

THE TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF ADULT EDUCATORS

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Though there have been great changes in the educational world since the foundation of the Bureau, the training of professional workers in adult education and attention to their status was an early interest and has become an almost recurrent theme. It first took a formal shape in an exploratory conference in 1961. Bob Schouten, always a cheerful optimist, believed that as adult Education was "gaining in importance, the question of the training of Professional Workers becomes more and more urgent" and that "at this stage it seems particularly helpful to come to an exchange of ideas at an international level.. In the first place because we can learn from one another and can profit from the experience gained already, but in the second place because it is clear that at present the European countries no longer stand in isolation". These sentiments appealed to me immensely at the time and they seem to be even more valid and applicable now. In a real sense they are central to the raison d'etre of the Bureau.

How to finance the cost of a conference has been a persistent problem in Bureau affairs. On this occasion the aid of the relatively new European Community had been obtained to meet some of the costs, and as a result we found ourselves beginning the meeting with a study visit to the Communities in Brussels on December 11th and 12th, 1961. There in the Palais de la Dynastie we had six lectures on the work of the Community, especially the policies concerning agriculture, social affairs and atomic research. One of these talks was given in Flemish, which caused almost all of us the reach for our headphones! The final talk discussed the possibilities for co-operation between the Communities and organisations for adult education.

Duly fortified by all this information, we left Brussels to go by coach to Bergen in the Netherlands. There we continued the real business of the conference in the pleasant surroundings of Huize 'Kranenburgh' which was then the home both of the Bureau and of the European work of the Association of Dutch FolkHighSchools, of which Bob Schouten was also the international secretary. Helpful as always, the Dutch Association provided free accommodation for the meetings, though participants stayed in the Hotel Hertenkamp not far away.

By later standards perhaps the conference was a little small - it was attended by only 33 people - but representatives came from ten countries with the largest contingents coming from the Netherlands, France and Great Britain.

This was my first Bureau conference and I knew little of what to expect. What I quickly found was an atmosphere of friendship, mutual respect and firm enthusiasm for the cause of adult education, and those few wet december days laid the basis for my long term commitment to the Bureau. Having acquired the taste, it led me to over thirty years of contact with Bureau conferences, a six year membership of the Steering Committee and the much prized achievement of being the first Individual Associate of the Bureau. I therefore owe a lot to the 1961 conference but my task there was to present an account of the Manchester University Diploma in Adult Education, at that time very young but in fact the only one of its kind in Western Europe. Earlier in the day we had had talks by Professor G. de Bock of the University of Ghent on "The importance of professional training for adult educators and a general analysis of the training required" and by Professor Dr. T.T. ten Have of the University of Amsterdam on "The training of professional adult educators in the relevant sciences and methods." As the latter an ideal to be sought after" and I remember poking a little fun at all this theory compared to the practical reality in Manchester. Perhaps this was a little naughty, especially when I commented on ten Have's love for the terms "andragogy" and "agogy" but it was the sort of happy exchange leading to lifelong friendship which has been a not unusual situation in the story of the Bureau. The final two full days were given to discussion in three groups, each being asked to consider some prescribed questions. As in may later conferences most of the groups did not keep strictly to these "terms of reference" but all produced very full reports and useful ideas in the final plenary session on the Saturday morning. With the Generous support of the Prince Bernhard Fund and the Dutch Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences it became possible to publish a report of the whole conference in a special edition of "Notes and Studies".

As a follow-up to the 1961 conference, the Bureau was asked by the Council of Europe to carry out a pilot study on "Workers in Adult Education, their Status, Recruitment and Professional Training", to use the title of the report published in 1966.

This was a comparative survey commissioned in 1964 which was based on information collected in just six countries (Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, The Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom). As Bob Schouten and Edward Hutchinson (President of the Bureau) said in their preface, this was only possible because of the financial support of the Council and because of the extensive contacts the

Bureau had built up in the field. Frank Jessup of Oxford University collected the material gathered by the national reporters and acted as the editor of the final report. Matters moved quickly: the first meeting was held in December 1964, the national reports were presented in the first half of 1965 and in October 1965 a "substantial synopsis" of the final report was discussed both by the national reporters and by about thirty members of the Bureau. My direct contribution as in 1961 was again to provide information and ideas about the training courses in the University of Manchester Department of Adult Education, which by then had increased in size.

The report both described and compared the factual situation and moved on to conclusions and recommendations. It noted the growing awareness of the importance of adult education, the "unprecedented ferment" of ideas which was bringing about extremely rapid changes and, despite all the variations in the six countries, a growing awareness of the need for more full-time professional workers. Most of the Report was a summary of the information from the six countries but the final chapter pressed for action on several broad questions. Emphasis was given to the need to train both the full-time professionals and part-time workers "whether paid or voluntary". Notions that training was impossible, or if possible was highly undesirable were, however, still current in all countries and I felt that perhaps the Report was still fighting the general tide of opinion. Sadly, it did not lead directly as hoped to a "more widely based and authoritative enquiry" but it helped to prepare the ground for future surveys in a number of countries.

In the conferences in the years which followed there were many incidental references to problems of staffing and training, especially in the working groups, but the next major conference on "The training and Further Training of Adult Educators", however, did not take place until September 1982. This time it was held in the superb setting of Geiranger in Norway, in the Union Turisthotel at the head of the fiord.

The meeting was arranged in co-operation with Samnemnda for Studiearbeit, then celebrating its 50th anniversary, and the general quality owed a great deal to the preparation put in by this organisation and its President Ole-Jorgen Woltman. This kind of mutual support has had a beneficial effect on European adult education throughout the years. About 50 adult educators from 1961 conference none came from Austria, Belgium, Finland or Italy but there were "newcomers" from Switzerland, Ireland and Israel, with a visitor from Australia. A much wider range of

countries was represented, however, in the Newsletter (No 1962-1) which formed part of the pre-conference documentation, and in the earlier Newsletter of March 1980 which concentrated on "Training for Part-time Adult Educators and Volunteers".

Looking back, it is clear that the Geiranger conference took a wider view of the subject than its predecessor. After an address by Hans Amberg, Vice-President of the Bureau, the conference looked at examples of training including centrally provided multi-media packages and self study materials which had not really been in anyone's mind in 1961. It was concerned also with questions about the general approach to training. These topics stimulated a great deal of discussion, as did the major exchange of views on "Professionalism and Volunteerism" between Ron South, then Principal of the City Lit Institute, London, and Per Himmelstrup, then head of the Sydjysk Universitets Center in Esbjerg, Denmark. This conference provided a great stimulus to ideas about training, especially during the meetings of the four working groups which carried out much of the work. As the wandering general Reporter, I was much impressed by the vigour of these discussions and by the keen but friendly exchanges. As Vernon Smith, then Director of the Scottish Institute of Adult Education, said in his "Summing Up", the time had been limited and many questions had been left unanswered but much value had come from the opportunity to meet and to reflect on the problems of training. Happily the finances allowed for the issue of a hundred page report.

In this conference the temptations of the setting had been confined to a brief visit to a snowy viewpoint some 5000 feet up and a short sail on the fiord. The weather was not very kind - there were some cool wet Geiranger during the final hours of the conference as delegates prepared to leave.

We felt, however, that it had been a very worth while remark made in the final session that "the training of adult educators of all kinds should be accepted as the norm, a basic right for everyone".

Perhaps we still have some way to go before this concept is fully accepted and it is to be hoped that the Association will give increasing attention to this vital theme. The contribution of the bureau to the development of the work has been great and this was fully acknowledged in the book edited by Peter Jarvis and Alan Chadwick in 1991 on "Training adult educators in Western Europe" (6) which gathered together much information with the aid of eighteen

contributors. The Bureau co-operated fully in securing the contributions and was associated with Routledge in its publication. In an age which has seen the disappearance of so many old enthusiasms we need to preserve and revitalise the ideas of international comradeship based on the mutual respect and real friendships which the Bureau conferences have done so much to stimulate. These give a much needed human and personal dimension to the idea of co-operation and are required just as much today as when only a small band of people gathered together in Bureau meetings. In the thankfully much wider dimensions of Europe today it is even more vital to maintain the old vision and perhaps this is the major task in the training of adult educators in the coming decades?