LIVING ADULT EDUCATION: FREIRE IN SCOTLAND

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN ADULT EDUCATION

Volume 6

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Living Adult Education: Freire in Scotland

Second Edition

By

Gerri Kirkwood

and

Colin Kirkwood

With a new preface by Jim Crowther and Ian Martin and a new chapter
by Vernon Galloway, Stan Reeves and Nancy Somerville

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This book has been written in a Freirean spirit and is the product of complex layers of team work. We cannot therefore simply give a routine 'list of acknowledgements', but wish to pay tribute to all participants in the process in a more personal way.

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Gerri has been a member of the Adult Learning Project (ALP) team from the beginning and worked very closely with Stan Reeves and Mike Rosendale in her research and preparation of drafts, discussing all the issues with them. And Gerri, Colin, Stan and Mike were also members of the Project Committee, which was convened by the Scottish Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (SIACE). The other members were: Gerry Cairns, Lothian Region; Brian Semple, Scottish Education Department; and Elisabeth Gerver and Lalage Bown, SIACE. The committee acted as a sounding board for the authors' ideas and discussed issues, texts and format with them. All found it an absorbing and stimulating experience.

As well as the visible teams (the author partners; the ALP workers; the Project Committee) there was a less determinate team, made up of all participants in ALP over the years, whose presence, views and achievements decided the existence and shape of the book.

Secondly, there are the *providers of resources* – the Scottish Education Department, who imaginatively gave a grant to SIACE to fund this book's preparation, and Lothian Regional Council, who allowed Gerri Kirkwood to use her time in the necessary research and writing. Honour is very much due to Lothian Regional Council for having continued to support ALP through the years.

Thirdly, there are the many *people who have contributed specialist skills* to ALP and to the book itself. These have included interviewers of ALP participants and the various ALP assessors, consultants and resource persons. In particular, the various teams valued and appreciated the contributions of: Joan Bree, who did all the typing; Mary McCann and Jo Hignett who illustrated the leaflets; Julie Macdonald and Davy Hunter who prepared the map of Gorgie Dalry; Sandra McSheaffrey who undertook the initial research in the ALP chronofile; the ALP Photo Workshop who did the photographic codifications and Janet McLaughlin who did the sketched codifications. The *Scotsman* newspaper permitted the use of the photograph of the 1977 Wembley football match.

Thanks to the help and goodwill of all these people and to the clear understanding of the Kirkwoods, it is our faith that this book conveys the authentic voice of ALP.

Lalage Bown

Acknowledgements for the second edition

Like the first edition, the second is a team effort. First of all, we wish to express our gratitude to Emilio Lucio of the University of Seville, whose idea it was to translate what everyone now calls 'the ALP book' into Spanish and Valenciano. And likewise we are very grateful to the Paulo Freire Institute of Spain, Centre of Resources and Continuing Education of Valencia and Dialogos for publishing both these versions of the second edition. We are particularly grateful to Jim Crowther for the part he has played in the conception of this project.

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For their thoughtful and challenging Preface to the second edition, we thank Jim Crowther and Ian Martin. We express our gratitude and congratulations to Vernon Galloway, Stan Reeves and Nancy Somerville for rising to the challenge of our invitation to write a selective, illustrated discussion of ALP's work from 1989 to 2006. This is included as a new Chapter Seven, and should, we believe, be regarded as a significant addition, in its own right, to the literature on community-based adult education. What a historical context! What a story! What pride the authors, ALP workers, tutors, students, members and directors of the ALP Association can take in their praxis! ALP itself has written a new chapter in the history of popular adult education, locally and globally, reaffirming and honouring the brilliance of the

'onellie begetter' of this approach, Paulo Freire, whose writings have inspired us all since the 1970s.

Finally, our thanks go once again to the great lady of world adult education, Lalage Bown, for permission to reproduce her Acknowledgements and Preface to the first edition; to the members of the Project Committee who guided the writing of the original book; and to all the progenitors, founders, participants and workers on ALP since it began in 1979. A special word of thanks must be said again to the illustrators, artists and photographers whose work graces the pages of the original book and is reproduced here: for their names, please refer to Lalage's original Acknowledgements.

It is important to emphasise that the work of Vernon, Stan and Nancy, and Jim and Ian, in the new Chapter Seven and the new Preface, represents their own interpretations, incorporating insights and perspectives both old and new. Many other interpretations are possible, and will, no doubt, be offered in the future. That is as it should be in an open society. That is how vital, living traditions develop, through dialogue, contestation and continuing processes of analysis and synthesis, always with reference back to deep roots in what we have inherited. It is for these reasons that we have chosen to let the text of the original ALP book stand unaltered, exactly as it was written.

As the original authors, we commissioned and edited the new Preface and the new Chapter Seven. All the contributors have worked for free, in the voluntary tradition of adult education. Brief autobiographical notes by each author are to be found at the end of the book.

To our new readers, greetings! Welcome to the work of Freire in Scotland.

Gerri Kirkwood
Colin Kirkwood

Preface

The Gorgie Dalry Adult Learning Project in Edinburgh, known affectionately as ALP, is a sustained experiment in applying the principles of the Brazilian adult educationist, Paulo Freire, in a Western European post-industrial urban environment. After almost ten years, it has become an accepted and highly respected feature of the adult education landscape in Scotland, operating throughout under the auspices of the local authority and constantly visited by enquirers and students.

ALP's prime importance is to the community of Gorgie Dalry and the many members of that community who have participated in its work and have gained heightened awareness in learning programmes there. But its unique character and history make it of serious interest to adult educators all over Britain and elsewhere as well. This book is partly a celebration of its achievements and partly a bid to spread knowledge of its work more widely.

One reason for ALP's significance is that it is an experiment in cultural borrowing, an acknowledgement that UK adult educators need to escape from insularity and recognize the possible value of theories and methods engendered in 'the South' – to use the Brandt Commission's shorthand for developing countries. We and they are now facing similar challenges – large-scale unemployment and under-employment, social fragmentation, sharp inequalities between rich and poor, urban stress and decay – and if we perceive adult education as a tool for change, adult educators in North and South can only gain if they exchange ideas and try them out in each other's environments.

Freire is fairly well known in Britain, in the sense that some of his

more general ideas about, for instance, the combination of reflection and action (praxis) are part of the rhetoric of adult educationists; but full-scale, consistent efforts to apply his theory as a whole are very rare. Hence the second reason for the importance of ALP. The Freirean process has been worked through over a sufficient length of time for the practitioners involved to say that it works and it has value and others in Britain should be challenged to try it.

Thirdly, in saying that it works, the ALP team are affirming a constructive and vigorous alternative to some of the current orthodoxies being pushed in adult education by some government agencies – the kind of orthodoxies which were described recently by a disillusioned further education lecturer in England: ‘in tomorrow’s world of testing, training and technology . . . all students can sit passively and contentedly as “docile listeners in the transfer of information”, free from the discomfort of participating’. Cheryl Law – Farewell to Freire, *Adult Education*, 60/4, March 1988, Leicester, National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE). There can be discomfort in participating, but the long-term results in terms of human and social transformation are surely a vindication.

Because this book explains so sensitively the theory and rationale of Freirean education, it will provide a first-rate grounding for those who want it; and because it describes so carefully the Freirean process at work in a Western setting, it should hearten and inspire all those who fear the iron hold of mechanistic and passive approaches to learning. It is thorough, serious and exciting and tells the story of a thorough, serious and exciting experiment.

Lalage Brown

Convenor, ALP Book Project Committee,
Scottish Institute of Adult and Continuing Education

Preface to the second edition

This new edition of the original publication from 1989 came about through a visit to the Department of Higher and Community Education at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland by Professor Emilio Lucio of the University of Seville in Spain. Because of his interest in the work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire he borrowed a copy of *Living Adult Education: Freire in Scotland*, and we put him in contact with its authors Gerri and Colin Kirkwood. The project they write about is called the Adult Learning Project and is commonly referred to by its acronym, ALP. Gerri was one of ALP's original trio of adult educators, and Colin was an intellectual and inspirational resource for the project. Their book is an account of the gestation, implementation and development of Freirian ideas in a community-based setting in Edinburgh from the late 1970s onwards.

Unlike the work of Paulo Freire, which first developed in literacy campaigns in Brazil and Chile, the focus of ALP was from the outset on general adult education in a community setting, mostly at a post-literacy level. Its success in what it has achieved rightfully deserves recognition beyond the confines of Scotland and, for that matter, the UK. The first word of the title of the book, *Living*, was aptly chosen in that the project has grown in an organic way since its inception. To reflect its continuing development, this new edition of the

original publication comes with a specially commissioned additional chapter, chapter seven, which brings the story of ALP up to date. This has been written by three members who are still actively involved in ALP: Vernon Galloway, a former ALP worker and now a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh; Stan Reeves, one of the original team who began work with ALP in 1979 and who continues as one of the project's two adult educators today; and Nancy Somerville, an adult educator formerly with the project full-time who is still involved in a voluntary capacity in its cultural and women's work.

Five general themes are useful for understanding the wider relevance of this publication for non-UK readers: the link between theory and practice, the longevity of the project, the changing Scottish context, the theme of alienation in ALP's activities, and the link between the local, national and international contexts of its work.

A major strength of ALP has been its ability to demonstrate through practice the applicability of Freire's ideas beyond the boundaries of 'underdeveloped societies' and beyond the teaching of literacy. Many students of Paulo Freire today still find his ideas, particularly in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, difficult to follow and hard to visualise in pedagogical terms. It is therefore tempting to dismiss his ideas as exotic and not relevant to the gritty reality of educational work in post-literacy contexts. The approach of ALP, which has involved adopting and adapting Freire's ideas in the Scottish context, contains lessons for others who want to engage with his work. The ALP process, which is depicted in diagrammatic form on page 7, is a good example of the clear and systematic way the project developed its praxis and made explicit an educational methodology which has now been applied to work across a wide range of subjects and themes. In this way, ALP has been able to sustain an explicit link between theory and practice.

It seems quite remarkable that a project of this nature has had such longevity. It was born in the same year, 1979, as the coming to political power of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party and the UK government. This was a period that marked a decisive turning point in social democratic politics with a shift towards a neo-liberal political and economic agenda which continues to be dominant in mainstream politics, in the UK and

elsewhere, today. Characteristics of this approach to governing have been the cutting back on social welfare, the privatisation of public utilities, favouring market relations to distribute goods and services and the emphasis on individuals looking after themselves and their families. This is a type of politics that many today are familiar with in very different parts of the world.

Another characteristic of neo-liberal politics and policies has been an emphasis on short-term welfare and educational interventions. This is particularly the case in community-based activities. The longevity of an educational project such as ALP, which stands opposed to the dominant politics of its era, is therefore a significant achievement. There seem to be two key ingredients to its success in this respect. It has been popular, and this is reflected in its ability to retain and expand the range of students it has engaged with. It has therefore had a strong level of community support behind it. Related to this, it has been able to change in the changing context in which it has found itself. This is not a subtle code for saying it has lost direction! Instead, it has been an active agent in influencing the circumstances in which it operates and has thrived because of its creative ability. A project that had very early success – as the original publication testifies – could quite easily have rested on its laurels and eventually stagnated by losing touch with currents of community life which make it a *living* educational project. This has not been the case with ALP. Its ability to change has given it a dynamic that has ensured its survival. The legacy of the original project has been the impetus, even the necessity, to develop an intellectual account both of its educational practice and of the context to which it has had to relate.

To understand the success of ALP it is important to locate the development of its work in an analysis of the changing Scottish political and cultural context. Today, Scotland has its own devolved Parliament with political control over a number of important domestic policy areas, including education. It still sends political representatives to the UK Parliament in London but it also elects representatives to the newly devolved Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. The foundation of this institution in 1999 followed the victory of New Labour in the 1997 UK general election. A subsequent referendum on devolution established ‘the settled will’ – at least for some time – of the Scottish people about the need for greater political control over their own affairs. This tension between

local and national autonomy is not peculiarly Scottish. It is an issue with deep roots in the social, cultural and political history of Scotland but its significance will be well understood in many other contexts where tensions of a similar kind exist. For example, the expansion of the European Union in terms of member states and in terms of political influence on national policies appears to have heightened the demand for greater local control over decision-making in many parts of Europe.

At the time of the founding of ALP, however, the political situation was very different. The emergence of Thatcherite politics in the UK created a widening ideological gulf between Scotland and its more powerful neighbour, England. The outcome was that by the early 1990s Scotland was a politically 'Conservative-free zone' in the sense that in general elections it returned no Conservative politicians to the UK Parliament in London! This development had very important long-term repercussions. The ideological gulf between the political representatives sent to London by the Scottish electorate and the Conservative domination of UK politics for 17 years, meant that the aspirations and hopes of the Scottish electorate had little chance of influencing mainstream British politics. This emasculation of Scottish interests in the formal political processes of the British state led to the migration of political struggle *away* from UK party politics *into* the cultural politics of Scottish civil society. The political struggle for democratic renewal in Scottish civil society was crucial to the formation of the devolved political administration today. This process was a struggle that ALP was always actively involved in, not in the sense of taking an explicit party political position, but in the commitment to Scotland having greater control over its affairs.

In terms of curriculum development, ALP can be understood in terms of an analysis which conceives alienation as a major generative theme of the epoch. This theme has had various manifestations in its work which addresses alienation in personal and social terms, developing educational programmes in terms of the organisation of communal life and the institutions of the local state such as schooling and health facilities and also in terms of the alienation created by the democratic deficit in the British political state.

Three distinct phases in ALP's work can be identified. In the first phase, the emphasis was on interpreting Freire's ideas and

establishing their relevance to an urban context in an advanced industrial society. The interpretation of Paulo Freire's work and its relevance to Scottish community life owes much to the influence of Colin Kirkwood who, at the time the project was founded, was a Tutor Organiser with the Workers' Educational Association in south-east Scotland. He taught a series of pioneering courses on understanding Freire and became a consultant to the newly established ALP. The relevance of the ALP curriculum to the life of Scottish people in urban communities is evidenced in the case studies which are documented in chapters three and four of this publication. The experience of home life, schooling, health and unemployment were all aspects of daily life which could be interrogated and decoded in ways which encouraged people to take individual and collective control over their lives.

The second main phase in the ALP curriculum was resistance to the neo-liberal political agenda from the late 1980s onwards by an emphasis on reasserting the importance of communal and associational life as against market and consumer relationships. The emphasis on cultural activity, the traditional arts, music and song were woven into the curriculum of ALP with remarkable levels of support and popularity. Because the project has expanded in terms of mass participation, particularly in the expressive arts, the problem for ALP has been to ensure the applicability of its ideas, practice and methodology across a wide range of curriculum areas. Training of voluntary staff and the graduation of its own students into becoming tutors have helped this process and ensured that the project retains continuity but is also open to new influences. The formation of an ALP Association to create a structure of student democracy in the project, regular cultural events and popular participation in the expressive arts are all manifestations of this period in the project's life. This is a cultural struggle, informed by a political agenda, but with an educational focus. It parallels the broader shift, noted above, away from a preoccupation with the formal politics of the British state into an engagement with the politics of Scottish cultural life.

The third and current phase is being shaped by post-devolution politics in Scotland and the wider context of globalisation. In addition to the earlier themes that it continues to be engaged with, the focus of ALP's work has developed to include educational approaches to encouraging popular participation in democracy,

analysing the ownership of land in Scotland and work with refugees and asylum seekers, all of which are ongoing and fully documented in the specially commissioned final chapter. Whilst ALP has always addressed the local community in which it is located, it has also sought to link community issues with Scottish-wide concerns and an appreciation of Scotland's position in an international and global context. What is remarkable is the consistent way in which the ideas of Freire have been systematically and explicitly developed in a wide range of educational, political and cultural activity. The creativity of the project is evident in the fact that it has constantly been testing the boundaries of its own practice.

For adult educators interested in socially purposeful adult education ALP provides a unique and inspirational model of how this can be done. The fundamental concern in all of Paulo Freire's work – in particular *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* – is to assert the possibility and potential of human agency. The Freirean educator does this by challenging the passivity and fatalism of ordinary people, intervening purposefully in their lives and enabling them to lever themselves out of 'immersion' in the 'culture of silence'. Through its pedagogy and curriculum ALP has made a significant contribution to enabling the often marginalised voices of Scottish communities to be heard. For educators the world over who share similar aims and values, the experience of ALP is both insightful, instructive and inspirational.

Jim Crowther and Ian Martin
University of Edinburgh, Scotland
January 2011

Introduction

The writings of the Brazilian adult educator, Paulo Freire, have been available in English as a source of inspiration and encouragement to students, teachers and trainers since the early 1970s. In spite of the cultural gap between Brazil and Britain, and the difficulty of his language, we knew that Freire was speaking to us.

Interest in his work has grown steadily. Today there are few writers on adult education who do not acknowledge his influence. Freire has been no instantly disposable prophet.

Yet all along there has been a problem. Although, from time to time, word was out that such and such a project was struggling to apply his ideas, after the initial flurry of excitement, little further information would emerge. It was as if the gap was too wide to bridge. It was as if Freire belonged to another world. He faced south, towards Africa and Latin America, and although he visited North America and many European countries, and for ten years was based at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, doubts were expressed as to the relevance of his interesting ideas about oppression, liberation, and the culture of silence in the high-tech democracies of the north.

The opposite view was also held, that Freire was saying nothing that was not embodied in the work of the best exponents of the liberal tradition in British adult education.

For whatever reasons, it seemed that his vision and our reality were doomed to remain apart.

In the Lothian Region of Scotland, as elsewhere, there was an existing interest in Freire's ideas among community education workers, which was further encouraged by a series of courses offered

by the Workers' Educational Association. It was this interest which led to the successful efforts of Fraser Patrick (Community Education Officer) and Douglas Shannon (Senior Community Education Worker) to obtain funding for a project which would put his ideas into practice.

This book tells the story of how, in 1979, the Adult Learning Project (ALP) came to be created, as a systematic attempt to implement Freire's approach in Scotland. It sets out to explain his ideas as simply as possible, and to show how they have been adapted and applied by the ALP workers and participants in learning programmes in the Gorgie Dalry area of Edinburgh.

It is written by practitioners for practitioners, trainers, managers and policy makers, and tries to answer the questions which have been directed at the ALP workers over the years. The authors have attempted to communicate the experience of taking part in Freire-type learning groups, the process that has been developed, the issues that have arisen, and the lessons that have been learned. They have tried to represent the contributions of everyone: ALP workers, participants, and resource people. It has been a difficult but rewarding job.

Chapter 1 tells the story of the ALP project, its origins, the locality in which it is set, the staff employed, and the process of learning and action generated from Freire's ideas.

Chapter 2 deals with ideas, the British context, the context of education and specifically of community education, and concludes with an account of Paulo Freire's life, his ideas, and the methods he developed in Brazil and Chile.

Chapter 3 consists of case studies of three major ALP investigations; *Living in Gorgie Dalry*, *Health and Well-being*, and *Parents and Authority*, and the learning programmes emerging from them.

Chapter 4 presents case studies of three action outcomes arising from the learning programmes described in Chapter 3: *Play in the Terraces*, the *Skills Exchange*, and the *Parents Centre*, followed by two ALP groups whose activities have been central to the vitality of the project, the *Photo Workshop* and the *Writers Workshop*.

Chapter 5 discusses the influence of ALP on participants, on the staff, and on other professionals, drawing on interviews and on the project's records of its training work.

Chapter 6 offers some reflections on what has made ALP thrive, and explores key themes recurring throughout the life of the project

which have wider implications for the spread of the influence of Freire and of ALP.

Since ALP is an ideas-intensive project, and since many of these ideas are difficult – or at any rate, unfamiliar – a glossary has been included with definitions of terms used by Freire or by ALP. The first time each word is used in the text, it is in *italics*, encouraging the reader to refer to the glossary for clarification if necessary.

The book concludes with a select bibliography and a statistical summary of participation in ALP over the period from 1979–87. Illustrations are included throughout.

ALP is a part of the Community Education Service of Lothian Regional Council. A word of explanation about the meaning of community education in Scotland may be helpful. The Community Education Service was established in the years after 1975, following the publication of Alexander Report which recommended the integration of adult education and youth and community work into a single service. It is promoted at national level by the Scottish Community Education Council. The specific interests of adult education in community, further, and higher education, and in the voluntary sector, are promoted by the Scottish Institute of Adult and Continuing Education.

ALP was set up in the first place as an Urban Aid project. Essentially this means that it was financed jointly by central government (the Scottish Education Department) and local government (Lothian Regional Council) on a 75/25 per cent basis. After an initial three-year period of funding, a two-year extension was given. At the end of five years, Urban Aid projects sponsored by local government either close down, or else the local government body involved assumes full financial responsibility, integrating the project into its own mainstream provision. The campaign by ALP participants to secure the future of the project in Gorgie Dalry received widespread support from adult education bodies throughout Britain, and was successful.

This book is a project of the Scottish Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, supported by Lothian Regional Council, and funded by the Scottish Education Department. The views expressed, however, are those of the authors, and not of the sponsoring organizations.