

field is needed. A necessary condition for constituting a science is a founding of a precise terminology. This also applies to andragogy. But both the terms and the scientific structure are in the very essence of every discipline.

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The ideal of self-education in popular adult education A historical and comparative perspective

Abstract: The paper explores the reasoning, meanings and practice of self-education within popular adult education. A philosophical foundation is traced back to the writings of Kant, Rousseau and Herder. Following the implementation of the ideas from the 19th century two main traditions are identified; the self—improvement and autodidactic tradition and the mutual improvement tradition. The latter is closely related to the work of social or popular movements and is further outlined and exemplified with the Nordic study circle work and the workers' education. Finally the paper comments the contemporary meaning and practice of self-education related to the paradigmatic shift towards self-directed and self-reflexive learning. The conclusion is that self-education is still a residual, although transformed, education ideal in popular adult education.

Introduction

If we draw a simplified picture of the history of popular adult education two traditions or educational ideals can be identified. The first presumes a delimited amount of knowledge, a teacher and a pupil or student who is the recipient of the transmitted knowledge. The teacher is the master of the external knowledge base - or at least far ahead of the learner in terms of knowledge and refinement – and he or she transfers insights and skills to an ignorant and passive and recipient with help of some chosen methods and techniques. Enlightenment was something happening when an educated person explained and clarified the matter or the text to the student. This is a patriarchal educational ideal (Gustavsson, 2005) that dominated the philanthropic popular education in the 19th century and can be found as a residual element (Williams, 1977) up to our times. I will call it a teacher managed and regulated education. The second one is the self-education tradition founded on the belief that enlightenment can come from below. It presumes that knowledge can be created through social interaction between equals and can be transmitted to an active learner and acquired without help of external mediators.

The paper deals with this second tradition and explores the

different meanings, reasoning and practices of self-education. I start with the main pedagogical and philosophical foundation for self-education which can be found in the better part of writings on education and *Bildung*. A distinction will be made between the individualistic and autodidactic self-improvement tradition on the one hand and the collective mutual improvement tradition on the other hand. In the final part of the paper I discuss the existence and relevance of self-education ideal in the contemporary, and mainly Nordic, popular adult education. The problems addressed is whether self-education is part of a frozen ideology (Liedman, 1998), a residual element (Williams, 1977) or is transformed into new meanings and forms as self-directed or self-reflexive learning.

1. A pedagogical and philosophical foundation

The idea of self-education, from the point of view of the history of ideas, can be traced back to the writings of Rousseau and Herder and the Kantian theory of cognition (Gustavsson, 1991). It is not the place in this paper to elaborate their ideas at any length but I will mention some main ideas.

Kant placed the main responsibility and achievement for education on the human being itself. For Kant education seemed to be equal to self-education and the individual is the subject of knowledge. Following Kant the enlightenment is coming neither from above nor from below, rather does it come from within the human being itself or from reason (Kant, 1993; Korsgaard, 1997:).

Rousseau maintained that experience is the best teacher and that we learn by acting. In his writings we find a theory of the natural self-developing human subject who will grow and develop like a plant. Self-development is a consequence of self-activity (Korsgaard, 1997:126). This ideal has strongly inspired adult education initiatives and can especially be identified in the folk high school movement (Tøsse, 2005).

Herder agreed to a great extent with Rousseau but emphasised more the social interaction with the surrounding world. According to Herder the human being has an inherent potential which may develop through interaction with an encouraging environment. The realisation of this potential is the central element in *Bildung* (*bildning* in Swedish or *dannelse* in the Norwegian and Danish languages). Moreover *Bildung* is the harmonious fellowship between the individual and the popular culture of which the individual is an organic part, it is the harmony between man and nature and finally between

man and God (Korsgaard, 1997:127-128).

These ideas became reproduced in the neo-humanistic pedagogy in the 19th century. *Bildung* meant transformation through an intercourse with culture, especially the classical. This intercourse has been described as a kind of internalisation or incorporation of the strange and unknown and as an active process it is inherently self-*Bildung*. The drive towards such a refinement must come from within and a true, genuine and natural *Bildung* has to grow out of a deep felt need, the Norwegian professor in the classical humanities J. M. Monrad (1816-97) said. He was one of the founders of *The Society for the Promotion of People's Enlightenment* (1851) with the aim to spread enlightenment from the top and downwards, or more precisely, to enlighten the people from above via the middle classes. Although the Society was a true philanthropically adventure, the leaders were largely inspired by a neo-humanistic ideal of self-learning. "In the final end the people must enlighten themselves", Monrad declared (1855). The leader of the Society, the educationist Hartvig Nissen, agreed: "All *Bildung* (*dannelse*) is essential self-*Bildung*" (1856, see Tøsse, 2005:41).

2. The idea of self-improvement and the autodidactic tradition

The early 19th Century efforts of providing education of the people in Great Britain, United States as well as in other countries were all inspired by an ethos of self-improvement. The motives were various. In his *History of Adult Education in Great Britain* Kelly (1970:123) writes about the mechanics' institutes:

"Employers ... hoped the institutes would provide training in self-government; philanthropists ... hoped they would alleviate the poverty and misery of the working classes. ... Self-improvement was the slogan, and self-improvement covered both a genuine intellectual interest in learning for its own sake, and a desire to acquire knowledge as an instrument of personal advancement".

Moreover educators appealed to self-improvement as a way to establish respect for the laws and the subordination of rank on which, they declared, the well-being of every gradation in society depended. Workers were told to not complain of exploitation, but instead to attend to education and self-improvement. During a period of rapid development of adult education from the 1830s Stubblefield and Keane (1994:60, 91) report from America that "the public appetite for self-improvement seemed insatiable". George Craik's *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties*, printed in England 1830, became a big hit in the North America colonies. The book presented hundreds of

successful persons who had provided for their own self-education. Craik defined self-education as an education without a teacher except for the initial teaching of reading and writing. His main message was that success or failure in learning depended more on the individual self than on the circumstances of which the person was subjected to (Kett, 1994:86; Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991, ch. 1). This message fitted well into the individualistic ideology which since have dominated the North America society. Craik's book was succeeded by similar guiding. William Channings lectured on how to develop a spiritual "self-culture", and Orson Fowlers constructed a "Self-Improvement Directory Table" with descriptions of 37 mental abilities which could be further developed in order to achieve greater material benefits. A market for professional lecturers as well as books concerning self-improvement emerged. One of the most popular and widespread books was *Self Help* (1859) written by the Scot Samuel Smile (1805-1912). Smile believed in education for the masses both from the individual as well as from the societal perspective. "Knowledge is no exclusive inheritance of the rich and the leisure classes but may be attained by all", he said (Smiles quoted in Cooke, 2000). However, he did not advocate a public responsibility for education. The philosophy was strongly individualistic. The happiness and well being in life he told the workers "must necessarily depend on themselves – upon their own diligent self-culture, self-discipline and self-control" (Cooke, 2000).

We may notice that Smiles wrote his book in the heydays of liberalism, not to say the pure *laissez faire* ideology. The classic economic liberalism extolled the virtues of the pursuit of self interest. The common interest or the well being of the society was founded on the individual's diligence, moral and happiness. As John Stuart Mill wrote in his work *On Liberty* (quoted by Smile in his book) "the worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals comprising it" (Cooke, 2000). This philosophy greatly inspired others in many countries, for instance the Norwegian lawyer, economist and professor in the science of law T. H. Aschehoug (1822-1909). He added an important element to the liberalistic theory; if self interest should have a positive effect it had to be guided by knowledge, good sense and rational thought. According to Aschehoug the interplay between self-interest, reason, insight and moral was the real dynamic forces in the economic life. This theory was also authorized by Thomas Malthus who claimed that the Scottish education system had demonstrated "considerable effect in the prevention of crimes and the

promotion of industry, morality and regular conduct" (Cooke, 2000). The degree of enlightenment and insight was a decisive factor if the self-interest would lead to social progress and hence Aschehoug attached great importance to the education of the people. That is why he also joined the foundation of the above mentioned *Society for the Promotion of Peoples's Enlightenment*. Aschehoug was in fact one of earliest who emphasized adult education as the critical factor in economic growth and transformation of society. Education, he believed, would counteract poverty and create the basis for improved living standards for the working class. As a devoted liberal, however, neither Aschehoug nor the other leaders of the Society did suggest public help against poverty but would provide opportunities to self-help through "ennobled enlightenment" (Gooderham & Tøsse, 1997; Tøsse, 2005:40).

As reported by Fieldhouse (1997:13) self-help and individual learning were important aspects of nineteenth century adult education. Indeed we may talk about, as Fieldhouse does, an autodidactic tradition. What is interesting to note here is the belief in the individual's ability to educate him/herself. This belief was supported by the many stories of role models who had taught themselves foreign languages and acquired scientific knowledge. Fieldhouse (1997:13) gives some examples and books like *Self Help* was in fact potted biographies of men (Smile had one female example) who had achieved success in self learning. As some argued in the flourishing literature of self-help, every person could receive education from others as well as give education to him/herself. But "the best part of every man's education", Smiles argued (quoting Sir Walter Scott) "is that which he gives himself" (Cooke, 2000).

This theme was further elaborated by one of the most prominent leaders of the *Norwegian Society for the Promotion of Peoples's Enlightenment* and editor of its magazine *Folkevennen (the People's Friend)*, Eilert Sundt (1817-1875). Eilert Sundt was educated as a clergyman but early in his life he was granted a state scholarship in order to study popular culture and the conditions of living of ordinary people. Through his extensive and excellent work Sundt has acquired status as pioneer of sociological research in Norway. From his studies of the traditions, culture and life of ordinary people Sundt developed the conviction that there was much of value within the common well of the nonliterate people's experiences as denoted by their cultures, their work methods and their ideas. From originally

perceiving culture as equal to civilization from above Sundt gradually came to the conclusion that culture could be expressed in terms of popular reason and he argued that enlightenment had to come from the people itself.

Sundt propagated primarily for self-education both as an ideal and as a necessity. He opposed the belief that “the laymen must be instructed and once more instructed”. He even would regard it very unfortunate if books became the prime source of knowledge. In stead he advocated learning from experience, from life itself and the daily work, and he believed that every man and woman could be cultured and educated if he or she reflected on his or her practical task. “I believe there is no work being so ordinary and simple”, he wrote, “that performed with diligence it will refine and develop the worker not only regarding hart and will, but even regarding intellect and insights as well”. His studies of common practice convinced him that a person that carefully has been brought up according to the national customs has received an excellent education (*Folkevennen*, 1864, 1865, see Tøsse, 2005:40).

Self-learning according to Sundt had two elements. The one was the above referred learning from work and daily life. The other was the autodidactic and purposive self-education which he primarily recommended for the young. The years after the initial obligatory schooling – from 15 to 25 years – should be a period of self-education. In these years the young ones should spend his or her spare time to systematic training in reading, writing and the acquirement of knowledge. Idealistically he suggested “self-education as a permanent practice” in which autodidactic learning became supplemented with guidance at an evening or Sunday school. The self-education system he had in mind presupposed the development of public libraries, accordingly he also devoted much energy to establish local libraries.

3. Mutual improvement

From the ideal of self improvement there is a short step to the ideal of mutual improvement. In times of high illiteracy among the working class the idea emerged that friends could educate each other. In England a lot of mutual improvement societies were founded in the 1840s and 1850s. The societies concentrated on elementary subjects and they disappeared in the second half of the century, partly due to improvement in literacy rates and partly due to a more radical turn in the working class adult education (Fieldhouse, 1997:14).

A later example of mutual societies is the Chautauqua movement in USA. The founders, John Vincent, a Methodist pastor, and Lewis Miller, an Ohio inventor, started with Sunday schools and summer schools for Sunday school teachers and in 1878 they founded *The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC)*. This was one of the first and the most successful experiment in correspondence education in the United States. It was founded on the belief that books had a potential to transform a person and Vincent envisioned the home as the centre of learning. The CLSC provided a systematic plan for study through home reading, featuring a book club and study circles in local communities. In this way the Chautauqua movement was firmly rooted in the Anglo-American tradition of popular self-education and it lead to the organisation of hundreds of local associations (Stubblefield & Keane 1994:137-38; Kett, 1994: 157-161).

A third example of mutual improvement society is the Nordic folk high school. In the founding ideology, inherited from Grundtvig, self-education is related to his concept of *vekselvirkning* (interchange) translated by Steven Borish as “a balance between two things that remain different, but that should fertilize each other in their differentness” (Borish, 1991:169). One of Grundtvig’s Norwegian admirers, the school teacher and editor of *Folkevennen*, Ole Vig (1824-1857) suggested the founding of associations which could recruit people from different social stratum and educate each other through conversations, discussions and lectures. This idea anticipated in fact the later Norwegian youth movement and the founding of youth associations all over the country. Vig also greatly inspired the pioneers of the first folk high school in Norway. These new type of schools (established from 1864) put into practice the Grundtvigian belief in the possibility of learning from each other through an exchange of ideas and experiences. In the folk high schools *vekselvirkning* converted into the practice of dialogue and dialogue teaching.

Another element contributing to the self-education ideal of the folk high school is the belief in the education from within. The pioneers of the folk high school movement meant that *Bildung* (*dannelse*) could not create anything new which was totally non-existing in embryonic form from nature (as the neo-humanists believed). The task of education was to support the forces of nature and provide for as much as possible unrestrained self development. Accordingly the folk high school emphasized that awakening had to precede knowledge acquisition. A human being must first be aware

of his or her intellectual interests before he/she would start to learn. In this process of spiritual awakening the young one could be in need of a teacher as an inspirer, awakener or facilitator but real *Bildung* had to come from within the human being itself. At this point the folk high school pioneers were close to neo-humanists, like the before mentioned Monrad, who talked about incorporation with culture as a process “developing from within and from the people itself” and accompanied with “a deep felt popular need” (Tøsse, 2005:41). Both agreed in the ideal of self education, both used the concept of *vekselvirkning* (interchange) and claimed that the individual had to take the substance of *Bildung* from life itself. However, there were two big differences: Firstly, the neo-humanists prescribed incorporation with the classical culture and the civilized world while the folk high schools perceived *vekselvirkning* as circular movements of spiritual streams in which both the scholarly and the common people exchanged experiences and knowledge and accordingly had something valuable to give each others. Secondly; the neo-humanist accepted forced learning, while Grundtvig strongly impressed that learning by force was foolish talk.

4. Collective self-education through social and popular movements

For some, especially members or sympathizers of the labour movement, the rhetoric of self education from within was metaphysical, hazy or at best unclear. For the labour movement self education was something concrete and practical and usually understood as a collective effort of learning jointly. The collective self education could take two forms. I associate the first one to the reformist labour and other social-reformist popular movements which integrated the folk high schools ideals of interchange and dialogue with social democratic ideas of democracy. I will choose the Swede Oscar Olsson, also named as the father of the study circles, as a representative for the first form. The second one is associated to the more radical and Marxist oriented labour movement and some other counter cultural movements which appropriated self education as an instrument in a collective struggle against the cultural, ideological or political hegemony of the ruling classes. As an example here I will choose the Norwegian Workers' Educational Association in the 1930s.

4.1 Self education according to Oscar Olsson

In his thesis *Bildningens väg* (*The Road to Education*) Bernt

Gustavsson (1991) accentuate three prevalent educational ideals of the Swedish labour movement between 1880 and 1930; the ideal of the education of the citizen, the ideal of self-education and the neo-humanistic personality creating ideal. Oscar Olsson is the leading figure of the ideal of self-education and his ideas became widely spread and accepted throughout the Nordic countries.

Oscar Olsson (1877-1950) was a teacher at the teacher training school in Linköping 1907-43, member of the Swedish Parliament 1913-48, and a leader of the temperance movement (he headed the international IOGT from 1930 to 1947). Olsson has written extensively and published approximately 40 books or smaller writing besides being founder and co-editor (1917-36) of the periodical *Bokstugan* (*The book living room*).

Although an original thinker Olsson did not outline his ideas in isolation. Through the former high school teacher and professor of philosophy at Lund, Hans Larsson (1862-1944) he learned to know the ideas of education as a free process and activity in the thought of Rousseau, Fichte and Kant. From these philosophers he formed his basic idea of self-education as a kind of constructive self-activity. From the contemporary writer and educator Ellen Key (1849-1926) he learned how important aesthetic education could be for personal development. Moreover Key acted as an intermediary of the evolutionary ideas of Wallace, Darwin, Huxley and Spencer. From them Key developed the idea that the human could mould his or her personality through a conscious choice between different attitudes towards life. Larsson and Key formulated the ideas and Olsson put them into practical work. Oscar Olsson was primarily the executor of self-education (Gustavsson, 1991:147-153).

As a consequence of the belief in self-activity Olsson rejected philanthropy and the philosophical thinking of the people as the object of enlightenment. The people, or the working class he had in mind, must take the matter in their own hands. From Abraham Lincoln he borrowed the slogan he applied to the study work: *For the people and through the people*. That meant that the organisation, the form and the content of studies should be governed by the participants themselves. To use a later slogan; he had trusting to self-directedness in learning. This has been one of the characteristics of the Nordic popular adult education. Based on Olsson this tradition is founded on three main ideas.

1. Enlightenment, culture and personal refinement can emerge from below, from the common people.
2. Enlightenment and knowledge can be created and

disseminated through dialogue and studies in a group of mutual equal persons.

3. The search for knowledge, the dialogues and discussions concerning spiritual values, the sharing or interchange of human experiences and insights and not the least the acquisition of the inherent wisdom in literature, art or other cultural expressions may shape and refine the human being.

Education in accordance with these ideas is what the Swedes call *folkbildning* or the Norwegians and the Danes *folkeop(p)lysning* (translated here as popular adult education). Traditionally the main aim of popular adult education is personal development and acquisition of general knowledge which may be relevant and useful for all as distinct from the specific vocational and work related qualifications.

Put into practice these ideas resulted in the study circle. The temperance movement (IOGT) had tentatively arranged some study courses among its members, tried out lecturing concerning teetotalism and organized a few reading circles. These first efforts of organized studies had not been very successful, mainly due to shortage of teachers and money to buy books and other study material. On an IOGT meeting in 2002 Olsson suggested new ways of studying and founded the first study circle in line with his ideals in Lund 1902. He amalgamated the former initiatives of reading circles, lending libraries and study courses into a new kind of study circles which indicated both a method of organisation and a method of study (Olsson, 1902, in Arvidson, 1991, appendix 1, pp. 273). The recommended study circles could have between 5 and 30 participants (later usually fewer maximum participants). The idea was to organize a collective form of knowledge acquirement without the help of a teacher. The knowledge could be found in books, and the study circles of Olsson had the book in the centre. Books reflected life itself as the wisest and noblest men had experienced it (Arvidson, 1991:pp. 187; Törnqvist, 2002; Tøsse, 1998:84). "Books contain the aggregate of human experience and knowledge. We just have to draw off the sources", as one of the Norwegian leaders of the workers' movement later said (Tøsse, 2005:70). Thanks to the books even the uneducated could educate him/herself, and without books self-studies became impossible.

The first step in the study circle was the active search for knowledge in a library, or if not available there, the study circle had to buy the books. The need for a sufficient number of books that could

be circulating among the participants were in fact the main reason for building the first study association, *The Workers' Educational Association* in Sweden, 1912.¹ The second step was the actual reading. In the study circles reading became developed to a method. Readers were recommended to start with an extensive overview and then proceed to more intensive substantiated reading. For Olsson and his followers reading was a form of life. It could be an individual activity at home or take place as reading aloud in reading circles. In both case the ideal was a personal acquirement; so to speak incorporate the content with one's own personality and thereby develop oneself. The third step was reflection on the content and discussions with co-participants. Popular adult education has always from Olsson's days emphasized dialogue as an invariable element of the study circle work, both the Socrates' type of dialogue (starting from questions from an apparently ignorant) and the Grundtvigian inspired thinking of dialogue as *vekselvirkning* (exchange of experiences and knowledge). But dialogue according to Olsson must always have as the point of departure a factual content and this was to be found primarily in books. Moreover the reading should always be narrated to the collective experiences and the individual's life and work.

In this way the study circle could be a classic form of *Bildung*, i.e. the interplay between the individual and the collective and the process of taking part in the cultural heritage and the collective experiences. That means that learning from individual experiences is not enough. The learner must go beyond his or her personal world and aspire to develop him/herself through the acquirement of the cultural heritage of which the individual is a member. In other words, *Bildung* is the commuting between subjectivity and objectivity. It is important to note, however, that *Bildung* thus defined by Olsson, is a critical taking over of the cultural heritage. This was an inherent feature of self-education; the participants in study circles should go directly to the sources of knowledge and make their own interpretation without intermediations from other persons. The learners should encounter the writers and the man of letters and not their interpreters and apprentices, Olsson declared (Gustavsson, 1991:162-173). Studies, as part of the process of *Bildung*, required concentrations and immersion. For Olsson

1 The triggering factor was the Library Act of 1912 that introduced state grants to the purchase of books to nationwide organisations of more than 20.000 individual members (Johansson, 1985).

“all real education is fundamentally self-education. This is, however, not only working alone, individual reading and thinking, but an independent and sustainable collaborate participation in order to acquire and extend the cultural heritage” (Olsson, 1918, quoted from Gustavsson, 1991:170).

Olsson's advice was to start with reading of fictions. He believed, as the folk high school pioneers, that literature was important for the personality creation. But the personality creating ideal had to be supplemented by scientific and intellectual *Bildung*. The aim of the studies he advocated was also to educate informed, responsible, critical, and independent citizens. Besides being a prophet of self-education Olsson is also a representative figure of the ideal of the education of the citizens. As a devoted social-democrat he was very concerned of the needs of the working class to acquire the useful knowledge they required in order to participate in the social and political life. Accordingly he also urged the workers to acquire the practical, instrumental and useful knowledge they needed for being active citizens. Olsson linked such political education to the aim of personal development. Citizenship presupposed personal formation or *Bildung*, he claimed, since the future society needed personally refined individuals who were able to undertake social responsibility (Gustavsson, 1991:169). The utmost aim of the self-education in study circles was to generate a spiritual change of the cultural climate, and this was more important than the acquirement of factual knowledge. By spiritual change Olsson also meant refinement of the popular means of entertainments and aesthetic education. Even art could be popularized and transmitted through study circle work (Arvidson, 1991:171-186).

4.2 Self-education in the counter-cultural and counter-hegemonic work

Some of the social and popular movements added to the meaning of popular adult (self)-education an ingredient of counter-culture and counter-hegemony. An example is the Norwegian labour movement that in the 1920s and 1930s was more separatist and Marxist-radical than the contemporary Swedish and Danish labour movement. The Norwegian left-wing radicals had an ambiguous attitude towards *Bildung*, the cultural heritage and similar concepts which they associated to a decadent Bourgeoisie. Alternatively they idealized a construction of a separate working-class culture and advocated learning from life, especially from the everyday class struggle. To participate in union work with its wage disputes, conflicts, strikes and

demonstrations, was regarded as an excellent schooling. From the class struggle the workers learned, as also Marx underlined, that the emancipation of the workers must be carried out by themselves. Contrary to the neutral and liberal workers' education in Sweden the Norwegian counterpart was a partisan, indoctrinating and propagandistic education comprising the study of the socialistic theory, history and praxis, the acquirement of the practical knowledge necessary for participation in internal organisation work and the learning of general and citizenship knowledge in order to take part in the society as full-member citizens. In lack of adequate schools and economical possibilities to take further education the labour movement had to organize its own education; evening schools, study courses, study circles and some few day schools and workers' high schools with leaders and teachers from own ranks. Building of the Workers' Educational Associations in 1931 was in this respect instrumental in the provision of the workers' education. The WEA schooling was built on the principle of self-education in study circles and organized mainly in accordance with the instructions from Oscar Olsson. The study circle was a “group of comrades around the study of books. ... A school without a teacher”, one of the leaders declared. The study circle needed a leader who could be a little head of the rest, but learning was founded on “mutual help with everyone as both a teacher and a student” (WEA Report 1931, quoted in Tøsse, 2005:70). The study circle combined the individual and the collective. Intellectual self-studies lead to personal development and by working collaborate the participants learned solidarity and became deeply involved in the common matters and ideology of the working class. Socialism must be experienced jointly, one of the leaders of WEA said (Tøsse, 2005:70). In the end all learning was aiming towards not the individual but the collective improvement for the (organized) working class. Studies were also part of the pursuit of the movement's own culture, values and norms in order to advance the objectives set by the movement. The utmost aim was to lay the foundation for the labour movement's political and cultural hegemony (Tøsse, 1997; 2005: pp. 68).

5. Self-education in our times

The counter-cultural feature of popular adult education disappeared rapidly after the Second World War and the ideal of self-education in popular movements became undermined by a process of institutionalisation and professionalisation, i.e. paid staff members

and vocational trained and well-educated teachers in stead of volunteers and amateurs from the field of practice. At the same time the field of adult education changed according to two new emergent objectives and functions. Firstly, adult education as a second chance to education. Secondly, adult education as instrumental for upgrading skills, vocational qualification and the acquirement of new competences (the vocational turn in adult education). The popular adult education field became divided into two; 1) a residual tradition of self-directed study circle work aiming at personal development, competences for life, spare time activities and social participation, and 2) encroachment into an emerging branch of teacher-directed education and training for working life or further studies. The first one is characterised as cultural work and defended as *Bildung*, nonformal or informal education and a non-examination zone of freedom while the second part is education and training terminated by examination which gives the participants formal and interchangeable competences (Andersson and Tøsse, 2006; Tøsse, 2006)

In the rest of the paper I will discuss the theme self-education in three respects. Firstly, the question of studying with or without a teacher. I take the development of study circle work in Norway as an example. Secondly, I discuss the transformation, or rather the confusion, of self-education with the ideal of self-directedness. Thirdly, I will comment the attempts to recreate the self-helping and self-educative individual in the shape of the reflexive individual.

5.1 Study circles with or without a teacher

The traditional study circles were, as we have seen, an organised form of learning activity without help of a present teacher. Up to the 1960s a majority of the study circles in Norway were organized and completed without a paid teacher. The state subsidies, however, favoured study circles with a teacher and during the 1970s a majority of the study circles hired a teacher. In 1977 – the first year of implementing the Act of Adult Education – only ten per cent of the study circles were teacher less. This development towards more professionalisation and school similar education did not happen without causing great worries. It changed the distinctive character of popular adult education being an alternative to the school system, the critics said. They stressed the importance of the study associations to counterbalance the school emphasis on theoretical and teacher-directed education and conformity and they feared that professionalisation threatened diversity, self-regulation, spontaneity,

adjustment to local condition and need and it put the amateurs and volunteers away. The study circle without a teacher is our “original way of working ... our distinctive character and our most important tool in adult education as well as our cultural work”, one of the leaders of WEA said (Tøsse, 2005:189).

In the late 1970 the state intervened in favour of these critics but not directly. The government do not decide whether study circles should have a teacher or not, nor do the Norwegian statutory requirements say anything about qualifications of teachers or study leaders. As in Sweden the circle leaders and teachers are approved by the local office of the study association (Andersson and Tøsse, 2006).² The state can however regulate the activity by financial means. From the end of the 1970s the Government reduced subsidies to teacher wages and urged the study associations to arrange a larger share of studies without use of teacher. In the beginning of the 1980s a third of the study circles had no teacher (Tøsse, 2005:190). The policy turned, however, once again and from 1993 the state subsidy per study hour with a teacher is 1,5 greater than the subsidy per study hour without a teacher. Since the late 1990s approximately 20 per cent of the study hours are completed without a teacher involved. An additional explanation of this return to teaching in the study circle is an increase of the average duration (from 28 lessons in 1980 to 33 lessons after 2002) as well as in the number of participants (from 10 to 13 in the same interval). The use of teacher, however, varies very much among the study associations (from 0 to 40 % without a teacher) and varies in proportion to content of study.

5.2 Self-education and self-directed learning

Within the field of an increasingly more professional and discipline-oriented adult education self-education came to be replaced by a new orthodoxy called self-directed learning which from the 1960s, especially in the USA, have become a major trend of research and practice oriented studies. The new trend was introduced by Cyril

² In Sweden almost half of the circle leaders get paid, the rest is working voluntary for free (Andersson, 2001). There is no available statistics in Sweden of the proportion of circles without a teacher, but the state regulations are very favourable of teacher less studies since a study circle approved for state grants may have only three participants who meet regularly at least nine hours all together. In Norway the state regulations require that a study circle must have at least five participants and last more than 12 hours (Andersson and Tøsse, 2006).

Houle and his book *The Inquiring Mind* (1961). In this book he discussed how 22 persons were motivated to take further education and he found three different personal orientations; towards specific goals, activities or learning. The last category became later the self-directed learners, a group that Houle signalled as important to study. In 1964 C. Verner repeated the need for "research into self-direction". The year after Johnstone and Rivera published their grand inquiry of adult education activity in the USA and they estimated that nine million persons were involved in self-studies. "Self-instruction", they concluded, was probably the most neglected "avenue of activity in the whole field of adult education". It became, however, first of all Houles' student, Allen Tough, who inspired to further research through his doctoral thesis *The Teaching Tasks Performed by Adult Self-Teachers* (1966) and his later book *The Adult's Learning Projects* (1971).³

Tough and later P. R. Penland's investigations of adult education activities in the USA demonstrated that the majority of adults' learning projects were self-planned and self-directed and occurred outside the professional, formal and teacher-dominated education field. They had discovered an ice-berg; the greater part of adults' learning took place outside institutions and was self-directed.⁴ These findings also influenced the public opinion of adult learning. In 1977 the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare estimated that 2/3 of the learning efforts of adults were self-initiated and self-regulated.⁵

A second factor to the progressive discourse of self-directedness was the humanistic pedagogy and psychology inspired by Maslow and Rogers and marketed by Knowles' claim of andragogy as a new co-ordinate discipline to pedagogy. Maslow postulated self-actualization as the prime aim of education. The drive towards self-actualization came from within. Education, according to Maslow, was therefore a process of "helping the person to become the best that he is able to become" (Elias & Merriam, 1984:123). Roger expressed himself in the same manner. The utmost aim was to be "the fully functioning person", and he lay the psychological foundation for a

3 For an overview see Candy, 1991, p. 25, and my paper *Selvstyrt læring* (self directed learning) (2002).

4 Penland's results came 1977 and was published in *Adult Education* (USA), no. 3, 1979. See also Cross, 1981 and Candy, 1991, pp. 194.

5 OECD (1977) *Learning Opportunities for Adults*. Here referred from Strong, 1992.

self-directed learning approach by saying: When a pupil or student "chooses his own directions, helps to discover his own learning resources, formulate his own problems, decide his own course of action, and lives with the consequences of each of these choices, then significant learning is maximised" (Rogers, 1969:199). Knowles proposed self-direction as a distinguishing characteristic of adult learning. As a prescriptively defining characteristic it implied a conception of the individual as a free agent being able to act independently of the social situation (Jarvis, 1997:97). In many ways the new "ideology of self-directed learning" (Welton, 1996:128) coincided with individualization and "permeated the field of adult education" (Elias & Merriam, 1980:135). Knowles was the right man to the right time and spurred a lot of discussions as well as research. In the middle of the 1990s Roger Hiemstra (1996a; 1996b) found 247 synonyms to self-directed learners; for instance, self-taught, individual, independent, self-operating, self-sufficient, self-initiated, autodidactic, and autonomous learners/adults and designation like self-education, self-instruction, self-acquired (knowledge), and learning without a teacher. As Welton (1996:129) claims: "Autodidaxy, learner-controlled instruction, self-management, and personal autonomy were all lumped together".

A fundamental problem with all these concepts, pointed to by Brookfield (1986:46-47), is the semantic confusion between learning as a noun and as a verb and between learning and education. On one hand learning may be reserved for the phenomenon of internal mental change and is in this meaning an internal activity of the self. On the other hand it may be used to describe a range of activities and processes of managing external conditions that stimulate the internal change called learning and can be facilitated by an external educator. By this definition some writers have suggested that self-directed learning should really be called self-education or self-teaching as Tough favoured at the outset of his research. If one goes deeper in the meaning of the concepts Brookfield (1987:47-48) doubts, however, that all of these words related to self-directedness can be synonymous with (all of) the meanings of self-education. Moreover, it is important to note that not all of the appraised values of self-directedness, autonomy and authenticity we usually associate to self-learners lead to successful learning. Brookfield (1986:41-44) presents an example. In one of his studies the *field independent learners* - defined as "analytical, socially independent, inner-directed, individualistic, and possessed of a strong sense of self-identity" -

were not as successful as the *field dependent learners* who are “less self-directing in their learning, wanting more structure and guidance from an instructor, and not preferring the independence that may be required in collaborative modes of education”.

5.3 Self-reflexivity as a new disguise of self-help and self-education

Above I have linked the ideal self-education and self-help to an individualistic liberalistic ideology. The new-liberals have returned to this philosophy, even Smiles have been revitalized. His book, *Self-Help*, has been reprinted hundred years after the first edition and once again in 1997 by the *Institute of Economic Affairs* (a right-wing think tank). In the Paper on Lifelong Learning, 1998, the Labour Secretary of State Education claimed: “We are fortunate in this country to have a great tradition of learning. We have inherited the legacy of the great self-help movements of the Victorian industrialist communities” (quoted from Cooke, 2000). With the advancement of new-liberal ideology also various types of self-help books have prospered. In a paper at the ESREA conference in 2004 Edyta Zierkiewicz writes about the educational offer of self-help books in Poland. These books deal about almost every kind of subjects and will usually help the readers in three ways, offer *reactive* help to cope with difficult situations that has already occurred, *prospective* help to manage self-development in a more or less distant future or *advice* the reader how to be a more effective learner. Zierkiewicz considers the books as a significant phenomenon of popular culture and as a constituting part of the traditional theme of self-help and self-education. The authors of the self-help books seem to share the same view as the 19th Century self-help books, namely that the solution to problems or the development of skills depend solely on the individual, actually on the personal self-confidence (Zierkiewicz, 2005). The self-help books fit well into the commercial and consumer society with its promises to make the individual more free and independent by consuming the right remedy or commodity. This society is heavily criticized by Bauman and others who depict a development in which we are increasingly becoming more helpless and dependent on experts. From a critical point of view self-help books will probably make readers more adaptable to the consumer society but will not be very helpful in self-education as an emancipatory project.

On the other hand Giddens (1991) see possibilities for the process of reflexive shaping of identity. He believes that such self-

help books may help us to discover what our problem really is and contribute to the self-education and self-teaching orientation he regards as constitutive feature of the reflexive learner in the post-modern society. J. Rainwater's book *Self-Therapy* (1989) is one of his examples. In the same way as the teacher's role in self-directed learning is reduced to be merely a facilitator the therapist can only act as a “catalyst who can accelerate what has to be a process of self-therapy. ... Keeping a journal, and developing a notional or actual autobiography, are recommended as means of thinking ahead” (p. 71-72). Another recommended therapeutic study is *Learning to Love Yourself* (1987). To learn to estimate oneself as a worthy person is a precondition for trusting others and for risk-taking for self growth in order to change our lives for the better. The self has to be seen as a “reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible”. This is “an active process of self-construction ... of becoming free from dependencies and achieving fulfilment” (p. 77-79). He advocates a life policy which is a policy of choice in which the individual are free to engage itself in a process of reflexive self-creation and construction of an identity narrative. To my opinion, however, Giddens seems to be very close to the old self-improvement ideal advocated by the devoted old liberals.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have explored the ideas and practical implementation of a self-educational ideal which I claim to be a defining characteristic of popular adult education. Self-education is a consequence of the romantic view of the inherent potential of the human being that may be developed through interaction with an encouraging past and present environment. It is also a derivative of the organic view of human beings stating that humans can grow and develop by their own self-activity. Learning is accordingly a process of constructive self-activity in which the individual educate him/herself. From the early philanthropic efforts of educating the masses through the heydays of 18th Century liberalism the adult education initiatives were accompanied by a demand on self-improvement. In the literary advanced world a market for self-help books emerged which provided guidelines and suggestions for how to master one's own learning and succeed in the daily work and life. The usual message was that happiness and well being depended on oneself and one's own diligent self-education. The autodidactic learner was the hero of the day.

The slogan of mutual improvement referred to the organized efforts of helping each others in the process of learning and development. This collective form of self-education is a constituting element of the folk high school's ideal of dialogue and interchange and was practised in the social movements and voluntary associations that became prominent providers of popular adult education in the 19th century.

In the Nordic countries, first of all in Sweden, the ideal of self-education was put into practical work through the organisation of study circles as a form of knowledge acquirement without help of a teacher. Modelled and developed by the educator and politician Oscar Olsson the study circle as a method as well as a form of organisation rapidly became implemented in the voluntary study work. During the first half of the 20th Century self-education in the collective form of study circles became a defining characteristic of the Nordic popular adult education.

The collective form of self-education is especially associated to counter-cultural movements. My example in the paper is the Norwegian labour movement in the 1920s and 1930s which demonstrates a self-organized internal class based education with leaders and teachers from own ranks. The Labour Party organized its own cultural and social associations, including an educational association, which constituted a separate "camp" in the society. The camp had both the function of safeguarding the workers from bourgeois influence as well as building a cultural and political counter-hegemony. This was a real practice of collective self-education as it was for the members, through the members and founded on own forces.

At present the ideal of self-education can be found in the individualisation of learning provision and the paradigmatic shift from the 1970s towards self-directedness. Moreover I also claim that the post-modern reasoning of the reflexive society and self-reflexive individuals constitutes elements of the traditional self-help and self-education ideal. A pronounced new-liberal turn in educational policy and announcement of individual responsibility for own learning as well as examples of a new self-help books add to my conclusion that self-education is still a residual, although transformed, educational ideal in popular adult education.

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