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Is there a place for popular adult education in the managerial university? A finnish case

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Abstract

This article studies the possibilities of reclaiming and revitalising popular adult education in Finland's neoliberally driven managerial university and addresses the place for popular adult education in it. In Finland, popular adult education has been taught at a university level since the 1920s. Currently, it has a marginal position in academia. This descriptive case study ponders the role of teaching popular adult education in Finnish universities and describes the pilot program on popular adult education organised at Tampere University in 2020. The study suggests that popular adult education, even in managerial universities, can provide students and practitioners with meaningful knowledge and the means to build global humanity and a sustainable future. In conclusion, the article discusses the future of popular adult education and its role in the university.

Keywords: Finland, managerial university, popular adult education, radical adult education, Tampere university

Introduction

In this article, I study the possibilities of reclaiming and revitalising popular adult education at the university level in Finland. Furthermore, the article addresses the place for popular adult education within the neoliberal managerial university. This is important for, as researchers on popular education have argued, neoliberalism has narrowed the possibilities of teaching and studying popular education and related fields in universities around the world in recent decades (see Crowther et al., 2005; Crowther et al., 2006; Crowther 2013; Scandrett, 2017; Sinwell, 2022).

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Following Crowther, it is possible to claim that scholars 'still enjoy a high degree of relative autonomy' (Crowther, 2013, para. 2) (for less optimistic views of the university, see Fleming, 2021; Hall, 2021; Santos, 2017). It is the researchers' task 'to support popular struggles for greater democracy, equality and social justice – at a time when all the demands being made upon them are, seemingly, towards institutional disengagement from social and political action' (Crowther, 2013, para. 2). In this article, I wish to explore how this 'relative autonomy' can be used to advance university-based popular adult education in Finland.

Popular adult education forms a rich tradition worldwide. As is well-known, its roots are in the European Enlightenment (Aufklärung), the industrial revolution, and the birth of the bourgeois public sphere (Steele, 2007; Habermas, 1991; Ferrer, 2011; see also Thomas, 1982). Forms of popular education have existed in European countries since the 19th century (see Flowers, 2009) and become visible in other continents such as Africa and Latin America, especially during the 1960s '[m]ostly in response to social and economic inequalities and in resistance to authoritarian regimes' (Gajardo, 2019, p. 100).

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—Nordic countries share a rich historical tradition of non-formal, popular adult education. Its origins are in the late 19th-century social movements, such as the women's, workers, and youth associations. In Finland, the pro-independence Fennoman movement's impact was also essential. The grand narrative of Finnish popular education and the ethos of free non-formal education, in general, has stressed every person's right, regardless of their social status, to participate in an open, unlimited process of cultivating their whole being and personality to the fullest.

Nowadays, Finnish popular adult education is extensive, with 1.1 million participants per year and thousands of part-time teachers teaching and facilitating their studies in about 300 adult education institutions (181 municipal adult education centres, part of them also known as 'workers institutes,' 77 folk high schools, 12 study centres, 20 summer universities, and 14 physical education centres). The field covers at least the following studies:

a) adult basic education and training (including immigrants' basic literary education)
b) vocational training (youth and social sector, physical education, trade union education)
c) civic colleges' short courses, and two-semester long courses, and adolescents' national curriculum-based training for their secondary education and general life skills
d) regional civic centres' and national study centres' short courses, especially in arts, crafts, and languages
e) open and summer university's courses in languages and academic subjects (EAEA, 2011; Harju et al., 2019)

As the above list presents, popular adult education practices are vast in Finland.

In this respect, one could assume that popular adult education has a strong foothold in Finnish academia, but as it turns out, it has not. All these forms of organisational popular adult education that receive funding from the state (see Edquist, 2015) serve different pedagogical and ideological purposes in Finnish popular adult education depending on the representative organization (political, religious, or some other). Despite the ideological differences, the overall picture of Finnish popular adult education is humanistic-liberal, reflecting the official politics of the Finnish welfare state.

Thus, Finland's 'official' map of popular adult education represents organisational popular education compared to forms of popular education stemming from and linked to

various grassroots social movements working independently of the state typical to Southern, Freirean-spirited traditions of popular education (Santos, 2018). However, Finnish popular education is not confined to organisational activities but expands to informal social movements and organizations (such as Extinction Rebellion Finland). Their work represents the fundamental characteristics of popular education (such as interest in people's experiences and learning goals, self-organised and transformative learning, shared leadership, and collective action for social change (Kerka, 1997) and connects with international campaigns against global warming and climate change.

Although the grand narrative of the Finnish welfare state has historically been based on consensus and coalition governments' reformist politics, there have still been ideological and political dissensus, and this is reflected in the theories and practices of popular adult education. Leftist, radical popular education is a case in point. Alongside the rest of popular education, it has contributed to the general education of the workers and developed them as critically reflexive actors who are capable of shaking societal inequalities, moving towards social justice, and advancing everyone's equal economic, political, social, cultural, and educational rights (Steele, 2007).[1]

Throughout the history of Finnish leftist popular education, critical literacy has been the key to personal development and social transformation. Literate workers could act as agents of history, possess their own words, and participate in cultural and political activities to change the world as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had urged[2].

In the first half of the 20th century, the emphasis was on developing workers' mental capacity and critical consciousness to win political power. In the 1950s, the societal role of workers' cultural activities, democratisation and self-regulation of workers' education based on mutual respect and solidarity, and equality in learning in dialogue with others were stressed. (Oittinen, 1954; Hakoniemi, 2018; Hakoniemi, 2021)

In the second half of the 20th century, radical popular educators in Finland and elsewhere increasingly collaborated with social movements (e.g., civil rights, ecology, folk art, development, identity, race, peace, gender, sexual diversity, and multiculturalism, see Borg & Mayo, 2007; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Foley, 1999; Hall, 2009; Heaney & Horton, 1990; Holst, 2002; Holst 2018; Wallén, 2021) and concentrated on planetary questions and human beings' position in the world amid the multiple crises (see Harju & Heikkinen, 2016; Mojab, 2011; Aedo et al., 2019).

Changing Trends of University-based Popular Adult Education: The Case of Tampere University

Popular adult education has been taught at universities in Finland since the 1920s (Steele, 2007). Since the 1970s, its status has gradually been sidelined because of other research and study interests in adult education. It has only a marginal position in adult education studies in Finnish universities. Tampere University (former University of Tampere) has pioneered offering university degrees in adult education and popular education in Finland. The first professorship in popular adult education was founded at the University of Tampere in 1946 (Heikkinen et al., 2019; Filander, 2012). This post was retitled as a professorship in adult education in the 1960s. It was not until the 1980s that a second professorship was established in adult education at the University of Helsinki. Nowadays, there are five professorships in adult education in Finland in total.

At Tampere University from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, university-level teaching and research mainly focused on liberal and humanistic popular education. Since the late 1970s, work-life-related adult training and human resource development have gained

popularity at the expense of popular adult education. The trend strengthened in the 1990s, and popular adult education as a university subject was gradually sidelined.[3] The training of adult education teachers was integrated into large-scale teacher education in 1990, and adult education study programs were buried (Tuomisto, 2002). In the same decade, professorships in lifelong learning and continuing education were founded (Jokinen, 2017, 2018).

Salo (2012) points out that popular adult education has gradually merged into adult training. It has sought its role as a substitute and complement but hardly as a challenge or questioner of the status quo (see Gustavsson, 2005). Practitioners had to define the specific outcomes of popular adult education in line with the state's adult education policy and the serving personnel and on-the-job training market.

Simultaneously, popular adult education has lost its central position in the research and teaching agenda. The investments in adult education research in the mid-1990s (several new professorships in different universities) did not improve the situation (Salo, 2012; Tuomisto, 2002). At Tampere University, the Faculty of Education combined the candidate degree programs in education and adult education in 1994. Adult education was integrated and conceptualised within educational sciences and lifelong learning (Tuomisto, 2002). At the same time, adult educational themes gained interest in health sciences, gerontology, administrative sciences, practical philosophy, and political sciences. This corroborates Brookfield's (1996) assessment that adult education themes are no longer limited to adult education research alone.

Tampere University reformed its structures several times in the first two decades of the 2000s. A major structural reform occurred in 2010 when the university changed its administrative systems and degree programs. As part of the structural changes, the then-only professorship of adult education was transferred from the Faculty of Education to the Faculty of Social Sciences (the original location of the professorship from 1945 to 1974). The structural reform and the transfer of professorship were a loss to many (Jokinen, 2017). Many critics claimed that the reform turned the university into a managerial institution and noticed that the change was possible because the Finnish higher education policy (especially after the new law in 2010) followed the global neoliberal trends (see Kuusela, 2021).

> Changed structures and practices of power have created new conflicts while leaving many old problems unresolved. Most of the issues relating to well- or ill-being and work and the precarity of academic employment are in the hands of the university leadership. (Kuusela et al., 2019, p. 27)

The concept of a managerial university as part of the global 'prestige economy' (Olsson & Slaughter, 2016) has the following main characteristics: marketisation and profit-orientation of the university research (piling external funding) and teaching (rising student fees), in-equalization of the academic community, precarisation of academic work, and de-democratization of university governance (in the name of neoliberal management system known as New Public Management) (e.g., Anderson, 2008; Lea, 2011; Poutanen et al., 2020; Zuidhof, 2015; Jessop, 2018).

Research Question and Methodology

These changes raised the question of the status and role of popular adult education in the new university structure: does a popular adult education have a place in a current managerial university structure? The question arose as key area of concern in the spring of 2019 when I met with a group of adult education practitioners who worried about the

lack of university-based popular adult education. As we discussed the status and future of popular adult education in Finnish universities, we concluded that popular adult education–including radical strands–had a marginal position in adult education studies in Finnish universities.

Thus, education students were at risk of missing essential knowledge on, e.g., popular adult education's history, its current organisations, dialogical pedagogy (or andragogy) elemental to popular adult education, and recent and future developments in the field. We agreed that there were too few options to study popular adult education at the university level, and something had to be done. Our conclusion was not particularly original and reflected a long-standing trend noted by others (see Tuomisto, 2002).

At about the same time we met as a group, Tampere University launched a two-million-euro project to develop continuous learning in different disciplines. We decided to seize the moment by forming a planning group[4] that wrote a proposal to establish a pilot program on popular adult education, and the funding was granted. The title of our proposal (and eventually the name of the study program) was Current Tides of Popular Adult Education (CTPA). Its objective was to give university students and persons working full-time or part-time in popular adult education a comprehensive picture of the field and bring about the newest and most urgent themes about popular adult education.

While participating in the planning and implementation of the CTPA study program, I decided to reflect on it by applying the methodology known as 'at-home ethnography.' Its basic idea is to learn a person's lived reality, 'a cultural setting to which s/he has a 'natural access' and in which s/he is an active participant' (Alvesson, 2009, p. 159; see also Vickers, 2019).

The at-home approach thus means that a person puts themselves and their experiences at the center of the analysis and connects them with more significant sociopolitical issues and themes in each context. In this respect, at-home ethnography has a strong family resemblance, e.g., with such methodologies as teachers as researchers (Kincheloe, 2012), the 'dig where you stand' approach (Lindqvist, 1979)[5], and with autoethnography (Mc Cormack et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2010).

At-home ethnography suited my purpose since I had worked as a professor at Tampere University since 2006 and held administrative positions (I acted as Vice Dean and Dean from 2007–2013). I was involved in the structural reforms and thus gained practical first-hand knowledge of their consequences. When I next turn to view the training program, my approach will be descriptive, based on the planning team's discussions and reflections during and after the study program. Therefore, I will focus on the planning and implementation of the study program from the planning group's point of view.[6]

Popular Adult Education in the Managerial University

Current Tides of Popular Adult Education study program grew from our planning group's observations and popular educators' complaints that popular adult education was underrepresented in Finnish universities. Thus, we were genuinely interested in developing and refreshing the academic field of popular adult education in Finland[7]. But what did we mean by popular education? We acknowledged from the outset that there are many traditions and interpretations of the field (Flowers, 2009; Ferrer, 2011); scholars have used the concept 'in divergent senses' (Ferrer, 2011, p. 25), arguing that it is a messy concept (Manninen, 2017) which has led some commentators to conclude it should not be used as an analytical concept (Edquist, 2015)[8].

In the planning group, we were aware that although Finnish popular education stems from different ideological traditions (such as workers', religious, agrarian, women's rights, and even conservative movements), there were some common characteristics uniting the field: emphasis on adult persons' dignity and self-determination, attention to and appreciation of the unique local and communal social situations and contexts, and support for social and political participation (Koski, 2011; Pätäri et al., 2019; Sihvonen, 1996).

Thus, the study program was an act to provide students with a comprehensive introduction to the current Finnish field of popular adult education. A more political aim was to make a civic society's intervention in the managerial university by designing a program against the grain of neoliberal educational policy tendencies. However, since it was a pilot program, we had no previous experience or guidelines, and we needed to define the process as emergent – or we had to make the road as we walked it.

Planning

We decided that the Current Tides of Popular Adult Education study program's planning and implementation should be based on popular education's Nordic tradition. Our planning group representing a mixture of radical adult education, critical pedagogy, Nordic popular education tradition, and humanistic-dialogical perspectives on adult learning, brainstormed the most vital topics a student, whether a beginner or a senior, would need to know about Finnish popular education. In addition, we wanted the studies to be as up to date as possible and thus pondered the most urgent themes in popular adult education worldwide.

On one hand, the planning group's discussion concerned the functions and tasks of popular adult education in the face of global problems such as climate change, people's mobility, immigration, populism, the crisis of democracy, pandemics, famines, and war and peace. On the other hand, the planning group pondered how popular adult education should respond to domestic issues the government and economic elite emphasise, such as the need for new skills and competencies to run even faster in the global economic competition. These themes have also been on the top of the list in global interactions between popular educators and social movements under the umbrella concept of social movement learning and collective learning (see, e.g., Kuk & Tarlau, 2020; Holst, 2011; Zielińska et al., 2011).

Because of today's Finnish education policy's heavy emphasis on instrumental rationality, work-related competencies, and innovation also in popular adult education, the planning group wanted the program to stress that popular adult education is 'rooted in the interest and struggles of ordinary people, overtly political and critical of the status quo, and committed to progressive social and political change' (Crowther et al., 2006, p. 54).

As a planning group, we discussed these themes in-depth and decided to include them in the study program. Because of the university's study structure and timetables, the program needed to be restricted to 10 ECTS and implemented in a semester, contrary to our initial two-semester plan. Thus, the CTPA study program consisted of the following five (2 ECTS) core modules in the program: 'Popular Adult Education in the Finnish Society,' 'Popular Adult Education Institutions as Work and Study Places,' and 'Bildung pedagogy (sivistyspedagogiikka in Finnish), Ecosocial Bildung, and civic adult education,' 'Dialogue and Radical Popular Adult Education,' and 'Basic Skills and Integration of Immigration' (Virtauksia, 2020). The latter three courses highlighted Finnish popular education's radical and dialogical dimensions. The planning group

thought these contents would be essential and timely and facilitate debate and discussion among the students and the teachers.

Because the contents were rich and varied, the program needed experienced teachers. The pilot funding allowed us to recruit practitioners from different fields of popular adult education. Finally, 16 of them participated in preparing learning material and teaching.

In addition to the contents, the question of appropriate pedagogy was also crucial. From the beginning, the obvious answer was to utilise study circles and peer learning so that students become acquainted with these approaches common in popular education. Thus, the Nordic popular education tradition underlining interaction, cooperation, discussion, and dialogue in teaching and learning was respected (Korsgaard, 2002).

Recruiting students from the university and popular education practices were necessary to have a heterogeneous populace for successful peer-to-peer learning. Finally, nine university students (two from the social sciences and seven from the educational sciences) and 15 work-life participants enrolled in the course. The study's guiding principle was to avoid the distinction between the students and the teachers. Although there would also be lecturing during the studies, the group took Freire's (2005) words into the heart: 'education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students' (p. 72).

Implementation

The Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 forced the program online. Thus, every course module needed to be planned and organised in Moodle. Eventually, the online platform contained all the information and materials required for the course: guidelines, learning objectives, assessment criteria, assignments, study materials, lecture materials, Zoom links, and folders for the group discussions and learning diaries. Joint communication with students also took place mainly through Moodle newsletters. Module 'Popular Adult Education Institutions as Work and Study Places' included students' study visits to an adult education institution as an individual or pair assignment. Under the circumstances, these visits were also organised via the Internet.

The course coordinator guided the students via personal emails. Especially at the beginning of the program, many students and work-life participants needed specific guidance, e.g., what was expected in the Moodle discussions to be accepted. Some also contacted the coordinator directly to ask for clarification on one of the assignments, request additional time, or find alternative ways to complete the assignments. Coordinating the program was demanding as the online environment was unfamiliar to all students, and study assignments required additional guidance.

Although the study schedule was tight and the framework for the work was relatively rigid, the coordinator tried to guide and advise everyone to complete the assignments. The course was completed successfully by eight students and ten working-life participants. In total, they completed 178 ETCS credits. Participants visited 14 adult education institutions. Five work-life participants and one student had to drop out because of work- or study-related issues and the overall workload of the study program. One participant could not be reached after the semester had started.

Critical Reflection on the Study Program

As a planning group, we critically reflected on the Current Tides of Popular Adult Education study program during and after every module and observed a few drawbacks in implementing the course. The most significant challenge experienced by teachers and students was the course's tight schedule and rigid deadlines for the assignments. Especially for work-life participants, 8–10 ETCS credits proved to be too much to study in a semester (in about three and a half months) in addition to full-time work. The original plan was to begin in the spring term, which would have eased the pressures in the autumn.

The mixed groups were an ideal that did not come to fruition. The overly tight study schedule and the different study (and life) rhythms of university students and work-life participants hampered the work of the groups, and the joint discussion could have been better. It wasn't easy to reconcile the two student groups' different goals, expectations, and skill levels. Despite the differences, everyone had the same assignments to be assessed according to uniform criteria. Thus, some tasks fit work-life participants, and some are for graduate students.

The idea of peer learning connecting students and work-life participants failed as planned mainly because of the online mode. Moodle's group discussions were among the most criticised parts of the program. Learning groups did not work ideally online because communicating in Moodle's discussion areas was seen as a slow and clumsy way of having a conversation, not to mention entering a dialogue. Besides, work-life participants usually dominated the discussion during the live online meetings.

An additional obstacle was the Covid-19 pandemic which took all involved into survival mode, increased the sense of urgency, and forced them to re-evaluate learning or other habits. Also, going online due to Covid-19 made it somewhat difficult for students to group and collaborate. On the other hand, it also forced us coordinators, teachers, and practitioners to reflect on our pedagogical models in popular education and university. Because the Covid-19 pandemic changed the course's teaching and learning circumstances, the planning group and teachers should have listened more closely to the student's experiences and ideas and gathered them systematically, for example, through the critical incident questionnaire (see Brookfield, 1995; Samuel & Conceição, 2022).

The current managerial university's time frame restricted work-life students' opportunities to study freely and at their own pace. Thus 'managerial university time' posed a significant challenge for the popular educators' participation in regular university studies. There were also some difficulties with the university's educational administration in getting the pilot program into the online system and having access to work-life participants.

At the beginning of the CTPA study program's planning, it was unclear how popular adult education would fit in the managerial for-profit-oriented university. The external funding helped us launch the pilot. Otherwise, it might have been challenging to launch the program at all. The managerial ethos respected our academic freedom, perhaps only because we had the needed external funding for the pilot.

The greatest strength in implementing the program was the seamless collaboration between academic and practical fields of adult education. We needed experienced practitioners to plan and execute the program. Their contribution to teaching the program's core modules was essential, for they brought the latest experience and knowledge from the field to the course.

As a result of the program, work-life participants could broaden their understanding of popular adult education and their institutional role. On the other hand, graduate students gained direct contact with popular adult education and understood its

significance as part of the Finnish education system. Some of them said in online discussions that they are seriously considering applying for a job at a popular educational institution. They also hoped that the CTPA study program would be offered permanently in educational and social sciences studies.

The Future of the Current Tides of Popular Adult Education Program: Four Questions

The study group located the following four issues regarding the Current Tides of Popular Adult Education program and its future. Monetarily, it was possible to develop the program with external funding, but without it, the program's future is unclear. The grant made it possible to hire a course coordinator, a luxury in today's universities. In the fall of 2021, Tampere University laid off every fifth of the administrative staff as part of its managerial policy. Thus, getting organisational resources in the future is difficult, if not impossible. In addition, hiring external experts is more difficult due to a lack of money.

Organisationally, it is still being determined whether such a program as CTPA has a place in the current neoliberal curriculum. The course requires more time to teach and study than the current teaching framework allows. Another question is whether enough qualified faculty members are interested in teaching in the program and contributing to its development. Moreover, it is difficult to know how adults who participate and work simultaneously could fit in the 'managerial university time' emphasizing speedy studies and fast degrees.

Pedagogically, it is vital to ponder how to solve the experienced contradiction between a managerial university's top-down teaching mode and the Freirean egalitarian ideal of the teacher-student relationship. This question relates to the question of how can we cope in the future – in practice and theory – with such a 'hyperobject' as Covid-19 (Bengtsson & Van Poeck, 2021) and develop new forms of 'hybrid pedagogies' and 'hybrid andragogies' to guarantee peer-to-peer learning and dialogue vital in popular education practice?

Academically, or from the point of view of the research paradigms, there is always the question of whether there is a place for popular adult education teaching and studies in the current culture of grant hunting and the destructive ideology of 'publish or perish.'

The program showed a path to reclaim and revitalise popular adult education in the current context of managerial university's opportunities and contradictions. As Crowther et al. (2006, p. 63) has put it, popular education often operates dialectically in these contexts where 'there are always new spaces to be opened up and new connections to be made.' However, the pilot program did not solve the general problem of the lack of teaching popular (and radical) adult education in Finnish universities.

Nevertheless, it may have shown some possible modes to organise such teaching. The real question is how to get popular adult education study contents inside the ordinary course structure in the faculty of education at Tampere University and elsewhere and maintain their originality and core ideas of dialogue and collaboration. Another critical question is how to plan courses and programs that consider adult students' and work-life participants' different learning needs (and timetables). Particular attention should be given to adult learners' learning needs.

Conclusion: The Future of Popular Adult Education in the Managerial University

It has been noted that popular education's engagement in and placement with the academy is a difficult task (Crowther et al., 2006, p. 63). Popular adult education (along with adult education at large) has long struggled with its academic legitimacy and faced the charges of being too sporadic and 'not defined and delimited in a very clear way' (Larsson, 2010, p. 103). Some scholars have assessed that the research paradigm is still vague and immature and lacks theoretical and methodological rigor (Malewski, 2010). Partly, this debate on the disciplinary status and appropriate paradigm has been hegemonic and concerned those who seek power to define what is an essential adult education research and teaching and what is not.

At times popular adult education has perhaps been defined as too pragmatic and practice-oriented in the disciplinary debates. It has not had power or voice in the struggle for academic prestige. Besides, popular adult education has been considered expressive action, not contributing to economic development like work-life-related research and teaching areas such as adult training, human resource, and competence building.

Popular adult education would benefit from a stronger foothold in the managerial university to bring the students critical views from non-formal and informal areas of learning and the civil society where people 'unionize, create revolutionary parties, build social movements, take to the streets, and develop community organizations' (Brookfield, 2016, p. 28). Based on lessons from Tampere University's pilot, the planning group also sketched an 'ecumenical' approach or a synthesis of adult education research and teaching. A comprehensive study program would consist of lifelong learning, continuum education, popular adult education, and vocational adult education. Higher education institutions in Nordic countries, Europe, and other parts of the world could eventually contribute to the study program.

This study program would be a place for popular adult education because it is flexible enough to identify societal changes and invent the needed responses, perhaps better than the formal education system. Besides, popular adult education unites the university and the students to global civil society and the life worlds of everyday learning outside the capitalist knowledge economy and paid labour. It brings forth 'the realm of freedom' which, according to Marx (1894, p. 593), 'actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus, in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production.' It is hard to imagine that popular adult education would serve capitalism's 'new growth economy' (Jesson & Newman, 2004). It is easier to think it stands on the side of humanistic ideals and can reclaim its radical roots.

As Scandrett has noted, the current neoliberalist managerial university is a site 'for pedagogical and political contestation. Democratic learning and knowledge production is not a fixed institutional state but is always contingent and borne of struggle' (Scandrett, 2017, p. 94). In participating in these struggles and in building popular adult education programs in the sometimes 'hostile' and 'cognitively unjust' (Santos, 2017) environments, the following question, among others, deserves critical attention: as managerial university often favors top-down approaches to program planning, development, and evaluation as well as evidence-based programs, in which rational and quantitative assessments are applied, there is a danger that accepting and following these guidelines steer the field in the wrong direction for they do not easily allow a dialogical approach, not to mention critical views on education and society. The current study

pipeline does not give enough time for reflection and does not consider adult learners' learning conditions, work, and other life.

If there is any future hope in the university (cf. Hall, 2021; Fleming, 2021) and university-based popular adult education as part of it, they need to join forces with global civil society's dialogical and activist practices. They need to find ecological movements, social justice activism, artivism (art plus activism), and other pockets of resistance. In doing so, university-based popular adult education could provide for students and practitioners alike socially, culturally, and collectively meaningful knowledge, means to build global humanity and a sustainable world (see also Scandrett, 2014, 2017) and increase possibilities for cognitive justice, that is, the recognition of the plurality of knowledge and paradigms of both studying and learning and living and knowing (Santos, 2017). In these tasks, it can be helpful for popular adult education to develop new alliances with different disciplines and fields of studies despite the experienced difficulties.

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Notes

1 These efforts conflicted between the Reds and the Whites in the Civil War of 1918. The war broke the unity of the workers' movement and its educational project into two, reformist and revolutionary camps. As a result of the war, the Finnish government banned revolutionary education for 30 years; the tasks of workers' education fell on the reformist. (Kantasalmi & Hake, 1997; Saarela, 2015)

2 Marx and Engels pointed to the power of the ruling class in 1846: 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force' (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 67).

3 In all decades of Finnish university-based adult education, teaching and research on radical adult and popular education have been marginal. In the 1950s, a study *Työväen omaehtoinen sivistystyö* [Workers' Self-Governed Popular Education] (Harva et al., 1954) on workers' study activities was carried out at the University of Tampere. In the 1970s, some adult education students and academics became interested in Paulo Freire's thinking (Freire, 2005). In the 2000s, a bunch of critical scholars revived Freirean ideas (see Suoranta & Tomperi, 2021).

4 The group consisted of Björn Wallén (Secretary-General of the Finnish Adult Education Association, FAEA), Anneliina Wevelsiep (Secretary-General of the Citizens' Forum, one of 12 study centres in Finland), Mari Tapio (an educational planner of the Citizens' Forum), and me.

5 Sven Lindqvist's book *Gräv där du står* (1978) gave birth to the adult educational Dig Where You Stand movement. It generated thousands of study circles and 'barefoot' research groups in Europe and North America. 'Their results were published in hundreds of exhibitions, books, pamphlets, and theatrical plays. […] The idea of "digging" for truth close to home can be traced back to Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote, "Wo du stehst, grab tiefhinein!" ('Where you stand, dig in deeply!', Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft, Poem 3).' (Lindqvist, 2014, p. 265)

6 The program produced rich data. In addition to my field notes and planning meeting minutes, students' assignments, learning diaries, and Moodle discussions were stored on the course's Moodle. However, I could not use the data produced by the students because of the research ethics: it was not gathered for research. Instead, I used my field notes, the group's memoranda, and our general discussions to ensure students' anonymity.

7 As one of the reviewers kindly informed me (anonymously), this study program is not unique in the Nordic context. There are folk high school teacher training programs and individual courses on popular education at the university level (e.g., at Linköping University since the 1970s and more recently at the University of South-Eastern Norway).

[8] In this question, I am inclined to refer to Wittgenstein, who wrote, 'The meaning of a word is its use in the language' (Wittgenstein 1967, para. 43). And more importantly: 'What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use' (para. 116). In the context of popular adult education, it is crucial to do rigorous conceptual work. It is also vital to study adult learning practices, develop theory from the ground up, and ask how to understand those practices better.

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