

# **The community of workers' university: a pragmatic institution for the future?**

**Paul Gibbs and Carol Costley, Middlesex University**

## **Abstract**

The identity of the worker foregrounds the development of higher education rather than the other way around. It is developed in contrast to the lack of higher education innovation in the recent UK Government White Paper on Higher Education and in the educational philosophy of Tawney and the neo-pragmatism of Rorty. The proposal is that higher learning, after capabilities have been nurtured in compulsory schooling, may be developed through communities of workers acting as agent for improvement of their communities; not in universities at all. This is a radical approach to higher education and employment and one that might bring true diversity to the higher education sector.

## **Keywords**

Tawny, Rorty, Pragmatism, Community, Higher Education

## **Introduction**

The policy debate on the nature of higher education in the United Kingdom, albeit formalised in the white paper *Students at the Heart of the System* (BIS, 2011a), here referred to as the White Paper, brings together what had, up until that point, been conducted in an *ad hoc* fashion by ministers and their officials for ideological gain rather than educational essence. At least that is the view that has been drawn from the sophistic announcements made by ministers, seemingly intent on pushing ideas in order to coerce the education sector into accepting their doctrine.

Clear evidence of this is provided in a speech by David Willetts, UK Minister of State for Universities and Science, to the Universities UK Spring 2011 meeting (BIS, 2011b). For example, when discussing his long-term ambitions he claimed that external degrees from select universities should ‘once again, be widely available across Britain’. His speech, designed to provoke the sector by lowering barriers to entry whilst retaining government control via student numbers outlined this process and could have been conceived in consultation with all the stakeholders to higher education provision. The ideas would then have been likely to recognise the edifying as well as commercial benefits of higher education, been evidenced-based and had transparency and parity in the way commercial interests and state institutional interests were treated. The White Paper may have then been better balanced. This does not seem to have been the case and so it is hard not to consider Willetts’ approach to higher education as unfair and based on a central ideology of control, commercial interest and unabated consumerism.

The White Paper seems to perpetuate the policy divide identified by Tawney when he wrote that the ‘way in which educational policy of a period reflects its conceptions of human society and the proper object of human endeavour is well illustrated by the part which has in the past been played, and is still played today, by the ideas, of status and the idea of the career open to talent’ (Tawney, 1914, p. 70). There is a dark shadow of it in current policy and it is problematic.

Even if the points put forward in Willetts’ speech were justifiable for reasons of innovation in delivery or access (which would need a 11.3% increase in full-time UK students but just 0.8% in part-time (HESA, 2011), it fails in the sense of being truly innovative or communal, as claimed in Chapter 2 of the White Paper. It realigns existing arrangements to make a few institutions so powerful that if they then fail to

bend to government political instruction it is likely to lead to bankruptcy in the whole higher education system. This is the downside to central government funding which can direct and manipulate a market by applying barriers to some parts and supporting other parts. For example, by opening up uncapped places for high flying students who will gravitate to a university which has a good reputation with employers, gives them greater control of the market than others. This notion of organisations ‘too big to fail’ sounds very much like the run-up to the banking crisis and the notion of moral hazard pertains to Willetts’ suggestions just as much as it did to the banks.

Moreover, what has happened is the structural separation of missions of difference and is not great educational diversity and decentralisation claimed in the White Paper but rather partition. Indeed, the idea of supporting with tax payers’ money, students attending profit-making institutions, seems inequitable and divisive, especially when all the institutions may add is efficiencies in the rate of degrees that are awarded but at the cost of effectiveness of education. This confusion of efficiency and effectiveness is common and likely to benefit an economic rationale. The cost per item (or student) goes down, for example through limited student support, online learning and greater intensity of provision (shortening of the length of time for the degree to be achieved). Efficiencies can cause depletion in educational experience and this is likely to be the personal developmental areas. Higher education will then move towards becoming more like technical proficiency training than skilful edification.

This paper suggests an alternative to the intermingling of existing commercial interest, state property and an awarding body, being Willetts’ rather reactionary notion of innovation. By returning to the past, but this time to Tawney’s egalitarian notion of higher education and especially to the assertion that ‘we want as much university education as we can get for the *workers* who remain workers all there lives’ (Tawney,

1914, p. 74 *italics in original*), it is suggested that changes can occur within the foundations of the idea of a university if the meaning of knowledge and its use is contested. On the basis of this credo, a preliminary outline of a plausible and legitimate alternative is offered to the proposed higher education policy of creating a high table for elitism in university education.

This is done by concentrating on the role of the university as a knowledge creator and defining knowledge as a justifier of belief (see discussion on Rorty below) and an institution of change and emancipation. Each of these definitions of universities as ‘justifiers of belief’ and ‘institutions of ‘change and emancipation’ is seemingly antagonist to the reactionary suggestions of the current UK government, yet both are in line with government policy; and both descriptions place students centrally in their world of work. To pursue this idea it is suggested that a pragmatic workers’ community university could be developed. Its mission is to make a difference in ways more profound than instructing students in the process of achieving an externally awarded degree. It draws from Tawney’s advocacy, not just for the development of greater access to the same form of educational provision but for universities to provide ‘as much university education as we can get for the workers who remain workers all their lives’ (Tawney, 1914, p. 74). He continues that we must find in our idea of the university student of ‘mature years, who carry on their education in the midst of their working life’ (Tawney, 1914, p.74) and finally that the universities ought to fulfil the ‘needs of those whose economic career is moulded on a different framework from the professional classes’ (Tawney, 1914, p.74). Here then we have the philosophical divergence from the homogeneity of central control and an edict to build the community university to provide democratic education.

With this in mind, and following Willetts, a look back for inspiration and forward for implementation is required. In so doing, central control is not sought but liberation and it is suggested that the tutorial classes of peripatetic academics reaching into worker communities to deliver higher education (Turner, 2009), which were organised by the Workers' Educational Associations (WEA) and exemplified through the work of Tawney (Steele and Taylor, 2008), provide a significant insight into how democratic education might be achieved. Change in the higher education sector to allow for pragmatic universities along the lines proposed by Tawney (1914) and based on his experience of the Workers' Educational Associations' tutorial classes as the 'nucleus of a university established in a place where no university exists' (Tawney 1914, p. 77); a university in the community not in the building of existing institutions might be achieved through a convergence of the philosophical, political and economic issues discussed below.

By foregrounding the notion of work, not as the missing link in an academic curriculum but as the essence of our identity the paper discusses how, if work is placed at the centre of the policy debate, such a move may arrive at a form of higher education that is innovative, communal and simply worthwhile. To address this, the starting point is with the notion of work, rather than higher education in order to seek innovative structures for edifying a general public rather than an institutionalised elitist model based on merit and cost efficiencies.

### **Work and identity**

The essence of work is the essence of being, for it provides a point of departure in our understanding of the being within a specific context, the workplace. As Kovacs (1986, p. 195) commented, 'work is an essential part of human life as recognized by all

serious reflection on the value of human activity' and this is the case not just for the privileged professional creative worker but also for those vast numbers who work just to earn enough to sustain a living and do not wish or choose to gain with improvement or reflection on their working position. As Shershow pointedly reflected, we see ourselves as '*working to live* and as *living to work*: understanding labour at once as inescapable obligation... and as the definitive essence of our humanity' (2005, p. 13, italics in original). This phrase complements Arendt's more dramatic distinction where we 'eat in order to labor and must labor in order to eat' (1985, p. 143).

Of course, it is not the only point of departure (contact with the natural world, family engagement and contact with historicity are others) but it is an important one for it holds many of the practices through which human beings thrive to achieve and produce many of the means by which they may realise their lives, even if they think they just want to do the job and then get away, for work is an inescapable component of being. The prolific observers of industrialisation and those who formed political movements on behalf of the workers railed against their exploitation to achieve capitalist goals. Workplace communities are where practices are enacted; the form of the workplace community creates a background for action and the profundity of mood contributes to how this workplace as a community is conceived.

Learned functional skills are only the price of entry. Development enhances the capabilities of participants and this enhancement is a form of learning therapy that comes from experiences brought by inquisitiveness voiced in questioning. Moreover, its potency is directly related to one's belief in oneself in the specific community of practice of which one is existentially part. To gain recognition as community members it is necessary to understand how lived experience of practices are

assimilated. Negotiation by means of an understanding of the workplace, in order to find a familiar and satisfying niche, is the role of learning in our community.

The practices and rituals that are adopted towards work are central then to our being and are realised through our practices. These practices can be developed to higher levels where capabilities are present and where mastery can flourish but mastery is a praxis requiring both propositional and dispositional knowledge. To reveal higher levels of knowledge, techniques and skills in practice do not need a university classroom or academic disciplines but a way of acknowledging higher levels of skill in practice. How and why this might be done is the next concern.

### **A place for the development university in ‘developed’ economies**

In a recent book on the nature of higher education, Barnett (2011) categorised research universities from the perspective of their epistemological position along two axes; knowledge-for-itself/ knowledge-for-the-world and knowledge-in-itself/ knowledge-in-the-world (2011, p. 31). This grid locates universities as ivory towers, professional, entrepreneurial or developmental. He described the developmental university as one that is ‘active in the world and is generating knowledge through those activities in the world. It is intent on helping to improve the world – its knowledges are out to work for-the-world’ (Barnett, 2011, p. 32). Exciting as this type of university might be, Barnett had relatively little more to say about it beyond suggesting it might be the direction in which some universities may journey. He did, however, draw attention to Coleman’s (1986) ‘developmental university’. Although Coleman’s purpose for the developmental university mainly concerns developing economies, his emphasis on an edifying institution that contributes to political social and economic wellbeing has resonance with the neo-pragmatism of Rorty (1979) for

instance in 'Philosophy of the Mirror' he defines edification as "reinterpreting our familiar surroundings in unfamiliar terms' (1979: 360).

Coleman (1986, p. 477) saw such a university as 'an institution that in all its aspects is singularly animated and concerned, rhetorically and practically, with the 'solution' of the concrete problems of societal development'. It is suggested that the developmental university in developed societies may be conceived as the community of workers' university where ways of understanding, knowledge and action are pragmatically linked to solve societal problems. This is truly different from traditional universities for it seeks to build and develop upon skills that community members have, to realise them at higher level and, if appropriate, to credentialise them. The task is foremost not the discipline, success is getting thing done well, not in abstract theory formation but in the reality of achieving the task's outcome which may be defined as a project. Quality is in the impact of the learning recognised through the achievement of tasks/projects.

In the community of workers' university, disciplines no longer provide its legitimacy, and knowledge is created in and through competences, capabilities, practices and judgement which shifts the focus away from the epistemological hegemony of disciplinary knowledge to the ontology of *praxis*. The wider application of these activities are now considered along with actions in the workplace and the realisation of knowledge that is both practical and relevant. To do this the work of Rorty as the leading proponent of the philosophy of neo-pragmatism is drawn upon.

It is acknowledge that his work is not without controversy, specifically as Rorty's neo-pragmatism is criticised by Brandom (2000) for not advocating change in the sense favoured by critical theorists. However, it is argued that his very notion of edification encourages change. Bacon (2006, p.863) summarised well Rorty's position



when he reflected that ‘social criticism is an interpretive activity’ that draws on current practices to build a better, happier future. Rorty does not use inactivity and *status quo* but activity and challenge to distance us from what is now, to make what might be, better.

These arguments are based on an interpretation of Rorty’s neo-pragmatic, inter-disciplinary notion of knowledge that seeks to improve current understanding and renders as truth that which is justified belief and explanation.

Rorty suggests that we drop the notion of metaphysical truth, at least in any sense implying correspondence with an external reality and replace it with a meaning that is based on what works. In doing so we ‘forgo truth as correspondence and science as an accurate representation as the world really is’ (Peters and Ghiraldelli, 2001, p. 3) in favour of the authority of the community. It follows that this includes any notion of disinterested pursuit of knowledge of such truth. As Rorty projects this dissolution of truth for pragmatists, he states that ‘there is obviously a lot to be said about justification of various sorts of beliefs, there may be little to say about truth’ (Rorty, 1998, p. 19). Such politico-epistemological claims are based on plausible argument and judgements and are inherently uncertain but sufficiently reliable to function in our everydayness and lead, it is proposed, to its graduates taking an ontological stance as members of their societies within their work worlds as creative innovators. This is distinct from other forms of university that, we believe, under a thin political veil seek to develop either scholars trying to metaphysically know a reality beyond the phenomena of our being (‘technicians of knowledge’, as Derrida (2004, p. 96) referred to them) or entrepreneurs dogmatically harnessed to politico-economic ideologies, determined to perpetuate a creed-based consumer society. We

suggest there is room for all but argue that the pragmatic approach concentrates on the most pressing and practical problems faced by society.

### **The community of workers' university**

What is proposed is to reflect the goals of Coleman's developmental university as a place of learning and knowledge creation that is edifying, emancipating, democratic and economically relevant to our time. Such an approach leads to the university being defined by its core functions of conversational learning, knowledge realisation and solidarity. Rorty, like Dewey (1997), positioned knowledge as the connection for social solidarity rather than knowledge as power, for instance as emphasised by Foucault (1998) in the portrayal of discourse as normalising power. As such, it is more supportive of hope than despair. The hope is not for the realisation of correspondence with some outside essence, revealed through refined method but for 'the constitution of an identity from within itself where knowledge claims are proposals for action. This is the same thing we hope for from our poets and dramatists and novelists' (Rorty, 1982, p. 202). The conduct of such activity is, according to Rorty, the 'most distinctive and praiseworthy is our ability to trust and to cooperate with other people, and in particular work together so as to improve the future' (Rorty, 1999, viii).

Where knowledge-in-the-world and knowledge-of-the-world coalesce, a new discourse emerges. This is not of disciplines or science or immaterialism but corporeal action, justification and conversation. This new language – one not wracked by the bipolar of applied and theoretical -creates a notion of cooperation in the face of need, is developmental and encouraging. This is not to be confused by the increasingly penetrable veneer of performativity in the current university that sees old

instrumentalism applied to unchanging institutionalist hegemony but a meaningful, edifying conversation intent on realising a better place to live. It harnesses the technological achievements to enhance wellbeing, not to subjugate it under the yoke of unfettered greed and capitalistic inequalities.

The workers' community university will position itself in the *praxis* of learning experiences of becoming, whilst in the flux of uncertainty. It will not start abstract and then apply but, as *praxis*, it will analyse and respond. The sufficiency of its teaching and its knowledge claims, discussed below, will be evidenced by their success in casting new insights on issues. The admitted situationally centred curriculum is more aligned with the idea of a university, working with the capabilities already in the process of development rather than the development of basic skills. The pragmatic curriculum focuses on learning experiences in a curriculum that is diversified and problem-centred, not fragmented or compartmentalised. All learning starts with a problem or question that allows students to search for answers according to interests and abilities that may involve working alone, or in groups. Moreover, the edifying and educative conversation should be open and not focused on seeking a metaphysical way towards universal commensuration (Säfström, 1999) but focuses on the practical needs of the situation in the world space of the participants. The approach is similar to Säfström's (1999, p. 230) where teaching should 'not aim at Truth in an absolute sense, but be just by practicing justice and creating conditions for justice'.

Having broadly set out the scope of such a university, the three functions of a university are explored in more detail; knowledge as consensus, learning as edifying conversations and service as solidarity with the community hosting the university through diffusion of knowledge and engagement in its *praxis*.

### *Knowledge as justified community conversations*

The notion of conversation as a generator of knowledge is not explicitly Rorty's notion (see for instance Plato's *Theaetetus* (1997) and, more contemporarily, the work of Gadamar (1979); Habermas (1984); or Bernstein (1983)) but in Rorty a notion of 'being' similar to that of Heidegger is found, where the functionality of learning is best interpreted as a hermeneutic engagement with others. Through this thinking an understanding of a common language use is developed that is taken as knowledge ('how topics are defined in terms of one another and how they relate to other topics to form a coherent conceptual system', (Ford, 2005, p. 374)). Within this notion, knowledge has its own life span and might be temporary (for example, in deciding if it is raining) or more permanent and enshrined in a notion of fact or theory, or intermediate when it is evidenced in practice. This is not an attempt to find an alternative objective reality that is certain, reified by an unswerving notion of knowledge as absolute truth but a definition of the level of confidence we may have in practical judgements.

The vocabulary of knowledge is culturally determined and acts to inform but also to include or exclude those without the appropriate characteristics for a certain form or category for the conversation. Wittgenstein (1963) called these 'language games'. According to Rorty (1979, p. 12), we engage in edifying discourses that seek to help others 'break free from outworn vocabularies and attitudes, rather than to provide "grounding" for the intuitions and customs of the present'. The cultural role of such edifying conversations is 'to help us avoid the self-deception which comes from believing that we know ourselves by knowing a set of objective facts' (Rorty, 1979, p. 373). Taking this stance helps to describe and thereby recreate our world.

The Rortyan conversation is necessarily ongoing, for it is not a matter of discovering or seeking essences but of being prepared to listen and learn from others. It requires that we construct our own world views as part of our work world with others. In so doing, we reflect upon what is our identity, both in the specific situated learning environment presented and in how we take a stance on our becoming with others.

We develop and form solidarity with a community through our choice of story to identify us with the wider context of that community. Thus, as Rorty (2002, p. 422) proclaimed in his important work on knowledge, 'Solidarity or objectivity', when a person seeks solidarity 'he or she does not ask about the relationship between the practices of the chosen community and something outside the community' rather, what is sought is pragmatic intersubjectivity where what is believed works and what is sought is something better. Knowledge, then, is 'simply a compliment paid to the beliefs we think so well justified, that for the moment, no more justification is needed' (Rorty, 2002, p. 425). For Rorty, knowledge is contingent upon access to a particular language game that relies on a convergence of social and historical factors of the type of conversation taking place. As he explains, 'if we see knowledge as a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature, we will not be likely to envisage a meta-practice, which will be the critique of all possible forms of social practices' (Rorty, 2002, p. 171). That is, we need not substitute facts for interpretation. Knowledge justification emerges democratically from a community based on Socratic edifying conversations and, 'while uniform agreement may not necessarily ensue, no difference of opinion so intractable as to bar solidarity with one's fellow could arise' (Nelson 2009, pp. 500 -2).

Where does this lead in knowledge realisation? We normally recognise that activities and practices embody knowledge and that knowledge is determined by its

usefulness to engage and cope in our everyday activities. Moreover, we generally accept that what we know might be transferred from the original domain of its justification into other domains for use. However, the success of the transfer depends on the ability of those who will use the knowledge to define it as such in their own language games and accommodate the knowledge through their own realisation of meaning in ways that work for them.

This different form of knowledge has the practitioners' knowledge ontologically and epistemologically linked through the Rortyan notion of edification. The role of reified method contributes nothing to the value of the knowledge. Certainly this form of knowledge includes dogma, myths, psychotherapy and poetic interpretation; as Peters and Ghiraldelli (2001, pp. 2 -3). described it, it 'puts science and philosophy on par with the rest of culture and to emphasize a hermeneutic model of conversation as constituting the limits and possibilities of discourse and agreement'.

The meaning of knowledge is pertinent so long as it proves to be useful in enabling us to understand and cope with our environment. This knowledge gains its authority from being developed in the world of activity and in being validated in context and its function is to resolve problems that occur in our everydayness. It has no claim to persist beyond this practical function; in fact, it is intended to be superseded by more beneficial knowledge. The application of knowledge is pragmatic and emerges as truth from its commonly defined sufficiency of purpose. Peroune (2007) has drawn attention to levels of peer engagement based on trust and self-disclosure and these findings indicate that the willingness of participants to share tacit knowledge is heightened when trust and willingness to self-disclose are highest. Such a conversational model compares well with Mode 2 knowledge production (Nowotny *et al.*, 2003), presenting us with a number of issues for the community university.

The responsibility for society is to create knowledge that contributes to the general wellbeing of others. This is a moral imperative and one that should be central to the ethos of any university and may bring the researcher and the institution into tension with those whose values do not coincide. It is essential to resist the often-powerful influences on academic discipline such as from sponsors and managerialism for their own, self-serving stakes and requires many other virtues besides the Aristotelian virtues of courage (it is a risky thing to acknowledge changing ways of being), prudence and desire. It also requires, according to Winch (2008), self-regarding virtues such as patience, persistence, diligence, attention to detail and tenacity. Further, the ability to learn involves areteic and personal characteristics in existing practice as putative abilities in knowledge creation, resting upon knowing and choosing and that they may be only realised fully in the community. From what has been said, the university will focus its research on society's concrete problems, developing not just the skills to do but the judgement to determine when to act and in what circumstances to resist engagement with issues lacking integrity and fairness.

### ***Learning as edifying conversations***

Edifying conversations are engaged by 'practical epistemologists' (Barnett, 1997, p. 170); they are not just intent on generating meaning but allowing personal growth and development through re-creating networks of beliefs and desires. In this they have much in common with a classical liberal education; not a liberal education necessarily based on 'great books' but on the emancipation, democratisation and freedom of society. Specifically, edification is a process of transformation in 'aiding us becoming new beings' (Rorty, 1979, p. 360). Therefore, it is not the rehearsal of a technical *habitus* but the creation of space to question and to build new ways of exploring and

using technology in a socio-politically aware manner. It is the creation of Rortyan self-creating ironists, not the confirmation of commonsensicalists who previously avoided formal higher education or who only participate in directed vocational programmes. The edifying conversations 'serve not only to make it easier for the community to accommodate each of our edifying projects but also to root those projects, and us, in the shared tradition from which they initially drew their resources' (Arcilla, 1990, p. 37). The emphasis on conversations is to enable a language game to be constructed, relevant to the evolving learning community so a new, more relevant learning community can evolve.

The Rortyan position on learning is drawn from his understanding of self-recreation and, thus, ontologically what it is to be human. He holds the view that 'human beings are centerless networks of beliefs and desires and that their vocabularies and opinions are determined by historical circumstance'. This identifying notion has large areas where our beliefs and desires overlap but these commonalities are contingent and not a result of some core essence. We develop and shape this intent individually and in the solidarity of others through what Rorty has called edifying philosophy, the 'project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking' (Rorty, 1991, p. 360). This conceives learning, the ability to converse with others and to persuade, as the ability to learn how to learn. This ability to engage in knowledge acquisition and creation clearly entails a social learning process; we are conveying a powerful underlying assumption that learning is collective, constructive and conversational. It is a domain-independent model of learning; and knowledge is presented that is designed to help conceptualise and understand what takes place when effective communication occurs. This is the process of coming to know where one participant in a conversation can be said to



understand another's 'knowledge'; knowledge is thus knowing with others for the purpose of coping in the world of experiences. Given the Rortyan context, this approach has much in common with the informal learning model of Hager and Halliday (2006) that emphasises indeterminacy, opportunity and contingency, practice judgements and process.

This model sees knowledge creation as a hermeneutic learning process that replaces one worldview with another. For Rorty, the purpose of interpreting or knowing our world is not just to know but to cope, that is, to exist in the world effectively and to seek ways of change for improvement. This leads us not to seek truth but to evaluate ideas regardless of their context in ways that help us cope for, as Rorty (2002, p. 356), suggested, knowledge based on an essential notion of knowledge is used only to 'criticize views that [they] take to be false... rather it is the vocabulary of practice rather than theory of action'.

### ***Solidarity as university service***

As noted previously, according to Coleman, in traditional universities a goal is to encourage participation of the institution and its staff in public service and this is a central theme in the Community of Workers' University. Its notion of service is in solidarity with its host community and, more than a peripheral activity but central to its mission is a reaching out to others with the goal of helping and ameliorating their lot. Solidarity should be thought of as 'the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs and the like) as unimportant when compared with the similarities with respect to pain and humiliation—the ability to think of people as wildly different from ourselves, as included in the range of "us"' (Rorty 1989, p. 192). There is much to be said for how this solidarity forms a moral

obligation for inclusivity, to consider solidarity not as a separate function of the university but one woven through the functions of justification and conversation to make the pragmatic notion distinctive.

The responsibility that we talk of is more than civic responsibility; it is questioning of what can be taken by responsibility to whom and for what. This seems to imply the responsibility of both the enquirer and the subject of enquiry and is best expressed persuasively from knowledge of what is intended to be best for the community.

### **The community of workers' university: how it might work**

In the new politico-epistemological space, the community university is confronted by competition from conflicts with others whose production and transmission of knowledge is desired and sponsored by those with the power to shape research agendas and produce technicians of knowledge. The community university is under the same surveillance but we propose that the internal solidarity of the community university and its commonality with its community makes it a place for transformation, not transmission. It creates knowledge with the purpose for the common good. Its members are adults often engaging for the first time with credentialised higher learning but not the higher learning or problem-solving that is part of their existing life spaces), drawn from the workforce and for whom the university is an opportunity to explore their own identity, test their community assumptions and to creatively contribute to change for the better. Their programmes are negotiated; for the university is a democratic place and their work is defended on the basis of the impact it has on achieving the change they have justified as being worthy for their communities. The knowledge they create is the *praxis* of their

enquiry, their enquiry is edifying for themselves and those it concerns and the purpose of their enquiry is the wellbeing of a community that views itself through its similarities, not its difference.

The audience would be defined in wider terms than previously; the university tutors would be within, rather than external to the arrangement and the burden of funding would fall more on the student although with access to government grants and loans. The university would not be for profit and the localised provision by tutors acting as facilitators of learning, based on real life situations, takes as its premise that all learning, not just that which can be codified, is important to the transformative development of individuals.

The curriculum is negotiated and structured around a learning contract. The learning contract is intended to reflect obligations to enable the student to flourish, to recognise non-traditional learning that has taken place, to offer specific, personalised learning routes for individuals to engage with the world of credentialism. In this, its intent is to encourage the development of social capital in those who had been excluded from its accumulation through certificated credentials. In the UK, pioneering work on learning contracts was undertaken at the University of East London. Stephenson and Laycock (1993) suggest that such an approach should emphasise co-operation, autonomy and experiential learning. The solidarity of local provision, the explicit claim for practical solutions and the accreditation of learning through the impact of the work achieved seem to fulfil both the needs of the individual and those of the community.

What is proposed is not a construction kit using existing forms of institutions but a reappraisal of what a university might be. Rather than locating knowledge outside the community to be taken into it, what is proposed is not even porous barriers

but a flourishing learning space that blurs boundaries between theory and practice in ways directed as social action and self-fulfilment. The *praxis* so created has as its goal benefit and hope, not personal interest and money. For sure, such institutions are risky to support because they might actually make a difference for those excluded from the existing system. People may perceive that to address societal and community issues they might need to change the nature of the problem itself.

The workers' community university provides the space to be creative and is deeply rooted in its local community. It takes its inspiration from Tawney but rather than following his notion of the content of higher education, develops a more radical pragmatic notion of knowledge and truth. It is not a place where external taught degrees are delivered but where problems of wellbeing are solved, opportunities created and assessments are made of this achievement. What is proposed is not a corporate or with-profit university, where techniques rather than skills are taught for an extrinsic purpose with the intent of replication but creative engagement with pressing social problems. It is practical approach where an infrastructure can exist within the many educational buildings and is made available at all levels for communities and these plus the technological and assessment changes provide flexible delivery and should not be beyond the existing university system's resources. In the spirit of the Workers' Educational Associations it is like these real outreach programmes and would be constantly in transition. In this important sense, what the community workers' university provides is distinct to its host community. In this it is a university of hope, for it is a place for those who have been deprived of discourse because they fail to conform to a particular ruling paradigm.

What has been suggested is not claimed as the correct formulation of a learning entity with pragmatism and community as core and where individual

contributions are recognised through the work they undertake for the community. It is that starting a radical debate by shifting deck chairs benefits the owner of the deck chairs whilst more serious social issues go unnoticed.

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