where we belong". (p. 267) He is also clear about the historic role of the working class. At Highlander the attempts to "build some solidarity" might be the beginning of a process "that could lead to revolution". (p. 269) To "get group solidarity and some cooperative spirit" is anyhow essential according to Horton (ibid).

The practical operation of the Highlander tradition is closely linked to the educational philosophy. Frank Adams (1975) writes that Horton became convinced that: "...the people, no matter, how poor or untutored, would know what they needed to learn, if he could only learn to listen to them and to translate what he heard into an educational program". (p. 24) From the beginning Horton had imagined that he would learn how to make decisions for the poor people but he then realised that "he should help people make their own decisions" (ibid).

In Horton's own words, what they actually do at Highlander is "to build on what they identify as their own problems...get them to share experiences and...introduce information only if specifically requested to do so." (Cited in Jacobs, 2003, p. 253)

It is very clear that Horton and the staff at Highlander were extremely cautious not to impose any knowledge on the participants. Horton explains this: "We think people become educated by analyzing their experience and learning from other people's experiences, rather than saying there's a certain body of knowledge that we need to give them." (Cited in Jacobs, 2003, p. 34) Rather a quality that was cherished at Highlander seems to be the ability of the staff to teach their own capacity to learn.

Adams (1975) notes that a fundamental pedagogical idea applied at Highlander is to “learn from the people” and “start their education where they are” (p. 206). Another typical Highlander idea that is practised is described by Horton in the following way:

“Probably the most important thing we do for people is to have them participate in an actual democratic experience – a ripe experience where people are free to talk and make decisions, where there is no discrimination, and where their experience is valued.” (Cited in Jacobs, 2003, p. 49)

PAULO FREIRE AND HIS EMANCIPATING PEDAGOGY

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) is probably the most well-known and cited proponent for emancipating and conscientization pedagogy. He is also often referred to as one of the important contributors in the Action Research tradition (See e.g. Reason & Bradbury 2001).

In his first book in English, published in 1970 in New York, Paulo Freire supplies the base for the more general and philosophic groundings for his pedagogy. His own theoretical and practical work had started already in 1947 in Brazil where he developed it during the beginning of the 1960ies with support from the progressive government at that time. But as it also became dangerous with its focus on liberation and critical consciousness he was put in jail for revolutionary activity after the military coup in 1964. Very soon he was released but urged to leave the country. In Chile he then could further deepen his work and also write a book about his experiences in Brazil (In Portuguese in 1967 and in French in 1970). Next year, in 1968 his more general book was ready, but never printed in Portuguese, instead in English 1970 and in German in 1971.

With the publishing of “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” in 1970, Freire became an internationally recognised educational thinker who highlighted the relationship between education, politics, imperialism and liberation.

First of all Freire is very clear about the fact that *education is never neutral*. Either it is an instrument for the domestication and domination of man or an instrument for man’s liberation. A pedagogy of freedom focuses on making people aware of how social structures are used as instruments of power and violence.

One important concept in Freire’s writing is the *culture of silence*. In addition to the situation in the third world Freire points to that the majority of the citizens in the industrialised countries must also be considered to be enclosed in the culture of silence. Not least through public education the oppressed become victims of an “oppression of their minds” consisting of various myths. He describes what this means in “modern society”:

“Perhaps the greatest tragedy of modern man is his domination by the force of these myths and his manipulation by organised advertising, ideological or otherwise. Gradually, without even realising the loss he relinquishes his capacity for choice; he is expelled from the orbit of decisions.” (Freire, 1974, p. 6)

This calls for a demystifying work and a scientific criticism of reality that should be developed in cooperation between scientists and practitioners. A problem, however, that Freire points to is that many scientists have a limited and flawed picture of reality due to the continuing specialisation into clearly defined fields. This might narrow the area of knowledge and result in what he calls "specialisms".

This demystifying work demands an alternative pedagogy:

"Our pedagogy cannot do without a vision of man and of the world. It formulates a scientific humanist conception which finds its expression in a dialogical praxis in which the teachers and learners together, in the act of analysing a dehumanising reality, denounce it while announcing its transformation in the name of the liberation of man. For this very reason, denunciation and annunciation in this utopian pedagogy are not meant to be empty words, but an historic commitment." (Freire, 1970, p. 40)

Already from the beginning of his writing Paulo Freire was very clear about how to use ideas and what the needed requirements were for the involved educators.

"The problem oriented education does not and cannot serve the interests of the oppressors. No oppressive system would allow the oppressed to ask the question: Why? Indeed only a revolutionary society can carry this kind of education through in a systematic way, but that does not mean that the revolutionary leaders need to take the whole power before they can use the method. In the revolutionary process the revolutionary leaders cannot use the bank method, as an interim action, legitimated by reasons of effectiveness and with the ambition to *sooner* behave in a genuine revolutionary way. They must be revolutionary – and I mean "dialogical" - from the beginning." (Freire, 1970 p. 87, translated from the Swedish edition)

Another fundamental concept in Freire's pedagogical thinking is of course: *dialogue*. This requires a strong faith in people, a faith which at the same time needs to be realistic in view of the existing conditions, but which must not for that matter forget the visionary aspect. Freire explains:

"Faith in man is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue... 'dialogical man' is critical and knows that although it is within the power of men to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation men may be impaired in the use of that power." (Freire, 1970, p. 60)

According to Freire dialogue is an encounter between individuals, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. A dialogue, then, cannot occur between those who wish to name the world and those who do not wish this naming. Another requirement is that both parties must practise humility. In addition to this Freire mentions hope and critical thinking as other prerequisites for a genuine dialogue. Without hope, you are resigned to a hopelessness characterised by a denial of and escape from the world. Critical thinking is related to action. For a critically thinking person, the continuing transformation of reality is the most important thing in the humanisation of man.

Hope is an important concept in Paulo Freire's work and he comes back to it many times. He is very clear about the necessity never to give up hope and to always find something to change, however small, in order to keep struggling.

In the "third world" as well as in the so called western countries Freire's work and writing has been used in alphabetisation as well as in different other ways to do liberating work. Not least has it inspired the folk high school movement in the Scandinavian countries. But it has also been misused, and reduced to a more general pedagogic idea about dialogue as a kind of "speech methodology" used in schools and other formalised educational settings. This has often resulted in a more "hidden pedagogy" in Bernstein's terminology, and in that way must be regarded as an even more effective manipulation and domination.

THE SWEDISH RESEARCH CIRCLE TRADITION

The research circle tradition in Sweden emerged in the 1970ies as a result of a pilot program concerning university courses for trade union representatives (Nilsson, 1990). For the union people the study circle was well known and an important part of popular education in Sweden. During the same decade many radical changes took place in the society among other things new labour laws were passed (above all The Co-Determination Act and The Work Environment Act, both of 1977). The trade unions turned to Lund University for knowledge that could help them to use these laws. The research circles were invented as a kind of bridge between the more general university knowledge and the experiential knowledge of the unions and their members. Later this idea spread to other contexts.

A research circle can be described as a kind of study circle that is strengthened by the participation of one or more university researchers. This arrangement provides a tool for collective and democratic knowledge work and thus contributes to breaking the divide between researchers and researched. In contrast to the Horton and Freire traditions there is no single central person that has developed the research circle tradition. Rather it has been growing as a collective academic enterprise where an impressive number of researchers representing different disciplines and universities have contributed (See ALC, 1990).

A fundamental aspect of a research circle is the collective construction of knowledge. In principal it is a dialogue between two kinds of knowledge: the experiential and first hand contextual knowledge of the "practitioners" – e.g. trade union representatives, people from a certain workplace or a vocation on one hand and the scientific or theoretical knowledge of the university researcher(s) on the other hand. The mutuality of this dialogue is vital and it usually takes some time to establish the favourable group climate for this. It demands having respect for each other and the different competencies at hand. The ideal is to establish equality between all participants. Holmstrand and Härnsten (1992) note that the circle work might be described as a "collective construction of knowledge" where creative discussions may lead to results where it is "perfectly clear that no single individual (in the group), if ever so clever, would ever be able to reach as far as the group has in its collective process" (p. 241). Through this collective knowledge building what we have labelled *democratic knowledge processes* (Holmstrand & Härnsten, 1996) can occur. We also regard the research circle as a pedagogic tool to do research with and not on the people who are engaged in the problems at hand. For the participants in a research circle the experience of taking part of the knowledge work has often been an emancipating event. Research circles,

then, offer a humanistic and democratising approach where it is possible to contribute to the empowerment of those who want to change (Holmstrand & Härnsten, 1992, Härnsten, 1994a, Härnsten & Holmstrand, 2002). Bertil Lundberg (1997) describes the research circle from an empowerment perspective: "In its genuine form, grounded in popular movements, the research circle is a tool for underprivileged – a way for powerless people and groups to strengthen the control over their own conditions" (p. 63). He adds that this demands respect and humility and what a research circle needs is support and not pointers. Lundberg further notes that a research circle must be cherished and used sensibly. He admits that good results can be reached without "caring too much about its soul" but stresses that "under good conditions it can achieve amazing results" (ibid).

Who then can work as a researcher in this context? In a research circle the participants should have access to an abundance of knowledge resources. Therefore the researcher must be well acquainted with different theoretical traditions and know many other researchers. Another fundamental function is to make use of the critical and self-critical attitude towards all kinds of knowledge, not least knowledge produced by research. Further a deep knowledge about different research methodologies as well as emancipating pedagogy is needed. The researcher has a special responsibility to make sure that the experiences and perspectives of everyone are brought forward, to facilitate in finding the hidden knowledge and not least to connect the emerging body of knowledge to structural perspectives.

Lönnheden (1997) points to the many valuable competencies a researcher might bring to the circle:

"In addition to the theoretical knowledge and the possible practical knowledge a researcher can have in a subject area, he or she possesses a competence to summarise and develop categories, to lift secret or unimagined stones, put forward questions and hypotheses that perhaps frightens, tickles, provokes or pleases" (p. 33).

Certainly all this might be felt like putting to high demands on a single researcher, so these demands must be met collectively by a group of research persons. This also means that cooperation among researchers, often from different disciplines is absolutely necessary.

The practitioners contribute with their first-hand knowledge about the focused problem. The researcher(s) bring to the circle their knowledge from research that has relevance for the problem. They also contribute with their professional competence as researchers in dealing systematically with research problems, developing new knowledge and documenting the process. Further they have the function as members of the academic community to find colleagues from various disciplines that can contribute to the circle work with relevant research. In this way potentially all research in any field from any corner of the world could be accessible for the research circle. Not least importantly the researcher can bring the fundamental scientific attitude of being critical and at the same time self-critical. The special character of a research circle and its potential is probably well captured by Holmstrand, Härnsten and Isacson (1989) who describe it as:

"...a way to deal with problems that otherwise will receive no attention, either in union work or in research. The research circle liberates us from conventional structures, it is a new form, a kind of forum that provides a free space where we

may reflect both on every day problems and on more universal matters. At best, new perspectives open up and the foundation of a new quest for knowledge is established. For all the circle participants (union representatives and researchers), the research circle means a possibility to leave the everyday work behind for a moment. It lets you step back and think about the situation. Under favourable conditions, the research circle can be a highly creative environment." (Holmstrand et al, 1989, cited in Härnsten, 1994b, p. 15)

The research circle idea has in recent years been used in many different contexts and with various groups of participants. The format of these circles can be very tempting and there is an obvious risk that the radical potential can be lost. Recently we have unfortunately seen a number of uses, or even misuses, of the research circle idea where its fundamental elements are not present to any substantial degree.

CONCLUSIONS

What we find is that there is a considerable potential in these traditions and it should be possible to work in a Freire inspired way and in a Horton inspired way, but indeed adapted to the current time and contexts. A point we want to stress is that it should be an advantage to systematically make use of knowledge from research and also to **do** research about the issue at hand as well as about the collective knowledge building process and its conditions.

The research circles are potentially useful where there exist several thick layers of "ideological sludge" making it difficult to understand why there are such huge and growing gaps in economy, power, social status, health and so on between different groups of people. A considerable body of university research with research circles and also about the research circle processes has been established in Sweden (e.g. Wingård 1998, Holmstrand & Härnsten 2003, Andersson, 2007, Siljehag 2007, Härnsten & Wingård 2007).

In our three traditions there are various forms of working with people in a cooperative way leading to an increased consciousness of the power structures in the world around us. The only way of achieving a lasting change is to have trust in people in line with what both Freire and Horton emphasise. In our late-capitalist era where the power structures are very strong but at the same time more hidden than before a critical social science is of utmost importance. When the two just mentioned conditions are combined, emancipating and empowering tools like the research circle can provide an opportunity. The democratic knowledge processes that can take place in research circles will most probably produce unusually well grounded and therefore also sustainable knowledge.

The traditions discussed above are pedagogical and have made and can continue making important contributions to PAR as a new paradigm that is characterised by an extended epistemology and a radical democratic approach (cf. Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Without these characteristics it is questionable whether much of what is labelled Action Research is really different from more conventional research of various kinds.

So what then are the common characteristics in the traditions discussed above?

Firstly the focus must be on a real and vital social problem to know more about and to take action on. In all three traditions it becomes very obvious that there is a fundamental concern for people and the problems and challenges people are facing. The same concern is also very important in the action research paradigm.

Secondly some kind of connection to a social movement must be at hand. In all three traditions there is an explicit ambition to connect to different social movements even if it varies during time whether and to the extent this is possible. At Highlander this connection has been clearly manifested in the early days with the labour movement, later with the civil rights movements and today with e.g. the occupy Wall Street movement. Freire tried in northern Brazil, but had eventually to leave, his ideas has been used also many other places. At least in the beginning of the research circle tradition there was a very obvious connection to the trade union movement.

Thirdly a genuinely democratic attitude is characteristic of the educational activity. In all three traditions there are elaborated and radical ideas about democracy and the need for trying to transform society in its ground in a radically democratic direction.

Fourthly there is a pedagogical consciousness permeating the knowledge processes set in operation. Key concepts in all three traditions, just to mention a few, are: mutuality, dialogue, respect, hidden or silenced knowledge.

Another striking element is the extension of the educational aspect into a **kind of researching** activity including all participants. In the Horton and Freire traditions different kinds of investigating the current circumstances are apparent. Not least Horton used different methods to find useful facts and knowledge. Followers, e.g. John Gaventa, clearly promoted research activities and today Highlander is even called Research and Education Centre. The more explicit connection to research, however, is developed in the research circle tradition. Here it is even a prerequisite and a basic point in the tradition.

Finally, in each of the three cases the **collective knowledge building** characterising the work clearly either includes or inspires action.

It is apparent that an important foundation in all these traditions is a radical view of democracy that is considered necessary to build from the bottom up. Different times and different contexts put different demands on the forms and conditions needed to perform this grass-root democratising work.

From what we have just concluded it is obvious that there are close connections and interrelations between radical adult education traditions and PAR. And as a consequence it is often difficult and even unnecessary to draw the line between these activities. But there are several issues that need closer attention.

PAR is usually described as having roots in Freire's pedagogy. Neither Freire nor Horton explicitly claim that what they do is research. It raises the question "is there any research done in these contexts?". What does it mean to be a researcher? One important aspect must be trying to connect knowledge from scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) research with issues raised in practice. Another role of the researcher is to systematically investigate and document the knowledge work done. This is not a primary objective in adult education, but in

educational research which is concerned about knowledge building processes of different kinds. Not least should the conditions for genuinely mutual and democratic processes be scrutinised.

In PAR as well as in radical adult education, the participatory nature of the work aims at an extended epistemology which can only be achieved when the knowledge work is characterised by a truly democratic and collective dimension. When this is developed the dominant tendencies of today's society are challenged.

In each of the three cases the collective knowledge building characterising the work clearly either includes or inspires action. It is only logical that the growing PAR paradigm has obvious roots in these radical adult education traditions. By engaging in the transition into this new and enlarged paradigm researchers would not only contribute to deliberating their own work but as well to developing the collective and democratic knowledge needed for change at all levels of our societies. And that – if anything – should be the role of adult education!

The experiences within radical adult education traditions as well as in PAR demonstrate the importance of having close relations to social movements. The climate at universities for research with democratising ambitions is today tougher than before. This makes the building of alliances and cooperation with forces outside the academy even more urgent. In Sweden SPARC (The Swedish Participatory Action Research Community) is developing links between universities and organisations like folk high schools, municipalities and new and old social movements. A major purpose is to establish a national doctoral program in “democratic knowledge and change processes” where the courses are open also for interested persons from the abovementioned organisations (see homepage: www.sparc.nu).

In principle adult education can, as pointed out in the radical traditions, either contribute to adaption or to change. The PAR paradigm, the radical education traditions and the global justice movement all share the belief that another world is possible – with more equality, justice and solidarity. They can all benefit from each other. In PAR the insights and experiences from radical adult education should be inspiring and useful. And in democratising radical adult education connections to research and researchers would provide material for more substantial knowledge building.

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