

Open Education 2030

JRC-IPTS Call for Vision Papers

Lifelong Learning

Open Education – Towards 2030

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Derek Tatton

Despite the economic crisis and financial restraints, informal adult learning networks are using interactive technologies to develop new forms of education-for-citizenship processes and courses to address big 21st century social, political, philosophical and cultural issues.

Adult Education, as it used to be called in the 20th century, was often state-subsidized and rarely free- of-charge for ‘adult students’. Looking ahead to 2030 we need a vision which connects back with the best of that *adult education tradition* including workers’ education projects; ‘education for social purpose’; ‘liberal adult education’; residential courses and opportunities as in ‘Folk High Schools’ or ‘People’s Residential Colleges’ in the Scandinavian countries, and other major successes like the *Open University* in Britain. Many of these adult educational programmes focussed on *education-for-citizenship* issues.

These notes refer to developments linked to the Raymond Williams Foundation (RWF) (www.raymondwilliamsfoundation.org.uk) which - although small-scale - through growing networks using e-mail and web technologies indicate potential for a ‘back-to-the-future’ radical vision for lifelong learning.

William’s last substantial theoretical work, *Towards 2000*, (published in 1983), included this prescient statement: “The new interactive technologies could transform (the problems of travel and funding) by providing regular facilities for consultation and decision from people’s own homes... This could be, in practice, the achievement of full social and cultural powers by civil society, as opposed to their appropriation or marginalisation by the corporations and the state.”

The extraordinary growth of ‘people power’ campaigns and petitions through *avaaz*, *38 degrees*, and other web-based ‘movements’ can connect to the many informal ‘face-to-face’ meetings in pub/cafe/bar discussion circles which in the last ten years have proliferated. Our own RWF network currently includes *Philosophy in Pubs* (PiPs); *Discussion Circles* (DCs) on big social, political and philosophical issues; *Sci-bars*, where scientists discuss their work informally; *cafe philosophique*; *Workers Educational Association* (WEA) and *University of the Third Age* (U3A) groups on similar themes. A key feature of PiPs, DCs, Sci-bars is their total flexibility and free-of-charge operation and methodology (*anarchist* practice in the best sense).

In recent years the weekly/monthly meeting groups, some of which use web and media resources for stimuli and ‘expert’ resource information, have extended their education and learning with short residential weekends and mid-week courses to follow through in larger gatherings at conference centres, residential colleges and hotels. These have engaged with issues such as *The Communications Media*; *Philosophy and Contemporary Political Theory*; *Democracy – and the future of political parties*. All have been promoted by, and informed through, web, e-mail and skype links.



These residential courses have been subsidized by RWF to enable participation from across a wide spectrum ensuring viability, with attendances from twenty to seventy in northern England. In this way, the 'education for social purpose' of late 19th century and early 20th century pioneers can now be extended, despite the economic crisis and restraints, using the flexibilities of voluntary organisation and technological innovation. This is one important way to move forward, *Towards 2030*.