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Comparing 'Popular' and 'State' education in Latin America and Europe

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Abstract

In the 1970s, a radical adult education movement in Latin America, operating outside the state and engaging in what it called 'popular education', sparked world-wide interest in its educational theory and practice. More recently, with a change in state formations in Latin America, the movement has reconsidered its potential relationship with the state. Though Europe has its own history of popular education, some have argued that advanced economies and welfare states co-opted any strong independent educational movement: today popular education is more likely to take place 'within and against' the state, rather than outside it. Based on literature review, personal interviews and site visits, this article (a) discusses what is understood by popular education (b) outlines the development of popular education in Latin America, examining its relationship with different types of state (c) considers differences between Latin America and Europe and what, if anything, popular educators in the two regions might learn from each other.

In the 1970s, the emergence of a radical adult education movement in Latin America, operating outside the state and engaging in what it called 'popular education', sparked world-wide interest among educators working for social change. Consequently, the term 'popular education' became adopted, resurrected or increasingly used throughout the globe (Arnold & Burke, 1983; Crowther, Martin & Shaw, 1999; Hunter, 2010). In recent decades, however, changing patterns in state formations in Latin America, particularly from dictatorship to 'democracy', have led to debates about whether or not popular education should continue to remain apart from or should now engage with the state (Gadotti & Torres, 1992; Brandão, 2002; de Souza, 2004; Quintana, 2006/2008). Similar issues have been discussed in Europe, though less urgently and against a

different social and political background (Jackson, 1995; Allman, 1999; Crowther, Galloway & Martin, 2005).

In trying to adapt aspects of Latin American popular education to Europe, where 'education' and 'state education' are almost synonymous, it is helpful to understand how the independent popular education movement has fared within different state formations in Latin America. Conversely, as Latin Americans seek to engage with the state, they may have lessons to learn from popular education in Europe. This article first discusses what is understood by popular education, including how its theory and practice is affected by different ideological outlooks. It then (a) outlines the development of popular education in Latin America, examining its relationship with different types of state (b) considers differences between Latin America and Europe and what, if anything, popular educators in the two regions might learn from each other.

Understanding popular education

Globally, the meaning of 'popular education' has varied according to where, when and by whom it has been cited. Braster (2011) and Tiana Ferrer (2011) analyse the term historically; Steele (2007) charts a variety of interpretations and practices in Europe, from the middle ages onwards; the Popular Education News (2011) provides links to contemporary initiatives. In the 1970s and 1980s, having been inspired by the ideas of the Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire (1972/1985, 1993), when Latin Americans made imaginative developments in theory and practice (Kane, 2001; Carrillo, 2011) they strongly influenced global approaches to popular education, albeit in some contexts terms like 'radical education' or 'education for transformation' retained more currency.

In Spanish and Portuguese, the lingua francas of Latin America, the adjective 'popular' suggests belonging to 'the people', the majority of a nation's citizens who, in Latin America, are normally poor. It carries connotations of social class and could often be translated into English simply as 'poor' or 'working class'. 'Educación popular' (Spanish) or 'educação popular' (Portuguese), then, communicates the idea of an education of and for 'the people' rather than the elite. More recently, as people organised around issues like gender, human rights and interculturalism, 'popular' stretched to include these initiatives too; since the mass of people involved come from lower economic sectors anyway, however, class-based nuances generally still apply.

In Latin America, popular education is conceptualised as both a social movement of educators and an educational philosophy-cum-practice:

> …on the one hand it is a broad and open movement, with a degree of articulation and organisation (such as CEAAL [the Latin American Council for Adult Education] ...and other regional networks), while, on the other, it is a particular brand of critical thinking. (Zarco, 2001, p. 30)

In and outside Latin America, most definitions of popular education now share a number of characteristics (Kane, in press [A]) which, summarised briefly, are that in popular education:

- All education is considered political in that if it fails to challenge social injustice and inequality, by default it promotes it.
- There are different types of knowledge, engendered by different social circumstances, and education should consist of 'dialogue' between them.

- Education should encourage people to be authentic 'subjects' of change, to think critically and act for themselves, not follow leaders.
- Exciting methodologies have been developed to put these principles into practice (Arnold & Burke, 1983; Bustillos & Vargas, 1993). However, while Freire (1972/1985) criticised the 'banking' ('knowledge transfer') approach to education as elitist and dehumanising, the alternative is not simply a formulaic application of learner-centred methods: these too can have reactionary purposes.
- The concern is to help groups, or movements, collectively take action to try and bring about social change.
- 'Popular education' refers to a generic practice covering a variety of social actors – from peasants to factory workers, women to Indigenous people's groups and so on – and a variety of topics, whichever generate interest in bringing about change.

Having said that, contemporary definitions of popular education continue to vary and none is definitive or absolute. Differences are often subtle, simply emphasising some characteristics over others, and occasionally serious, often reflecting attempts to co-opt popular education for conservative ends (Carr, 1990; Gibson, 1994).

Ideological variation in popular education

Despite a sizeable literature on its definitions, then, and common ground over key principles (Arnold & Burke, 1983; Martin, 1999; Kane, 2001; Núñez, 2001; Schugurensky, 2010), in both Latin America and Europe there still remains variety in how popular education is understood, conceptually, and how it is put into practice. Reviewing one European event, von Kotze and Cooper (2000) were surprised that

> the explicitly political and social purpose which framed the conference proposal and which was restated unambiguously in the opening session seemed to be interpreted in such different ways. We were unsettled by the wide range of conceptualisations of popular education that emerged in some of the presentations and papers. (pp. 22-23)

At heart, the issue seems less related to education and more to do with general political or ideological outlook. Though a fundamental tenet of popular education is that it cannot be politically neutral, that it sides with the 'oppressed' and promotes critical thinking and 'conscientisation', in practice this is understood in different ways. The predominant ideological lens through which popular educators view the world may be Marxist, social democrat, nationalist, feminist, religious, environmentalist and so on, with many combinations and variations in-between. Kane (2001) analyses ideological differences among popular educators in Latin America and Scandrett (2001) and Nicholas (2001) address similar issues in Scotland.

While no expression of popular education should try to impose an ideology on learners, even if popular educators are exemplary practitioners, against 'banking education' and competent in the use of educational methodologies, their ideological orientation arguably affects their practice in three areas.

First, while popular educators problematise issues rather than provide answers, the problems they see and questions they ask inevitably spring from their particular view of the world. While the questions and problems to be addressed will not dictate what people should think, they direct what people will be thinking *about*. The Masters course I teach on popular education revolves around questions *I* think are important to address; a different educator would probably ask different questions, leading to different discussions.

Second, popular education is based on a *dialogue of knowledges* ('diálogo de saberes: Ghiso, 1993) to which educators do and should contribute their own ideas. How this affects the educational experience of learners depends on many factors – how it resonates with their experience, the regard they have for the educator – but their ideological outlook inevitably enters the educational blender.

Finally, popular educators regularly engage in 'conjunctural analysis', reading society to consider how, where and when they might maximise their contribution to change. Clearly influenced by their (or collectively, their movement or organisation's) ideological outlook, this analysis affects how the educators operate, including their perceived relationship with the state. Social democratic educators, for example, are likely to see fewer problems working with the state than their Marxist counterparts.

In discussing the relationship between popular education and the state, then, it is important to recognise that while in theory the principles of popular education should be universal, in practice, due to a range of ideological perspectives, there is no single, homogenous popular education movement, in Latin America or anywhere else, and this ideological variation may influence the manner in which popular educators and social movements engage with the state.

Popular education in Latin American states: from dictatorship to revolution

Before examining its interaction with different types of state, it is helpful to have an overview of how the popular education movement has developed in Latin America.

Overview of the popular education movement
Though its roots have been traced back to Europe and the French revolution (Puiggrós, 1994; Soethe, 1994), to early 20th century working class movements (Jara, 1994) and to the Pervian thinker-activist José Mariátegui (Núñez, 1992), I would argue that the contemporary popular education movement in Latin America has had five broad periods of development. They offer a starting point for understanding the movement today, albeit the divisions between them are blurred and contestable.

Period 1 covers the late 1950s and 1960s, when Freire and others were developing new educational ideas in Brazil and the term 'popular education' started to be used. Period 2, the 'boom' period, covers the 1970s to mid 1980s when, against a backdrop of growing authoritarianism and economic hardship, social movements flourished and attempted to bring about change through extra parliamentary activities. The movements took the new ideas on education and radicalised them further and when popular education centres and networks began to appear, a new social movement in its own right emerged. Marxism was particularly influential during this period (Gutiérrez & Castillo, 1994; Núñez, 1992). Period 3 covers the mid 1980s to late 1990s, which saw a crisis in popular education parallel to the general 'crisis of paradigms' prevalent at the time (Carrillo, 2010, p. 20) since, with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the defeat of the Sandinista revolution in 1990, many concluded that the dream of large-scale social change was over (Castañeda, 1994). From the late 1990s to early 2000s, Period 4 saw a settling-down of the various debates and the emergence of a wider range of activities under the banner of popular education, some more overtly radical than others and now with varying degrees of engagement with the state (the Latin American Council for Adult Education [CEAAL], 2004).

Finally, in Period 5, from the mid 2000s onwards, with the so-called 'turn to the left' (Uggla, 2008, p. 9) in Latin American politics, particularly in Venezuela and Bolivia, accompanied by the rhetoric, if not the delivery, of increasing participatory democracy from below, state-led structural change is on the agenda again and popular education has responded accordingly (Kane, in press [A]). But social movements continue to be important in popular education and some, such as the Landless rural Workers movement in Brazil or the Zapatistas in Mexico, consciously developed into full-blown learning organisations. The degree of articulation between social movements and the state also varies (Zibechi, 2008), some arguing that the 'dance' between social movements and the state currently determines the kind of social change taking place in Latin America (Dangl, 2010).

The way in which the popular education movement should relate to the state, then, has been a constant theme for discussion and, occasionally, fierce debate. The next section examines how popular education – both in terms of a set of principles and a social movement – has interacted with different state formations in Latin America.

Dictatorship

Historically, politically, geographically and culturally there are enormous variations between and within countries in Latin America. Archer and Costello (1990) analyse twelve popular education projects in different settings, from Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, to refugee camps in Honduras, social democracy in Ecuador and revolution in Nicaragua. At one extreme, clandestinely, in communal laundries, women in Chile imaginatively used soap opera as a 'generative theme' to raise awareness. In the wake of the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti, I witnessed how popular educators promoted action-orientated discussions leading to great improvements in the quality of their lives (Kane, 2001). Examples like these are inspiring and show that popular education can take place in the worst of circumstances. However, it is undeniably difficult to engage in popular education in a dictatorship and the consequences, if things go wrong, are potentially catastrophic. As Chomsky (2009) observes, 'there is a tendency to underestimate the efficacy of violence. Quite often it succeeds' ("The long view", para. 10).

¡Viva La Revolucion!

At the other extreme there are 'revolutionary' states where, in theory, some aims are similar to those of popular education and there should be harmony between the two. But it is not straightforward. Cuba is the best-known revolutionary state, still surviving decades of US attempts to engineer its demise (Rumbaut & Rumbaut, 2009). Its achievements in literacy rates, higher education, life expectancy and attainment of Millennium Development Goals equal or surpass those of much richer countries (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2007; Glennie, 2011) and as in Europe, 'education' tends to mean 'state education'. As for popular education, in the 1970s and 1980s Cuba stood outside the Latin American movement, its approach to education characteristically top-down as opposed to bottom-up, left-wing 'banking education' rather than a 'dialogue of knowledges'. The situation changed from the late 1990s onwards, CEAAL (the Latin American regional network of popular educators) now has a growing number of Cuban NGO affiliates (CEAAL, 2012) and state educators also participate in Latin American popular education events. During the 'crisis of paradigms' in Latin America, some saw the new injection of Cuban radicalism as a refreshingly positive development (Ponce, 1999). In many respects, however, Cuba remains an

authoritarian state and popular education does not sit easily within an educational culture often seeking to promote governmental policy, however egalitarian and enlightened, rather than independent autonomous movements. At a popular education event I attended in Brazil, when a Cuban state educator was asked to evidence a particular claim about Cuba, her proof was that 'Fidel said so'; opening the 2003 World Education Forum in Porto Alegre – a spin-off from the World Social Forum – an eloquent 11-year-old Cuban girl delivered a passionate, detailed Marxist analysis of global capitalism to some 80,000 participants. I felt uncomfortable at what must have been the outcome of 'banking education' allied to dramatic performance. In defence of Cuban education, it has many achievements and its promotion of the revolution is arguably an inevitable response to powerful attack from outside. However, while popular education has made inroads into Cuba, tensions between mainstream and popular educational still exist and are addressed and resolved differently in different micro contexts.

The Nicaraguan revolution, from the military victory of the Sandinista's in 1979 till their electoral defeat in 1990, is a different case. Here was an experimental laboratory in which the principles of popular education were explicitly supported by the government:

> to create a new nation we have to begin with an education that liberates people… Only in that process can people fulfil their human destiny as makers of history and commit themselves to transforming that reality. (Fernando Cardenal, minister in charge of the literacy crusade, as cited in Miller, 1985, p. 113)

The revolutionary period was initiated with a popular education literacy 'crusade'. Over 40,000 urban students spread throughout the country to engage in a 'dialogue of knowledges' in which they taught literacy skills to *campesinos* and learned about their country's social reality. For one literacy worker:

> the Crusade was the best school, the best workshop, the best study circle we ever had. Instead of being told about how the campesinos had to live, we went to see it and experience it for ourselves. (Oscar, brigadista: Instituto Nicarguense de Investigacion y Educacion Popular [INIEP], 1995, p. 114)

After talking of the initial difficulties another said 'eventually it began to work. My students learned to write the word machete and I learned how to use one' (Rodriguez, brigadista: Archer & Costello, 1990, p. 31).

It is difficult to gauge the impact of popular education at macro level with so many variables involved. Despite governmental support, there were many obstacles to promoting popular education, particularly the war waged from Honduras by the US-funded 'contra' revolutionary army, specifically targeting health workers and educators: for the US, independent development in Nicaragua was seen as the *threat of a good example* (Melrose, 1985). There was also internal opposition to the Revolution, resource difficulties, a shortage of trained popular educators, poor infrastructure and the shortcomings of the government itself (Arnove, 1994): for the Sandinistas there existed tension between promoting authentic popular education from below and trying to persuade people to support Sandinismo, from above.

While Nicaragua indicates the limits facing popular education, it also showed that much can be achieved in a revolutionary context, despite the difficulties (Carnoy & Torres, 1990). Barndt (1991) discusses a range of successes and Arnove argued that as a result of popular education 'tens of thousands of previously illiterate and poorly-skilled

individuals are now playing important roles at all levels of the society, from co-op to national legislative bodies' (1986, p. 68).

Arguably, the greatest legacy of popular education was its contribution to a culture of participation which lasted long after the Sandinistas lost power. In fact, many understood the Sandinista electoral defeat not as the death of a revolution but the considered choice of a politically aware populace who saw this as the only way to stop the war, as well as to register dissatisfaction with aspects of Sandinista government (Harris, 1992; Gonzalez, 1990). Ironically, freed from the need to defend the Sandinistas, many grassroots organisations - the women's movement in particular – became more protagonistic than before (Montenegro, 1997; Stahler-Sholk, 1999).

Most recently, Venezuela's 'Bolivarian revolution' is championed by an elected government; it is not the outcome of a civil war in which a ruling oligarchy was deposed, though the internal opposition, supported by the United States (Golinger, 2010), is also powerful. But there has been little dispossession of property, entrepreneurs are welcomed into the governing socialist party, private media still dominate communications and revolutionary posters stand side-by-side with adverts for major multinationals. Rather than a head-on assault on the interests of the ruling class, then, some describe this revolutionary strategy as an attempt to create a 'parallel' society from below, in which old dominant interests will eventually wither away (Vera-Zavala, 2005).

More than any other government in Latin America, this one talks the language of participatory democracy, with 'popular power' considered a 'motor' of the revolution (Wilpert, 2007), enshrined at the highest level in Ministries of Popular Power. Some debate whether this is a genuine commitment to people power or simply a way for president Chávez to strengthen his position, enlisting grassroots support to subdue the opposition, in the Latin American tradition of 'populist' leadership (Denis, 2003; Gonzalez, 2004; Petras, 2004; Gindin, 2004), but it does create a climate in which popular education has an opportunity to flourish, outside and inside the state. Visiting Venezuela in December 2008, I saw an independent popular education movement engage constructively with the state-owned Simón Rodríguez Experimental University to organise degree-level education in popular education (Kane, 2010).

Aside from declared efforts to promote popular education through initiatives like Communal Councils (Bowman & Stone, 2006), the Venezuelan government also hopes that formal, state-run education will enhance the Bolivarian revolution. With the new constitution guaranteeing universal rights to higher education, in 2002 the government set up the Bolivarian University of Venezuela to address the increasing demand for places (Podur, 2004). But it was considered part of the revolutionary project, with an explicit remit to make higher education work for everyone:

> Traditional universities produce depoliticised professionals who see themselves as using technical skills but do not have any sense of social responsibility. We want to contribute to the reconstruction of our society. We want to create professionals with a sense of public service. (Castellano, as cited in Podur, 2004)

The entrance mural says 'Welcome to the Bolivarian University of Venezuela: 5 years of emancipatory education' and official political events are advertised throughout the campus. Most staff members have a picture of Che Guevara in their office, usually one of Chávez too. The University published *Theories in Latin American Emancipatory Pedagogy: for a Popular and Socialist University of the Venezuelan Revolution* (Damiani & Bolívar, 2007), an impressive collection of original writings in radical education from Latin America and beyond. In line with popular education thinking,

curriculums are designed to relate practice to theory, most teaching revolving around community-based projects and forms of participatory-action research (Comisión Nacional del PNFE, 2006).

But the difficulties in promoting popular education within Venezuela are similar to those of the Nicaraguan revolution. First, it is not easy to operationalise a popular education programme targeted at millions of people: enough supportive, experienced and competent popular educators, specialising in all curricular areas, do not appear overnight. Some university lecturers are esteemed academics but ambivalent about the social purpose underlying the revolution; others are enthusiastic but with fewer traditional academic credentials, like publications; others are both enthusiastic and esteemed academically but remain wedded to a traditional rather than a popular education pedagogical approach.

Second, for the revolutionary government there exists the same tension as in Nicaragua between promoting development from below and trying to win support from above. In the Bolivarian university, with the physical space communicating unquestioning support for Chávez, at a time when even supporters of the 'process' were concerned about its direction, it raised questions as to whether the university was leaning towards spreading propaganda rather than promoting popular education. Third, not everyone will act according to the principles espoused by the revolution; with a history of institutionalised corruption, this is a problem in Venezuela and popular education initiatives can be discredited due to the different personal agendas of opportunistic officials.

On the surface, then, revolutionary states create a climate in which popular education can flourish, new initiatives can be tested and many positive outcomes are achieved. On the negative side, there remain significant problems implementing popular education on a large scale and what is meant to be happening, in theory, is not necessarily translated into practice.

'Democracies'

In the middle lie the states described, to varying degrees, as 'democratic', though the adjective requires qualification. In the 1980s, when United States support for authoritarian governments in Latin America became embarrassing, there was a move to provide them with at least the appearance of democracy, while still trying to maintain control. Parodying the so-called 'low intensity' war waged by the US against Central America, some labelled these new states 'low intensity' democracies (Cendales, Posada & Torres, 1996, p. 121). In the 1990s and 2000s, some of these states remained authoritarian (Colombia, Haiti), while others moved to reject the 'neoliberal' model (Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, in addition to Venezuela).

Even if nominally democratic, the power of these states to enact the will of its people is tempered by the 'dictatorship of the market' (Betuto Fernández, 1998, p. 75) and their status as 'third world' countries, indebted to first world creditors. World Bank and International Monetary Fund 'austerity packages' have forced governments to cut public spending, increase exports, privatise services and so on. The gradual (semi) privatisation of services has also affected popular education: independent NGOs who supported popular education, which was often critical of the state, were now tempted to procure government funding, silencing themselves in the process (Petras, 1999).

So where states are formally democratic, the picture is varied and constantly changing, even within countries. From the late 1980s onwards, the popular education movement has generally tried to make its influence felt within the state. In certain times and places, this has clearly been welcomed and state organisations have played an

important role. A prime example has been local government in Brazil. The Workers Party, of which Freire was a founding member, was set up in 1980, an umbrella group of workers and social movements struggling to overcome the dictatorship (Branford & Kucinski, 1995). Initially, the party committed to the values of participatory, not just representative, democracy. When it won power in São Paulo, it appointed Freire minister of education from 1989-1991. In Porto Alegre, it attempted to engage the city's inhabitants in the now famous exercise of 'participatory budgeting'. The same council set up and financed the first World Social Forum and its spin-off 'World Education Forum', important gatherings for radical educators from around the world.

On the one hand then, in these various forms of capitalist representative democracy, opportunities could be exploited within the state sector as spaces opened up for increased participation by civil society. On the other hand, limits were imposed on what could be done, initiatives could be co-opted away from radicalism and educators faced the dilemma of where to prioritise their efforts, within autonomous movements, its traditional 'school', or within the state. Folquito Verona (2008), an academic, organiser of the Regional Popular Education Forum for the West of São Paulo (FREPOP) and a former Workers Party education minister in the town of Lins, argues that popular education cannot be properly done within the state, even when administrations are radical, and that it is important to maintain and develop independent popular education initiatives. The extent to which popular education should engage with the state, then, continues to be an important subject for discussion in Latin America, with no straightforward answers. In general, I think the dominant position is that articulated by Gadotti when he argued for social movements to have a foot inside the state 'but it has to be only one foot, inside. The other foot should be outside… The negotiating strength of the movement within the State depends on its own capacity for mobilisation outside it' (Gadotti & Torres, 1992, p. 71).

Comparing popular education in Europe and Latin America

In mainstream Europe, states also have wide historical, cultural and economic variations within and between them, particularly since the incorporation of former Soviet Block countries, where the former dominance of the state could mean that 'the phenomenon of Community was erased from society' (Nazaretyan, 2010, "The Role of the South Caucus", para. 1) or a history of resistance was co-opted into the new order (Zielińska, Kowzan & Prusinowska, 2011). In this article, however, analysis is restricted to European states sharing the characteristics of relatively prosperous Western capitalist democracies, albeit the current economic crisis means some might soon be known as 'formerly advanced economies' (Hahnel, 2012, para. 2).

A first difference with Latin America is that in much of Europe state education is so widespread that by definition 'education' means 'state education'. In Latin America, state provision is variable and, where deficient, popular education can fill the vacuum, particularly in basic education. In Europe, popular education either complements or competes with state education, on the outside in social movements or on the inside, in a struggle to promote its alternative philosophy and practice.

A second difference lies in the nature of social movements. In the Europe of wealthy economies and welfare states, theorists generally characterise social movements as more middle-class than their Latin American counterparts, concerned with deepening democracy and improving the quality of life in a post-materialist society, rather than struggling for basic material needs (Foweraker, 1995; Hellman, 1995; Radcliffe, 1999).

'New' social movements around issues like gender and ethnicity have also developed in Latin America but these tend to overlap with class-based concerns. Caution is required in generalising about social movements, however, and in both Europe and Latin America exceptions to the rule are easily found. Movements also change constantly and Della Porta and Diani observed in 2006 that in Europe 'working-class action seems to be back with a vengeance' and 'basic survival rights and social entitlements seem to play a more balanced role in contemporary mobilizations, alongside more post material ones, related to quality of life, than was the case in the recent past' (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. vii). Today this is even more true, with the rise of movements like the 'indignados' in Spain and Greece, combating unemployment and austerity in a way reminiscent of so many throughout the 'third world' (Ouziel, 2011).

Another difference is the extent to which an articulated popular education movement exists independently of the state. In Latin America it is a 'broad and open movement, with a degree of organisation and articulation' (Zarco, 2001, p. 30). Steele (2007) has systematised the history of popular education in Europe, though with various interpretations of what the term means only what he considers 'radical popular education' relates to the Latin American equivalent. Contemporary experiences of popular education in Europe, particularly Germany, were recently examined in Essen (Essen Conference, 2009); in Spain, the south has much in common with Latin America, including regular exchanges of experience (Abrio, Sánchez & Herrera, 1998) and a number of popular education movements have been documented in Cataluña (Puigvert & Valls, 2005); Guimarães and Sancho (2005) give an honest assessment of the ebb and flow of popular education in Portugal; from Malta, Mayo and others make prolific contributions to the literature on popular education (Mayo & Borg, 2007); in the UK Grayson (2005) analyses education in the British tenants movement and a range of initiatives have been documented in Scotland (Crowther et al., 1999). Finally, the Popular Education Network for academics, started in the late 1990s, has succeeded in forging lasting European-wide (and global) collaboration amongst its members (Crowther et al., 2005).

But do these and other activities constitute a popular education movement? On the one hand, much seems to be happening in the field of adult education for social change, probably more than is known. On the other hand, the extent to which these examples relate to an articulated theory of 'popular' education appears variable. Sometimes the educational aspect of a struggle is consciously understood as popular education by those involved; sometimes a different qualifier might apply, such as radical education or, returning to the discussion on ideology, workers, feminist or environmentalist education. Sometimes it may be thought of simply as the informal education people acquire in action, which others then categorise as popular education. While the same points could be made about Latin America, in general the explicit link to the concept of popular education seems much stronger in Latin America than in Europe, further enhanced by its association with Paulo Freire: in Europe the term 'popular education' is not quite as popular!

Independently of their allegiance to the term 'popular education', is there a degree of conscious 'organisation and articulation' which brings these different, alternative experiences together? While the picture varies across countries, outside the state, at least, such organisation seems significantly weaker in Europe than in Latin America, though given the different context, with the greater prevalence of the European state in the provision of services, of which adult education is one, this is hardly surprising. In the UK, alternative education movements were strong in the past but are weaker now, despite attempts to resurrect the tradition (Bane, Shaw & Thomson, 2000).

While I generally find that in terms of educational practice and the organisation of independent popular education initiatives, the cutting-edge nature of popular education in Latin America has much to teach Europeans, it is perhaps in the relationship popular education has with the state that Europe has lessons to offer Latin America. In Europe Steele argues that 'the functionalist and vocationalist policy of much state-sponsored adult education has evacuated it of meaningful personal, cultural development or radical social purpose' (Steele, 2010, p. 120); for Fragoso and Guimarães, with particular reference to Portugal, 'EU programmes have made it very difficult for CSOs [civil society organisations] to escape national state control. This situation impedes innovative and alternative attempts to promote social emancipation' (Fragoso & Guimarães, 2010, p. 17).

In the UK, as early as 1909, there were heated debates within and between organisations such as the Workers Education Association and the Plebs League over the extent to which Independent Working Class Education could exist if beholden to government funding (Fieldhouse, 2000; McIlroy, 2000). While sporadic radical practices managed to survive, in accepting funding there is little doubt the WEA was deliberately and consciously co-opted into the politics of social democracy and stripped of its radical credentials:

> this was recognised very clearly by the Conservative President of the Board of Education, Lord Eustace Percy, when he defended the adult education grants to the WEA...against Treasury scepticism in 1925, because in his view '£100,000 spent annually on this kind of work, properly controlled, would be about the best police expenditure we could indulge in' as a protection against socialist ideas being spread abroad by such bodies as the National Council for Labour Colleges. (Fieldhouse, 2000, p. 176)

Steele concludes that today

> the WEA and similar voluntary movements like the Scandinavian folk high schools are still active and offer potential. However, the funding restrictions which limit so much of their valuable activity to social first-aiding and 'vocational' preparation – or 'training' – may not permit the kind of radical or liberatory politics enjoyed by Latin American movements. (Steele, 2010, pp. 122-123)

In 1990s Scotland the anti-poll tax movement, often credited with causing the downfall of the Thatcher government, bore some resemblance to a Latin American style popular movement. Local government, responsible for collecting the tax, simultaneously funded Community Education, including some projects pursuing a 'Freirian' approach (Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1989). But educators in those projects felt unable to work with the anti-poll tax movement in case their funding was withdrawn. In Latin America, it is precisely those sorts of movements popular education centres would work with as a priority.

Popular education is linked to action, another area where states are likely to impose limits. In the UK, the belief that the Iraq 'war' of 2003 was about imperialism and oil, not weapons of mass destruction, led to the largest political demonstrations in UK history. Yet young people attending school were not allowed to participate in them, even when old enough to leave education altogether. Teachers blockaded the gates of my local school and 17 year-old pupils who insisted on leaving to demonstrate were threatened with suspension. As professionals, teachers were expected to appear politically 'neutral', the opposite of what popular education stands for. Subsequently, the 'weapons-of-mass-destruction' argument was proven to be false: if formal education cannot be linked to action even in the face of what many consider large-scale blatant

injustice, committed by their own elected government (Miller, 2004), this puts the strictest of limitations on the ability to engage in popular education within the state. One possible lesson is that where Latin American popular educators engage with the state, they should do so with eyes wide open and simultaneously be wary of giving up their independence.

More positively, the state is also a 'site of struggle' and astute, creative educators will push the limits to the maximum. In the same local school, some pupils walked through the teachers' blockade and demonstrated. At school the next day, several teachers openly supported the pupils' actions and in the end they were 'spoken to' but not suspended. Recent research into the influences on political activists in Scotland encouragingly showed that formal education, and the work of individual educators, had generally been seen as contributing positively towards their radicalism (Kane, In press [B]). So a familiarity with the European experience of widespread state-run education may help alert Latin Americans to both the pitfalls and opportunities in trying to engage in popular education within state structures.

Conclusion

At one level it is problematic to compare the relationship between popular education and the state in Latin America and Europe. Both regions consist of different countries, each with its own particular historical, political and cultural variations. There are differences within countries too and this diversity affects the way in which popular education is expressed. Nothing is static, moreover, and there is a constant dialectical relationship between popular education and the context in which it tries to intervene.

But it is possible to discern general patterns. Europe has a long history of popular education outside the state though this has been significantly co-opted by the spread of welfare states and mass education. Currently, there are various attempts to maintain or resurrect that tradition. In this they have taken inspiration from the recent past in Latin America where the independent popular education movement has been more visible and organised, as well as having original contributions to offer in terms of theory and practice. In both regions there are infinite numbers of groups involved in processes of informal education, a by-product of their struggle for social change, who are potential beneficiaries of a strong, independent popular education movement. In Europe, characteristically, attempts to promote popular education are more commonly located 'within and against' the state, and that is now becoming common practice in Latin America too. There remain substantial contextual differences between the two regions - greater degrees of poverty in Latin America, its continuing struggle against neo-colonialism – and these influence the shape of popular education. At the current time, however, in Europe and Latin America the relationship between popular education and the state is more similar than ever before.

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