Adult Education in Communities
Approaches From A Participatory Perspective

Emilio Lucio-Villegas

Participation can be a double-edged sword in that it can be used to bind people into agendas and policies they have little control over or it can help enable them to give voice to real and significant issues. Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams, genuine participation has to be an open and democratic process which enables all to contribute to the creation of meanings. Adult education in communities can then be involved in the process of creating ‘really useful knowledge’, that is, knowledge which enables people – individuals and collectivities who experience systematic forms of oppression, domination and exploitation – to think about, analyse and act on their situation individually and severally. By drawing on contemporary accounts of emancipatory action and participatory research the author elaborates on the role of adult educators in this context. (From the Preface)

This book tries to reflect on adult education and its close relationships with communities. It is a modest attempt to maintain adult education in the scope of the community life against the growing schooling, the focus on employability, and on the labour market. In the last years it seems that adult education has become a kind of provider of diplomas, skills and competences and has forgotten its role to enlighten individuals and help them to share their community life with an abundance of richness, diversity, sadness and happiness.

Adult Education is intrinsically connected to daily life, and the life that individuals constantly edify in their interactions. If adult education is connected to daily life, one of the major tasks is to recover this feeling and to link daily life and education. I think that at present time, in a moment of intense reductionism, reality is usually presented as very plain, losing its complexity and diversity that are related to the fact that life is being lived everyday by men and women as creators and relational beings.
Adult Education in Communities
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Adult Education in Communities

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Radical adult education has always been involved in developing knowledge, understanding and action from the 'ground up' rather than from 'the 'top down'. However it has also required the expectation of widespread social and political change to galvanise and catalyse the experiences of people in communities with the possibility of macro level social change. This book is a guide for thinking about and achieving this goal through a popular form of participatory adult education rooted in communities.

In Europe the economic crisis from 2008 has led to the proliferation of austerity policies for the poor and a redistribution of wealth to the richest in society. This incredulous situation has led to a range of social and political responses, giving rise to the re-emergence of political forces of the extreme right as well as progressive political forces and social movements which are breaking the mould of the atrophied political parties of the former left. Greece is probably the best known case, where austerity measures imposed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, led to the collapse of the government and the rise of the fascist party Golden Dawn. The same circumstances also led to progressive counter-movements, with Syriza, a grassroots political campaigning party forming a coalition government in 2015 with a mandate to oppose further austerity. The 2008 crisis also led to the bankruptcy of Iceland, but unlike other countries where economies collapsed, this experience resulted in the unusual response of throwing the worst culprits in jail. In Spain, the growth of Podemos as a major political force, amongst a population fed up with political corruption and mass unemployment, is rapidly overtaking in electoral popularity the right wing and mainstream political parties of austerity. In Scotland in 2014 the movement for self-determination, primarily driven by opposition to the neo-liberal forces of the UK government, led to almost half of the Scottish population wishing to secede from the fifth richest country in the world. Something is happening in Europe.

There is a kind of education, including adult education, which would simply ignore these wider social and political developments as if they did not exist. In fact the situation is worse than this because often educators simply add to the situation unwittingly. This happens through a focus on the micro level of experience as if ‘personal troubles’ was something to do with the character and failings of individuals rather than the macro, ‘public issues’, which shape the real circumstances of people and the choices they can make. This kind of aloofness and naivety, as Paulo Freire
pointed out, is simply a means of siding with the powerful against the powerless. Much of contemporary lifelong learning discourse across Europe simply reproduces the ideological dominance of a liberal, individualist, vision of education locked into the straightjacket of economic purpose. But of course there are alternatives to this scenario which is dominant in European policy and the focus of this publication is on developing a more genuine, socially and politically grounded form of lifelong education rooted in communities.

Lifelong learning, like education, is never neutral. It involves taking sides, which means knowing what you stand for as well as what and who you stand against. If we chose education for liberation it means, in Paulo Freire’s terms, that educators need to love the people and trust them in equal measure. Deficit discourses of adults and communities of the poor often start from charity, condescension or ignorance, which can never succeed as starting points for educating people. Love and trust, however, are essential characteristics of the radical educator who has the capacity to communicate with the people. To communicate means to listen, hear and respect rather than simply to talk and issue communiqués.

What I like about this book is that the issue of communication and participation in the lives of ordinary people, who are living through extraordinary times, is central to the development of educational praxis committed to progressive social change. Since *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in the early 1970s we know that the written word is an important means of acting politically. What this has tended to overshadow, however, is the significance of oral communication. In this book, Emilio Lucio-Villegas corrects the balance by drawing our attention to powerful forms of oral literacy that educators need to engage with rather than devalue in favour of text or digital media. One of the tasks he sets himself is to explore the transition between oral and written texts based on a participatory, dialogical and liberatory education.

Participation can be a double-edged sword in that it can be used to bind people into agendas and policies they have little control over or it can help enable them to give voice to real and significant issues. Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams, genuine participation has to be an open and democratic process which enables all to contribute to the creation of meanings. Adult education in communities can then be involved in the process of creating ‘really useful knowledge’, that is, knowledge which enables people — individuals and collectivities who experience systematic forms of oppression, domination and exploitation - to think about, analyse and act on their situation individually and severally. By drawing on contemporary accounts of emancipatory action and participatory research the author elaborates on the role of adult educators in this context.

Interestingly, the work of Stenhouse on the ‘teacher as researcher’, a movement for action research based on teachers developing their own expertise and agency, to provide insights and knowledge to make progressive change, is drawn on to argue and clarify the role of the adult educator in participatory action research. Stenhouse’s
approach to teaching is one that has been overlooked by adult educators, but gains a rightful place in this account. Reading this book might encourage more analysis of how his work can be claimed by adult educators. The ‘adult educator as researcher’ can be an agent of social change and this, today, is an urgent task.

The fostering of social and political change in the direction of greater social justice, democracy and liberation requires the construction of people’s alternative to the morally base hegemony of neoliberalism, which is so pervasive and destructive of genuine community and co-operation. Drawing on the insights of a number of key authors – Hardt and Negri, Williams, Gramsci, Sennett amongst others – a strong and contemporary case is made for a pedagogy of respect, that should be integral to popular education which is with and for the people.

Adult education needs to make serious engagement with the lives of people in communities if it is going to be a resource for social change. It will need to demonstrate how it can be meaningful to people making history and to do that it will need to start where people are in terms of their aspirations, concerns, ideas and beliefs. Adult education in communities: approaches from a participatory perspective is therefore a very timely book and the author, Emilio Lucio-Villegas, is the ideal person to write it. He has been at the centre of developments in Freirean adult and community education in the region of Andalusia, Spain, for a number of years. He was also – in 2008 – one of the founder of the Paulo Freire Chair at the University of Seville.

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INTRODUCTION

This book tries to reflect on adult education and its close relationships with communities. It is a modest attempt to maintain adult education in the scope of the community life against the growing schooling, and the focus on employability and on the labour market. In the last years it seems that adult education has become a kind of provider of diplomas, skills and competences and has forgotten its role to enlighten individuals and help them to share their community life with an abundance of richness, diversity, sadness and happiness.

My attempt is to recover an adult education that preserves and encourages the creativity of people, not only as individuals, but as members of a collective that is living together. If adult education was born from people’s struggles for a better life, now it seems an urgent matter to rebuild these foundations.

For me, adult education is intrinsically connected to daily life, and the life that individuals constantly edify in their interactions. If adult education is connected to daily life, one of the major tasks is to recover this feeling and to link daily life and education. I think that at present time, in a moment of intense reductionism, reality is usually presented as very plain, losing its complexity and diversity that are related to the fact that life is being lived everyday by men and women as creators and relational beings.

The book is divided into six chapters. In chapter 1, I seek to define some alternatives to the dominants tendencies of Lifelong Learning. These alternatives are – in my opinion – in the concept of Éducation Permanente and in the rescue of an adult education focused on the life of people. This adult education derives from authors such as Freire, Gelpi and others.

Chapter 2 is devoted to literacy, but also to participation. The notion of literacy cannot be reduced to the domain of some skills and competences. Literacy is a tool for communicating, and in doing so people share experiences. Thanks to literacy individuals become people in relationships. For that, literacy can only be participatory.

In chapter 3, I want to define some ways to express the everyday knowledge that people hold inside. The prevailing tendencies talk about an only and true knowledge. This knowledge became hegemonic thanks to the supremacy of capitalism, and has expelled other different approaches of knowing such as traditional knowledge, indigenous knowledge, etc. But if adult education wants to recover its pathway to become a liberating education it seems, for me, obvious that it must return to people’s everyday and the knowledge produced in their daily life.

Participatory Research seems to be a methodology in accordance with these goals. For that, chapter 4 is devoted to Participatory Research and tries to present it as more as a methodology. Participatory Research is a good example of how the
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ture essence of an adult education committed to people and looking for a way of
liberation, could be rescued. And this can only be done, as Freire said, starting from
the context where people live.

Participatory Research is useful, among other things, for edifying citizenship.
The struggle to become a citizen is closely related to the struggle for more and better
education. In chapter 5, I return to the matter of adult education and citizenship,
presenting, again, some experiences and some lessons that we can learn from these
experiences.

Finally, chapter 6 is devoted to the role of the educator. I believe that people
working in adult education are educators and I try to situate myself in a perspective
that avoids other denominations, such as facilitators, practitioners, mediators, etc.,
even if I could share some points with authors that usually are using these terms.

For me, it is very difficult to have a list of acknowledgements. Some people have
accompanied me in this long – sometimes winding, but always stimulating – trip. As
it is impossible to type a list without forgetting anybody, I am going to personify
a very small group of people. The women that undertook a process of Participatory
Research in an Adult Education School in the city of Seville more than 20 years ago.
Ana García Florindo, a committed educator that accompanied me in launching and
developing a project that combines literacy, adult education and citizenship in the
background of the Participatory Budget experiment in the city of Seville. Chapter 5
is in debt of this work. I have worked with my colleague António Fragoso – from the
University of Algarve in Portugal – for more than 15 years and one of the outcomes
of this work is in the chapter 6 which is impossible to understand without this fruitful
collaboration.

On the other hand, I am personally indebted to a lot of people. This would also be
another long list, but they know and I know who they are.

Finally, I am very grateful to Paula Guimarães, Isabel Gomes and Darlene Clover
who read some drafts of the book and provided me with wise advice to reformulate
and improve it. Thanks also to Jim Crowther and not only for writing the preface.

But at the end the only responsibility for the words contained in this book is my
own.

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December, 2014
CHAPTER 1

CLAIMING ADULT EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

In the current situation I witness important changes in the field of education and in the field of adult education. Perhaps it is possible to summarise them in two different approaches. First the shift from an education – and adult education – focused on the full development of the individual in the context of community life, as was the dream of the Enlightenment, to an education and an adult education focused on the acquisition of skills and competences to access the labour market. The keyword of this process seems to be employability instead of personal and collective development.

A second element is related to education conceived as a social relationship based on dialogue, confronting ideas and opinions, and creating a personal way of thinking in a social milieu, contrary to the idea of learning as an individual responsibility and also as an individual process undertaken in a virtual environment that prevents the creation of social relationships, bonds among people, and the growth of a rich and diverse social world.

Deriving from these two elements, another one is related to what is lacking from the state’s responsibility for the welfare of the citizens – including a good education. It seems that the role of the state, at present time and in the majority of the cases, is to privatise education, to turn education from a social value for all to a commodity that can be bought and sold in the market. The role of the state in this case is only maintaining an appearance of social cohesion to avoid social troubles from the excluded of the perfect market.

In this chapter, I will try to present this divergence starting from currents Lifelong Learning policies and practices. Then I will offer an alternative set facing this and taking into account Éducation Permanente. Finally I will try to focus on a model of adult education whose aims can only be related to the development of people either as individuals or as community members; a liberating adult education that is looking for emancipation to enable people to become citizens and to be with the others.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE KNOWLEDGE ERA?

In the introduction of ‘A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning’ we read that “Europe has indisputably moved into the Knowledge Age, with all that this will imply for cultural, economic and social life” (CEC, 2000, p. 3). Deriving from this affirmation a new policy is created and develops in Europe – and spreads to the world as an education to export (Mayo, 2013): Lifelong Learning (hereafter LLL).
The introduction of the concept of learning at the core of the educational processes seemed to be a very positive and interesting achievement trying to situate people in the centre of these processes. But the first thing that LLL policies and practices did was to transfer the responsibility of learning to individuals: “who, in the last instance, are responsible for pursuing their own learning” (CEC, 2000, p. 5). Learning becomes a personal responsibility and it is directly related to enlarge individual capacities for improving productivity. In a certain way this means that a right is considered and shifted to a commodity and, as Gomes and Lucio-Villegas (2009) point out, it “promoted the expansion of education and training opportunities […] has not yet guaranteed equal access for all” (p. 75). This means, on the other hand, that adults face education as an obligation to maintain a readiness to work. Not participating in training actions should be to stay unemployed, and of course, is blaming the victim. The new buzz word, ‘employability’, means that the primary objective of an individual is to become employed and the major aim of the educational system is to constantly prepare the person for this task throughout their whole life.

However, in the last 10 years, one of the most interesting and surprising achievements in education and learning has been the diverse attempts for a gradual unification of educational policies in the European Union. Going from the recommendations to the implementation of specific policies and practices were possible thanks to two different instruments. On the one hand the collection of good practices concerning education that, in theory, could be transferred to a different context without considering the specificities of the context. This is a kind of education to export inside the borders of EU that, in fact, imposes several practices ‘good and successful’ in terms of the standard of EU policies but not in terms of usefulness to people and communities. Plus, this is reinforced thanks to the benchmarks which I will refer to later.

The second instrument to homogenise these policies and practices is the open method of coordination that aimed to identify and circulate these good practices. (Guimarães, 2014).

At the end, as Lima and Guimarães (2011) state, this is an important process that has moderated national sovereignty. ‘A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning’ could be considered the foundational document of the so-called Lisbon Strategy, primarily aiming to promote a “comprehensive strategy on lifelong learning” (CEC 2000, p. 6). The ‘Council Resolution of 27 June of 2002 on Lifelong Learning’ stresses that the main goal of this policy convergence is “to achieve a comprehensive and coherent strategy for education and training” (OJEC 2002, p. 163/02), making Lifelong Learning in Europe a reality. Lifelong Learning is defined as follows:

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. (CEC 2001, p. 9)

The main goals of this strategy were defined in a Council Resolution (OJEC, 2002, p. 163/02) as follows: i) Providing access to lifelong learning opportunities for all,
these actions shall include disadvantaged people, migrants and others to facilitate their social integration; ii) providing opportunities to acquire or update basic skills; iii) the training and updating of teachers; iv) the validation and recognition of formal qualifications as well as non-formal and informal learning; v) the high quality of guidance and counselling concerning lifelong learning opportunities; and vi) encouraging the representation of relevant actors, as youth for instance, – in existing or future networks.

On the other hand, the ‘Memorandum’ differentiates three types of learning: formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning (CEC 2000, p. 8). The Memorandum also states the main aims for this common policy on LLL through six key messages, all of which stress on the importance of LLL (CEC, 2000, pp 10–20). These messages are meant to edify a “knowledge-based economy and society” (CEC, 2000, p.3) that will transform Europe into “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world by 2010” (CEC, 2007, p. 2).

For now I am going to describe the six messages paying attention to the first – new skill for all – because it seems to be basic for understanding the shift to a strategy only focused on the labour market.

The key message, ‘New skills for all’, addressed to “Guarantee universal and continuing access to learning for gaining and renewing the skills needed for sustained participation in the knowledge society” (CEC, 2000, p. 10). These basic skills for sustained participation include IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills “as those required for active participation in the knowledge society and economy” (CEC, 2000, p. 10, bold type in the original). The major goal of these basic skills is defined as:

**to encourage and equip people to participate more actively** once more in all spheres of modern public life, especially in social and political life at all levels of the community, including at European level (CEC 2000, p. 5, bold type in the original).

Basic skills are always associated with two different domains: active citizenship and employability. As active citizenship is not presented as an objective in and of itself, an important double discourse arises, distinguishing concept from practice. This double discourse specifically concerns particular LLL practices, with the stronger discourse focusing on the labour market rather than citizens’ rights and participation. Policymakers seem to have forgotten that education and learning should span an entire lifetime, rather than using education just for job preparation defined by competitiveness. ‘The Action Plan on Adult Learning’ (CEC, 2006) focuses on giving responses to the following challenges: competitiveness, demographic change and social inclusion. Responses to the last challenge, social inclusion, is meant to eliminate poverty among marginalised groups. ‘The Action Plan’, however, does not reference active citizenship. In fact, the discourse had been changed. The document ‘It is always a good time to learn’ affirms that “A key element of the agenda proposed in Lisbon was the promotion of employability and social inclusion
through investment in citizens’ knowledge and competence at all stages of their lives” (CEC, 2007, p. 2).

It has been forgotten, however, that the Lisbon Agenda “argues that promoting active citizenship and promoting employability are equally important and interrelated aims for lifelong learning” (CEC, 2000, p. 4).

The second key message is ‘More investment in human resources’. This seems a form of privatisation that is one of the main tendencies announced by Finger and Asún (2001) to define the current situation of adult education.

The idea of individual learning accounts is an example, by which people are encouraged to contribute to the cost of their own learning through special savings and deposits that attract matching or supplementary grants and benefits from public and private funding sources (CEC, 2000, p. 12). The document insists on the importance of social partners as private companies and enterprises that should have the weight of the training actions.

The third key message is ‘Innovation in teaching and learning’. Innovations are in the milieu but not in the message. It seems that the importance is in the devices used, and innovations are related to the level of use ICT and to introduce innovations that change people’s life. “ICT-based learning technologies offer great potential for innovation in teaching and learning methods” (CEC, 2000, p. 13, bold type in the original). This innovation also includes the role of the teacher that now is a facilitator. Since I will refer this issue in chapter 6, I agree with English and Mayo:

While it is no doubt results from dissatisfaction with traditional pedagogical methods that have been deemed […] one must guard against the danger of the pedagogic approach involved degenerating into laissez faire pedagogy which inevitably favours those who enjoy greater access to resources. (English & Mayo, 2012, p. 13, italic type in the original)

Plus, in the shift from education to learning, the innovation is linked to a kind of shift from knowledge to competences (CEC, 2001). In the next key message I will reflect on the diversity of knowledge that, I think, is the core of the matter.

The key message 4 is devoted to ‘Valuing learning’. As the Memorandum states “In the knowledge economy, developing and using human resources to the full is a decisive factor in maintaining competitiveness” (CEC, 2000, p. 15). There are two different elements here; first one is, again, the privatisation. The process of valuing learning must be accompanied by greater involvement of those who ultimately validate credentials in practice and who are closely familiar with the ways in which individuals and enterprises use credentials in everyday life (CEC, 2000, p. 16).

In a market economy these credentials are validated by private companies and enterprises. In the next chapter I will present an example on how literacy can be used to improve competitiveness in the frame of specific industrial development, and not, as traditionally had been understand, as a way to liberation.

But, on the other hand, the learning that is valuable is only a type of learning. I will develop it in chapter 3 taking into account diverse works collected, among
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others, by Santos (2009). The important thing here is that valuable learning is always related to an individual’s quest to become employable. Skills and competences that a person has to have are according to competitiveness, employability, the economic growth, and to edify the knowledge society. Other knowledge – such as traditional or indigenous knowledge, the knowledge that people in communities create in their interactions and daily life – must be erased because they are facing the progress as defined by the theory of modernity (Youngman, 2000).

The fifth key message is on ‘Rethinking guidance and counselling’ I will return to this in chapter 6 which will be devoted to the role of the adult educator. Now I would like to say in advance that the guidance and counselling as presented in the Memorandum and beyond became an essential element in discontinuous life where people are changing their job in a framework of both insecurities and risk. People’s narratives are broken as Sennett (2000) indicates in The Corrosion of Character.

The last key message is ‘Bringing learning closer to home’. It is a very positive message because the familiar distinctiveness of people’s home community and region gives confidence and provides social networks. These resources are important for lending meaning to learning and for supporting positive learning outcomes (CEC, 2000, p. 19).

The point is that LLL strategy is based on both benchmarks and indicators. The progress of learning “will be measured and monitored through the use of a limited number of indicators” (CEC, 2001, p. 5, underlined text in the original). This document also stresses statistics and indicators already form an essential part of existing initiatives in the field of lifelong learning with a view to monitoring progress both in achieving identifies targets and in implementing policy objectives (CEC, 2001, p. 27).

And now the question is: where is the diversity in this world of benchmarks and indicators? Because the main goal for benchmarks and indicators in presenting raw data is to enable comparative approaches that usually don’t consider differences as I mentioned above. Statistics, indicators and benchmarks close the circle to unified and homogenised practices and policies around the European borders and beyond them.

A second matter is the following. The idea of bringing learning close to home means to potentiate informal learning – which could be an interesting issue – but the danger is that this new validation of informal learning seems to be done in conflict with the school learning system that is a guarantee of equality and access for all.

According to Lima and Guimarães (2011) LLL is more a set of ideas disseminated and related to a field of practice than a theoretical framework as, for instance Éducation Permanente. The most important change comes from the importance given to skills, qualifications, and certificates that “have motivated a pedagogical model that signifies a change in educational domains” (Lima & Guimarães, 2011, p. 54) This change seems to have lost the values of social justice, equity and solidarity (Finger & Asún, 2001). On the other hand, the link between education and development as it was presented in the UNESCO Conferences and documents has
also been lost. Including when the documents talk about social cohesion they also are referring to the most underprivileged and marginalised, but there is not a belief in democratic values and social justice (Martin, in Lima & Guimarães, 2011). As English and Mayo (2012) state:

This discourse limits human beings to two-dimensional persons, consumers and producers, rather than expands the conception to embrace a more holistic view of persons who have the skills to engage critically and collectively not only in the work process but also in the public sphere, that domain of democratic practice entailing a notion of citizenship. (p. 19)

Lifelong Learning policies and practices have shifted their focus on society, moving it to the individual. Learning becomes a personal responsibility directly related to the success of finding a job, far away from the postulates those Faure et al. (1986) defined as the basis of Éducation Permanente: i) solidarity between government and people; ii) democracy as a right of each individual; iii) development as a right of individuals and communities; iv) education as a tool to reach these goals.

Lima stressed that LLL means a type of countable model of adult education closely related to the banking education drawn on by Freire. As Lima (2009) points out:

In education, managerial speeches have been occupying the position which was previously assumed by the educational theories and the pedagogical thinking, building narratives of managerial type that legitimise a new social order based on the market and in the private and productive sectors, in the economical competition, and in the client-centred management. (p. 243)

In the end, I think that the most powerful and important critique that can be made to LLL’s current policies and practices is that the aims of the education must be for education itself. According to Dewey ([1916]1995), the most important achievement in a democratic society is education’s role to encourage both personal and collective development. However, LLL policies subordinate these educational aims to professionalisation and business. As Dewey ([1916]1995) also stated, in a democratic society, learning and teaching cannot become mere resources to achieve aims disconnected from the educational means.

ÉDUCATION PERMANENTE: CREATING HOPE

Éducation Permanente, also named as Lifelong Education was born in the age of Enlightenment (Rubenson, 2004). Concepts are born and defined within historical, social and/or cultural landscapes, and this is very clear in the case of Éducation Permanente. Enlightenment was a political and cultural movement seeking – between other things – education and democracy, as Jovellanos – the most important Enlightenment representative in Spain – has shown us. Jovellanos considered that education was the main principle of the wealth of the nations and, he added, despotism was based on ignorance (Lerena, 1983). As Sucholdoski stated:
At the end of XVIII century and the beginning of XIX common people either in America or Great Britain undertook great efforts to break the barriers that impeded them to reach beyond an elementary education which excluded them from participation and cultural life. (1979, p. 61)

In analysing history, it is possible to see how education always became a battlefield between the upper-classes and the rising of a powerful middle class and, overall, the claims of working class for a better life, more education and culture and the right to personal development. This idea is reinforced by Lengrand when he wrote:

The issue that we really considered is that working movements’ leaders […] were not devoted to developing among the workers the spirit of critique, research and originality that define either a scientific attitude facing both reality and practice, or an adult perspective of thought and life. (1973, p. 16)

I will affirm later on that adult education is based on the building of diverse knowledge that comes from people’s daily life, their experiences and shared paths. For that, I agree with Finger and Asúñ (2001) when they state that postmodernism is a road (or many roads) to nowhere (p. 114), plus, when they consider that “this postmodernism social reality is constituted by growing individualism” (p. 117). In this way the feeling of community, solidarity, societal emancipation, the realisation of a “just, free and equitable society” (Finger & Asúñ, 2001, p. 115) are lost. As Sucholdoski stated:

Education shall instil [people] that personal life only obtains value and plentitude if men [sic] participate in an active way in the true social life and that the latter, at the same time, only thrives and becomes stronger when it reaches a good understanding with the more profound motivation of individual actions. (1975, p. 51)

According to Finger (2005) Éducation Permanente can be considered more a set of practice, a practical framework than a theoretical concept. In this set of practices and ideas there is always the importance that education means a relationship among individuals.

The most important event concerning Éducation Permanente during the Enlightenment age was the “Condorcet Report” presented to the French Assembly in 1791, two years after the French Revolution. The spirit of those times is clearly imprinted in the following quote that presents more a political project than a definition:

We have observed, finally, that instruction should not abandon individuals at the moment they leave school; it should cover all ages […] this second instruction is of most importance as narrower have been the limits that infancy instruction […] the possibility to receive a first instruction is not as [important] as [the possibility] to keep its advantages. (Condorcet, in Tiana, 1991, p. 11)
CHAPTER 1

Three different issues arise from this sentence: i) it expands education in the lifespan; ii) it guarantees an elementary education for all; and iii) it assures the compromise to keep education — and consequently the resources needed — during the whole life course. This humanistic approach is strengthened by the inclusion of another element: universality: “therefore, instruction must (...) extend to all citizens” (Condorcet, in González & Madrid, 1988, p. 90).

The XIX century is in fact prosperous of education struggles. The major outcome of this was the birth of the public school and compulsory education in the developed countries, in the XX century. The importance of this fact, taking into account the introduction of this chapter, is that a public school and a compulsory education for all means that education becomes a right for all. This is the matter which today is at stake.

As Faure et al. (1986) state: “Éducation Permanente is an expression of a sweeping relationship between all the forms, expressions and stages of educational actions” (p. 220). In this stele, Gelpi (1990b) affirmed that Éducation Permanente is synonymous of education as itself.

The idea of a school for everybody is reinforced by the concept that education can only be both global and permanent. Global means inside and outside the school. Permanent means during the entire lifespan (Faure et al., 1986). Lengrand (1973) wrote:

We understand Éducation Permanente as a collection of very specific ideas, experiences and achievements. Education in the plenitude of its conception, holding the totally of aspects and dimensions, in a continuity of personal development, from the beginning to the last moments of life, in a close coordination of its moments and phases. (p. 26)

After the Second World War, the ‘new’ Éducation Permanente idea was born in an emergent Enlightenment spirit growing after one of the most horrific periods in the entire human history. There was a generalised belief that education could contribute to avoid new barbarities such as wars, rising nuclear powers, attempts to eliminate entire populations, etc… In 1948 UNESCO was created. One of the first General Managers, Rene Maheu, later said:

Éducation Permanente is an idea that was born among Adult Education specialists and facilitators; in other words, it was born in contexts outside of the traditional school and university systems; and it was also born more from the contact with the social and economic reality of real life than from the contact with the academic universe. (Maheu, in Fullat, 1973, p. 15)

Laot (2002) sets the first legal French use of Éducation Permanente only in 1955, by Pierre Arents, in a law proposal concerning national education. This term would then substitute both the post-scholar and the popular education expressions. From the end of the 50’s and throughout the 60’s Éducation Permanente becomes the carrier of
CLAIMING ADULT EDUCATION

an immense hope because it opens new possibilities for cultural development and personal fulfilment.

In Laot’s opinion, Éducation Permanente’s moment of glory in the French country was definitely the period after May of 1968, when trade unions, employees and the State commonly agreed on a further vocational training model. But throughout the 70’s it is possible to assist to confusions between Éducation Permanente and other expressions. She concludes that despite having had a long history, Éducation Permanente had a short life:

from a recent work developed on thesis [in the domain of] adult education (…) [they observed that] the permanent adjective had disappeared from the titles of the thesis after 1993, while the further adjective appeared stably across all the time. (Laot, 2002, p. 122, italic type in the original)

UNESCO has become one of the most important International Organisations working in the field of education. In the Conference of Nairobi (Kenya) in 1976, UNESCO defined Éducation Permanente as follows:

The permanent education expression designates a global project aiming to restructure the existing educational system, and the development of all training possibilities outside of the educational system, in that project, [the learner] is the agent of their own education, through permanent interaction between their actions and their reflection, Éducation Permanente, far from being limited to the schooling period, must cover all life dimensions, all knowledge branches and all the practical knowledge that can be acquired in any context and contribute to all forms of personality development, the educational processes, which occur throughout children’s, young people’s and adults’ lives, in whichever form they take, must be considered as a whole. (UNESCO, 1977, p. 124)

Now I am going to outline some key ideas on Éducation Permanente (e.g. Apps, 1985; Dave, 1979; Faure et al., 1986; Lengrand, 1979; UNESCO, 1976) following Finger and Asun (2001, p. 25):

i) Education is permanent, not limited to a specific period of life; ii) education is everywhere including formal, non-formal and informal spaces and activities; iii) life is the main source of learning; iv) education is for all, it is a universal right; v) Éducation Permanente is flexible and means a dynamic approach to education that shall enable an approach full of methodologies, techniques and contents; vi) the most important point is learning to learn; vii) one of its main goals is to improve the quality of life of individuals in communities – this means to encourage participation among others’ expertise; and viii) it is opposed to traditional education in the sense that tries to promote the change and to not perpetuate the status quo.

The Faure report Learning to be (Faure et al., 1986) could be considered a kind of manifesto of Éducation Permanente. Speaking on this, Canário (in Guimarães, 2011) states that far away from an economical version of an education characterised
by accumulating diplomas, the focus is on considering that education and learning occurs during people’s lifespan. Education is, for that, diverse, continuing and global.

Éducation Permanente means changing the mind about education, not only about adult education, but also about the whole educational system in its formal, non-formal and informal expressions:

If learning is a lifelong subject, in all its length and diversity, in what concerns its educational resources as well as its social and economic resources, then it’s necessary to go further than the educational systems’ review. (Faure et al., 1986, p. 40)

According to Finger and Asún it is an attempt to humanise development “which is otherwise in danger of being run and controlled by experts, technocrats and other oppressors” (2001, p. 24).

But the most important matter is to consider that Éducation Permanente is related to development. This is the ancient idea of Enlightenment. Education is for creating new men and women, to liberate the creativity that women and men hold inside them, and to display them together with other people (Bélanger & Federighi, 2002).

As Lima and Guimarães state:

The conception of LLE [Lifelong Education] advocated by UNESCO was also committed to personal development and to the social change in the contexts, economic situations and living conditions of individuals. (2011, p. 120)

This means to include museums, libraries, civic and community centres, etc. as educational spaces everyplace in the community (Gelpi, 1990b). But it also means to rethink the educational system in order to integrate,

a democratic conception of ALE [Adult Learning and Education] [that] can neither ignore the economy, nor can it adopt a positive attitude of subordination overwhelmed by the force of economic interests that do not emerge democratically but from the competitive market, which, by definition, does not seek to produce social justice and human solidarity. (Lima & Guimarães 2011, p. 10)

It can be considered that Éducation Permanente means: i) to think about education and adult education from other perspectives; ii) step by step, all educational processes must be equally integrated as a totality; iii) each life stage has its own worries and necessities. Education must be adapted to these different stages; and iv) places and phases of learning can be different. The individual must be able to choose the best moment to learn. For that, learning in school and learning out of school mustn’t be contradictory. This means that,

education can be teaching and be acquired through several aids, because the most important thing is not in the way which the person learned, but what thing he [sic] has learnt and acquired. (Faure et al., 1986, p. 269)
In short, the notion of Éducation Permanente indicates that,

Education cannot be limited to an individual’s life before their adult life […]
For that reason it is necessary to rethink the educational systems […] If we need to learn to reinvent and to renew constantly, teaching becomes education […] If learning is a matter for a whole life, in its lifespan and diversity, and from the whole society, either in educational resources or economic resources […] so, it is needed to go beyond the required review of educational system. (Faure et al., 1986: 40)

This statement allows me to stress the importance of the diverse approaches to education and knowledge, and, on the other hand, to affirm that education cannot be limited to aims only connected with jobs as the essential element of human life. Education became the guarantee that people grow to be person and citizen. These ideas could be nearest to that which Rubenson (2004) considered a romantic age of adult education characterised by linking people’s daily life, development and a humanistic view that considers education as a human right focused on social justice and the edification of a more fair and sustainable society. I will make continuous reference to this romantic idea in this book.

Some critiques have been presented to the idea of Éducation Permanente. The most important could be that this concept,

set out to humanise it [development] in a very Western (and Northern) way, as neither (Western) science and technology, nor the very Enlightenment idea of mastering matter by means of the mind, were questioned. (Finger & Asún, 2001, p. 26)

A second critique is related to the fact that it seems that as well, this concept doesn’t criticise learning institutions, creating confusion between education and learning. I can agree with Finger and Asún (2001) but I would like to add that each concept has a theoretical, historical, political and cultural framework. In this sense, I want to express my conviction that Éducation Permanente was and still is a space for creating hope in a world of inequalities.

ADULT EDUCATION FOR EMANCIPATION?

To define Adult Education (hereafter AE) could be difficult. Usually it is considered a very diffuse concept that holds different meanings and practices. As McCullough states:

To extract adult education from its surrounding world – or at least differentiate adult education from its social environment – is as difficult as considering how many angels can dance on a pin head. Is adult education is a practice or a programme? A methodology or an organization? A science or a system? A process or a profession? Is adult education different from continuing
education, vocational education, higher education? Does adult education even exist? (in Jarvis, 1989, p. 23, italic type in the original)

Considering these difficulties in the definition of a vague and ample field, I have looked for different definitions coming from diverse perspectives. Faure et al. (1986) defined AE in a way nearest that of McCullogh’s statement.

Adult education gives a response to multiple definitions; it replaces elementary education for a significant number of adults around the world; it is supplementary to elementary education for a lot of people holding an incomplete education; it enlarges the education of those by helping them face the new demands of their environment; it improves the education of those who hold a higher level of education; it makes up, at last, a way for an individual expression for everybody. (Faure et al., 1986, p. 289)

In a similar direction, Barbier (2009) talked on formation des adultes, and asked himself how can it be recognised? At the end, when he is looking for a definition, he decides to start from the activities that are considered as formation des adultes: social work, issues related to social environment, communication skills, management and others related to working places, therapy or spiritual life.

Diversity and vagueness are also related to different landscapes. Rubenson and Elfert (2014) differentiate between a North American and a European approach. Plus, the inclusion of China and the Republic of Korea in this map introduces new perspectives. After analysing some of the published research, they conclude:

In reflecting further in the fragmentation of the map of the territory it is important to observe first at all that the field of adult education as such as begun to be split into its components with the parts becoming fields of studies in of themselves. (Rubenson & Elfert, 2014, p. 34)

This diversity, and perhaps the vagueness in defining it, is an essential element in understanding AE. The diversity is either in conceptual terms or geographically. In fact, as Lima and Guimarães state, LLL policies and practices have broken the “heterogeneity that is the feature of adult education in many European countries” (2011, p. 105). On the other hand, it is important to stress that this diversity seems to be the guarantee for an adult education committed to people and communities. As Gelpi stated:

Adult education in Europe seems to have progressively forgotten its history made of fighting, resistances, creativities and it is transforming into an instrument of power only used for personal development and in the logic of the market. (2004, p. 153)

In this wide range of activities and theories I would like to stress some aspects that can explain what I classify as AE. When I speak about AE, I am referring to a kind
of education which is addressed to adult people – in a society that considers them as adults. It is defined by UNESCO:

Adult Education denotes the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society. Adult learning encompasses both formal and continuing education, non-formal learning and the spectrum of informal and incidental learning available in a multicultural learning society, where theory and practice – based approaches are recognised. (1997, p. 1)

Some findings derived from this definition. Firstly the cultural dimension of adult education. On the other hand, the wide spectrum of activities that can be considered adult education, and the link between personal development and community circumstances. An emergent issue here is the things that people learn and not how, when or where. Education becomes, in this process, as diverse, continuing and global (Guimarães, 2011).

It could be considered that AE is characterised in terms of methodology and individuals involved in the process of teaching and learning. A specific methodology that merges peoples’ daily life with curricula. In a Freirean way I can say that AE is related to the possibility to read and say the world at the same time that people read and say words. People become more aware of their own situation starting from generative words as a basis of AE (Freire, 1970). It could be said that AE uses methodologies based on the experiences of people and focuses on the surrounding environment in a perspective close to Popular Education defined as: i) rooted in the real interest of ordinary people and in their struggles; ii) overtly political and critical of the status quo; iii) committed to social and political change; iv) the curriculum comes out from the experiences of both people and communities; v) pedagogy is collective, stressing the importance of the group; and vi) it tries to forge links between education and social action (Crowther, Johnston, Martin & Merrill, 2006).

A second element that could be useful to define AE is related to people participating (I will refer to this later in this chapter). Apart from a very confusing age criteria – different in different societies and cultures – it seems important to stress the people’s experiences (as I will also note later on) either in educational terms – people usually come from a previous experience of schooling – or life experience. AE can help individuals to understand and reorganise their own experience to deal and change their personal and community situation. On the other hand, it could be supposed that an adult is a person with maturity that looks to edify both their own sense and opinion facing the things that happen around him or her. In this scope it could be interesting to recover the four aims that an adult education policy should respond to: i) support a collective identity; ii) provide a response to the needs of training in workplaces, iii) support policies based on social cohesion; and iv) counselling and regulations looking for consumption (Bélanger & Federighi, 2002).
But it is also important to remember that adult education has been traditionally associated to decolonising programmes, social, cultural and productive projects. As Gelpi noticed, there is a long way from “adult education as a both social and political project to an adult education focus on professional training” (1990, p. 152).

In this stelle, Finger and Asún (2001) follow Ivan Illich to consider that AE is characterised by: i) learning as opposed to schooling; ii) conviviality as opposed to manipulation; iii) responsabilisation as opposed to deresponsibilisation; and iv) participation as opposed to control. The latter will become an essential element of my argument below because “In adult education, knowledge is created by the people, not for the people” (Finger & Asún, 2001, p. 13, italic type in the original).

I define AE as an education closely related to the daily life that people have in communities, in the process of edifying relationships with others.

Adult education is learning for democracy; researching communities searching for a school for all; transforming communities; the struggle for our own rights; becoming awareness about environmental hazards; edifying the city or expressing ourselves through theater or public art. These are the things that a true and educational process of validation should recognize. Lifelong Learning’s concepts and practices seem to have forgotten that life is more than the labor market. Life includes: relatives, partners and friends’ relationships; parents and children; holidays and work; desires and illusions; happiness and sadness; good decisions or bad decisions; emotions and feelings; a sunset in Almograve or a dawn in a plane coming back home; the dirty and delicate work of living. Lifelong Learning’s concepts and practices seem to have forgotten that the entire life of women and men are the substance of what adult education is made of. (Lucio-Villegas, 2009, pp. xiii–xiv)

Another way to define AE could be derived from Hill’s statement on indigenism pedagogy. According to the author, it is necessary to ask ourselves the following questions:


Finally, I name AE as a category of education that links popular culture and classic culture in the sense drawn on by Raymond Williams when he talked about criticism.

Criticism as a definition of conscious response […] Including, as often necessarily, positive or negative responses, a definite practice, an active and complex relations with its whole situation and context. (1989, p. 86)

Looking to history, AE is characterised as being an attempt to answer the wishes of people for a better life, a better education and the recognition of their own culture.
This first idea of an adult education related to the education of common people is basic in my own idea of it. AE arises from both needs and people’s desires. Perhaps the most representative author in this direction is Paulo Freire. According to Freire education is an act where people are creating knowledge. Really useful knowledge to understand the surrounding world and to change it.

According to Quintana (1986) I define some characteristics to AE that can also help in its delimitation: a) it is a participatory education. Teachers and learners are the main actors in the educational process that it has to take place in a context that promotes participation; b) it is an active process starting from the curiosity and the search for responses by the participants; c) the educator has to take a specific role such as animator supporting every proposal coming from the group; d) adult education is a collective process with a powerful social dimension; e) it also is a process of social transformation, either in an individual or collective perspective; and f) it is an attempt for adult people to discover their surrounding environment through approaches as Participatory Research.

Models on Adult Education

Some different models have been proposed as an attempt to organise the diversity and vagueness of AE. Usually these models are addressed to differentiate between a model of AE focused on schooling and curricula and others more based on giving a response both to problems and people’s desires and more related to a community approach. Jarvis (1986) offers different approaches when he differentiates between one that he called liberal education and another that he called radical education: learning from above and learning coming from below. So, he talked of two types of education and outlined the differences in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning from above</th>
<th>Learning from below</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tries to maintain people inside the social system and socialise individuals in it.</td>
<td>The most important aspect is to encourage the individual to achieve their own needs and desires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives are well and specifically defined.</td>
<td>Objectives have been defined during the process of learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The curriculum is the academic knowledge socially accepted.</td>
<td>The knowledge and curriculum are negotiated between learners and teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher is the main character in the classroom.</td>
<td>The teacher is not the main character in the learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning process is evaluated according to benchmarks and standards.</td>
<td>The process of learning is constantly self evaluated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Freire (1970) it could be possible to differentiate between banking education and liberating—or critical—education.

There is little question Freire’s concept of banking education is the most recognizable concept in his entire body of work. The term has been discussed and distorted [...] even teachers who consider themselves progressive are probably guilty of banking education during some of their classroom. (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2012, p. 82)

In the well-known Freire’s tradition, banking education is characterised by:

a. the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
b. the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
c. the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
d. the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly;
e. the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
f. the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
g. the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
h. the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
i. the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
j. the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (Freire, 1970, p. 73)

Liberating education is related to the process of conscientização and the way to reach autonomy and emancipation. Freire talked about humanisation,

Authentic liberation – the process of humanization – is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it. Those truly committed to the cause of liberation can accept neither the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled, nor the use of banking methods of domination (propaganda, slogans—deposits) in the name of liberation. (1970, p. 79)

Finally, Freire establishes a clear difference between banking and liberating education that it is rooted on a methodology which is based on problem-posing:

Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. (1970, p. 86)
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Other authors introduced a new approach taking also into account the role of the state and civil society and including an emergent model focused on the training of human resources – not human being.

Lima and Guimarães (2011, pp. 42–66) have differentiated three models.

1. the democratic emancipator model, related to the concept of emancipation that is based on the work of the Civil Society Organisations (CSO), looking for a “democratic and participatory reinvention, particularly through social movements” (Lima & Guimarães, 2011, p. 43).

2. the modernisation and state control model characterised by “underestimating the action of bodies linked to civil society” (Lima & Guimarães, 2011, p. 49). If the main characteristic of the previous one is to acknowledge the importance of non-formal and informal education, this model is mainly focused on school and schooling.

3. the human resources management model that is “focused on the acquisition of skills (which are not promoted in the provisions currently available in the education systems)” (Lima & Guimarães, 2011, p. 58). The most impressive achievement of this model is how it has been reconceptualising the discourses on participation or Popular Education to adapt it to an exploitative and not liberatory way. I will refer to this in chapter 2.

Sanz (2005) differentiates between:

1. the literacy model focuses on the teaching and learning of literacy codes – more as recipient than transmitter. According to Sanz (2005) it avoids people by codifying their own experience.

2. the social dialogical model that tries to help people to act in their daily life join with others. It is a model that gives priority to participation and awareness. Sanz (2005) talks on social learning that potentiates relationships among individuals and also participation as I will note in chapter 5.

3. the productive and economic model focuses on competences is closely related to productivity. As Lima and Guimarães state: “skills, qualification and certificates here motivated a pedagogical model that signifies a change in educational domains” (2011, p. 54). A change that differentiates knowledge and the source of this knowledge, as will be presented in chapter 3.

Olesen (1989), when studying the process of modernisation in Denmark, also differentiates three different models: i) Basic literacy education, reading, writing, numeracy, computer skills and foreign language; ii) Community and popular education, inside social movements or communities; and iii) Education and training for work.

Finally, Finger and Asún (2001) differentiates among three different perspectives.

i) Pragmatism. It is based on Dewey and Lindeman’s works, and the more recent developments by Mezirow and Jarvis. The most interesting matters here are the right for education for all and the importance of experience.
Accordingly, for Dewey, education must guarantee that all members of the community have the opportunity to have experiences, give meaning to their experiences, and ultimately learn from them (Finger & Asún, 2001, p. 34).

ii) Humanism. It is represented by authors such as Rogers, Knowles or Brookfield. The most important thing here is how people are growing in a certain environment but this blossoming is, in a certain way, independent of that environment. According to the authors “it is above all a therapeutic and individualistic approach to personal development, with a risk for adult education of further promoting individualism” (Finger & Asún, 2001, p. 73).

iii) Marxist adult education. Here they included the critical theory, Participatory Action Research and Paulo Freire. The most important things here are the collective approach to learning, the goal for transforming the surrounding reality and the edifying of knowledge. In fact, according to Finger and Asún (2001), PAR [Participatory Action Research] goes significantly beyond Freire, as it questions the epistemological issue of knowledge production and knowledge appropriation. More precisely, people have to recover not only control over their means of production, but, more profoundly, the control over the means of knowledge production. (p. 92, italic type in the original)

This last issue is one of these author’s thesis when searching for finding and learning the way out, and I will return to it in chapters 3 and 4. But prior to these three models Finger and Asún talked of the work of the UNESCO and Éducation Permanente and stressed two major ideas: an education linked to the process of development (although they were very critical with the ‘western model of development’ as noted above) and an education addressed to social change.

In conclusion, it could be argued that it is a common issue to tackle in two different approaches to adult education, one related to liberation and autonomy and other more interested with the preservation of hegemonic social relations. In this sense I would like to stress that workers’ training could be situated in both ends of the line under the condition that the training addressed people in order to understand the productive processes, the world of work and the cultures of work as Gelpi (2004) stated. Finally, I agree with Alheit,

(Adult) education with aims exclusively at ‘economics benefits’ pushes forward the processes of individualisation and destroys social relationships. The results are a growing disloyalty towards the system of society, the rise of ‘hidden civil disobedience’ (Habermas) and the increase of political frustration and right-wing counter power. A concept of (adult) education which respects the ‘wider benefits of learning’ strengthens individual autonomy without endangering social cohesion. It can indeed make a useful contribution to the development of new forms of active social and political participation. (2014, p. 87, italic type in the original)
Dimensions of Adult Education

Starting from these inputs, I present an attempt at defining an AE based on six dimensions/elements/principles that at the end could be considered as goals that AE shall reach: Dialogue, Participation, A Collective Approach, Experience, Diversity, and Autonomy and Emancipation.

Dialogue. Dialogue is the core of Freire's philosophy and methodology. Dialogue guarantees communication and establishes education as a cooperative process characterised by social interactions between people in which new knowledge is created by joining and sharing the knowledge that people have. Dialogue means multiple voices and multiple directions. In this multiple dialogue, knowledge is edified at the same time that dialogue takes place. For this, dialogue as an educational journey considers people as social human beings and not as recipients. It is the essence of liberating education. Dialogue is, in this sense, the starting point to edify a liberating education. As Park (2001) states,

Dialogue, in particular, looms large as an important methodological link among the activities pursued because of its existential significance for human life. More than a technical means to an end, it is an expression of the human condition that impels people to come together. (p. 81)

According to Freire (1970), teaching and learning are the two steps in the process of creating knowledge: the teacher is a learner and the learner becomes teacher. Freire stresses that doing a collaborative work means to include community members to ground the work in people's daily lives. This is represented in Freire's terms by the generative theme that emerges in the process of codification/decoding. Dialogue from generative themes lead people to reflect and take actions to transform their reality – their community, their village – in the process called conscientização:

The process by which people are stimulated and encouraged to explore their reality and their awareness of it, so that their understanding of both reality and their own consciousness is deepened, and they begin to engage in praxis. (Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 2011, p. 172, italic type in the original)

This process of dialogue that becomes conscientização is made through the double process of codification and decoding. When codifying and decoding, people undertake a collective work based on both cooperation and experience. In this process people’s knowledge emerges, creating a new one based on the surrounding reality. I will return to the process of codification/decoding when I talk on Participatory Literacy.

Participation. Adult education has to be a participatory education and potentiates participation. As Botkin et al. stated, “Participation is something more than to share in a formal way the decisions taken. It is an attitude characterised by cooperation,
CHAPTER 1

dialogue and empathy” (1979, p. 35). For that, adult education can only be considered as participatory because adult people are concerned in educational projects when they see a clear implication between these projects and their personal, social, communitarian and/or working life.

As Park (2001) states when relating the Freirean approach to Participatory Research:

Dialogue occupies a central position as inquiry in pursuing the three objectives of participatory research, and the knowledge associated with them, by making it possible for participants to create a social space in which they can share experiences and information, create common meanings and forge concerted actions together. (p. 81)

On the other hand, when Bélanger and Federighi (2002) connect adult education and development – an essential matter in the relations between adult education and communities – they said that “there is not sustainable development without the commitment of adult people, and without its energy which confers its true sense to the development” (p. 93).

But participation in terms of adult education also means to edify the knowledge collectively, develop a reflection and an educative mutual experience (Aramendy et al., 1988). In chapter 3 I will return to this matter and chapter 5 is devoted to participation where I will present this issue in a more detailed way.

A collective approach. This dimension is presented here in a double sense. On the one hand, I want to refer to the psychological approaches derived from psychologists such as Vygotski, Luria, Wertsch, etc. These have researched on the importance of social interactions that happen in people’s daily life, to constitute the personality and to help to edify the higher psychological processes. According to Vygotski (1979), our conceptual skills, our ways to produce diverse thoughts, are first social and then individual. As Luria (1987) demonstrates in his research, the edification of our possibilities to think about our world is related to the context, the circumstances of our life, etc.

Connections between dialogue and personal and collective development are in the notion of the Zone of Potential Development. This key concept originally referred to children. Some psychologists are using it and research conducted on it is giving attention to adults participating in adult education processes (cf. Cole & Scribner, 1977; Luria, 1987; Smagorinsky, 2011; Wertsch, 1987, 1991). I will return to this face of the collective approach in chapter 2 when talking on literacy and in other sections of the book.

The other aspect of the collective approach is the concept/notion of community. Fragoso (2009) has reflected on the shaking concept of community. Following his extensive literature review it is possible to analyse the term community from a historic perspective; as a social construction plenty of meaning and feeling for
CLAIMING ADULT EDUCATION

Experience. Experience is a strategic element to edify an AE plenty of significance to people. Experience is, in some ways, the result – and the process – through which an individual organises the knowledge and shares it with others. Experience from a Freirean perspective is related to problem-posing education, and it is the source for organising the processes of teaching and learning. Experience could be considered the matter from codifications that emerges when the moment to say the word and the world starts.

According to Josso (2005) the resistances against education, the needs for education, and the resources that people use in the educational processes are in their own life histories and it means that it is a way to discover resistances to change either at a personal or collective level. Sharing experiences means to move from “I” to “we” (Sennett, 2000) as we will see later on. As Olesen points out:

On the other hand we wanted to ensure that the courses functioned as a practical illustration of the fact that it is possible to turn a course into production of experience. We went to great lengths to include and exploit the experiences of the participants, to build on this and make them visible (1989, p. 105, italic type in the original).

The experience, and the expression of it, is decisive in this case because it is an important element to define the role of the adult. “What mobilized the desire and the
ability to learn was the simple fact that the teaching was a real part of the reality that is outside of the courses as such” (Olesen, 1989, p. 115).

In some ways, education is experience in a double sense. On the one hand, an experience is an affective reflection on the events that people live. But, on the other hand it is important to develop methodologies that provide opportunities to built experiences. To edify context where people can build experiences and learn from them (Josso, 2005). In fact it could be affirmed that in adult education, schools are places where people are sharing experiences.

There are two different aspects in the experience that will be possible to see later on in the book. For the one hand, experiences that enable people to reflect on their daily life and their own story. This is presented in a specific experience related to adult education in the city of Seville and that I will present in chapter 5. On the other hand, it is possible to regard schools – and other educational places – as creators of experience following the connections to experiential learning drawn on by Dewey (1938) and that it can find, in some aspects, in transformative learning experiences (Mezirow, Taylor & Associates, 2010). In short, as Gelpi (1990a) stated:

Experiential education can transform social and productive experiences. Is not new that these experiences have an educational nature, but it has recently been recognised that education is a part of the productive processes. (p. 17)

Diversity. It is possible to undertake it in two different aspects. The first one is related to the diversity of activities that can usually be denominated adult education as I noted at the very beginning of this section, either for the activities undertaken or the spaces where they are developed.

The field of adult education is rich and diverse in spaces: university, adult education schools, companies and enterprises, social movements, other informal spaces, etc. But, the most important thing is related to people involved in adult education activities: women, men, older people, migrants, workers, and youth. For this last some criteria can be used:

a. Age. Taking into account UNESCO’s definitions, adult education is addressed to people considered adults in a society. This is a cultural element that can change from one society to another. Who is an adult in western developed societies, and who is an adult in a society in Africa?

b. A second criteria can be related to the needs, and desires that people have to become a learner. It can be differentiated, at least, in two categories: i) people that need a diploma to access the labour market. This seems to be the major goal for adult education today, and ii) people that tend to strive for new knowledge not only related to the labour market, but to leisure time, cultural creation and expression, etc.

c. The context where adult people come to adult education. This last element is related to their experience either in the school or in the life. In the current
policies and practices of Lifelong Learning it is, sometimes, taken for granted that the context is not important. This is the essence of the transfer of good practices.

So, sometimes the problem is that when people talk about diversity, the first idea is always related to multiculturalism. In this sense, Besalú (2010) states that the difficulties that teachers stressed on diversity are defined as:

Difficulties in communication, either with learners that have a very limited knowledge of the official languages, or their parents that join with a lack of knowledge, they have a very significant ignorance about the usual functioning of the things. (p. 156)

This is a very limited position, based on the language and practices such as punishment, reward and a kind of stereotype that teachers sometimes create on the diversity. Since Besalú is talking about the children's school, this approach to diversity could be presented as something that disturbs the homogeneity of the process of teaching and learning. As Gelpí (2004) stated:

Differences owing to the language, religion or ethnic membership are significant, but it is necessary to not forget other elements that make up other different types of diversity such as: age, sex, access to training and education, access to information, relationships with productive work (the identity of an unemployed person is not the same as the one of a worker with a job), access to medical care, the right to a salary, the environment where people live, the degree of freedom (the citizen free to go somewhere or the prisoner), the disabled, etc. Such differences also indicate the complexity of the membership to a specific group or of an individual to a collection of shared diversities. (p. 57)

In approaching diversity, the process of mediation is unique. It is related to the context, the culture, economic situation, etc., but it takes form in individuals that feel threatened about their own way of life. In fact the same person could experience these threats in a different way in different moments of their life. In this sense the Freirean concept of the Culture of Silence is very important. People tend to silence their own voice and this voice is manipulated for the dominant culture.

According to Besalú (2010), there are two contextual elements that could help in the tackling of diversity: the role of both education and culture in the society of information. In fact, it is important to stress how the background of the process of socialisation has changed. Today it is possible to find too many possibilities when searching for information, ideas and, overall, the transmission of dominant culture beyond the school. In chapter 6 I will briefly return to mediation processes.

*Autonomy and Emancipation.* From his early works, Freire considered the educational process as one of liberation that would enable people to move away
from the *Culture of Silence* to have the experience and confidence to say their own word. To maintain the oppression – the Culture of Silence – the prevailing sectors in society maintain an educational system that Freire called banking education: deposits are made; rules are given; knowledge is memorised not built. All these kinds of things maintain people in a state of alienation. To turn this around, his proposal is for a liberating education that supports people to say their own word/world. This means that people can express their dreams, desires, hopes, and find ways to act on these as I referred above.

To reach for emancipation Freire used the term *conscientização*. Perhaps, it is the most controversial concept in all of Freire's thought. It is related to concepts above such as oppression. In fact, Freire stopped using it for a while because he considered that it might be understood mainly in an epistemological sense: a man or a woman oppressed could be conscious about their own oppression in an intellectual way, and he or she can create some knowledge about this situation (Freire, 1990). For this, it is important to stress that Freire always uses the concept of *conscientização* to make a reference not only about the knowledge that a group of people have, but, beyond this, conscience is formed in a process of investigation and changes – deriving from it – concerning their own reality. In this process, each person, through dialogue, meets with other people and can move from a magical conscience to a critical one. It can be argued that *conscientização* is a process and not a stage. In this path, Freire names different steps: magical consciousness where fate and inevitability are dominant in people's understanding, naïve consciousness which involves some understanding of the context in which events occur but the analysis is shallow, and finally, critical consciousness where deeper and contextual analysis are evident. The process of becoming conscious, I stress again, is more than merely ‘consciousness rising’: it implies also the need to act on what is known. But the most important element that I can stress is that *conscientização* is forged in the forge of everyday liberating actions that emancipate people not only to be conscious about their alienation, but changing the situation and the causes of it. It can be said that this process of becoming conscious is also the long and winding road to emancipation. I am using the term emancipation and not empowerment because it seems that emancipation refers to a collective approach addressed to the whole community. Empowerment seems to be more related to individuals or specific groups in the community (Brown, 2014; Inglis, 1997).

I will insist on these processes of being autonomous and to reach emancipation when, in chapter 4, I will analyse the close relation between emancipation and the Enlightenment’s process associated to Participatory Research.
CHAPTER 2

ON LITERACY AND PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

This Chapter presents various aspects which can potentially encourage reflection on literacy, or literacies, in the current context. Surely in today’s world people are not completely and absolutely illiterate. Many people have – even at a basic level – some knowledge and above all contact with the most characteristic elements of a literate society: reading, writing and numeracy. However, it is clear that there are people with significant gaps both in their written and spoken communication skills. And also there are obviously major difficulties that people face in reading texts within contexts, and understanding what they read or what they live. And this said without taking new languages into consideration. Therefore, my first assertion involves considering the status of literacy and communication processes between people as linked to and looking at literacy as a communicative ability which allows them to record, analyse, transmit and change the world (cf. Freire, 1970, 1990; Goody, 1987, 1990; Goody & Watt, 1996).

I will be asking the following questions: i) what is literacy; ii) who are the illiterate men and women of today; iii) orality as a primordial communicative element; iv) the processes of transition from orality to writing; v) the consequences of the acquisition of literacy skills; vi) and finally a brief appendix on participatory literacy.

Prior to this, I am going to make general observations on some of the issues that may help outline the study of literacy from a broad, complex perspective.

One of the first points is what I call a ‘dialogic approach to literacy’ to emphasise that the entire literacy process is built on the encounter with other human beings. As Ramirez Garrido noted in the prologue of the work by Wertsch, *Voices of the Mind*, “human existence is inextricably linked to social relations projected into the complex nature of dialogue” (1991, p. 14).

Individuals live in a world of talking voices, which generate heterogeneity. Each voice exists because the existence of different voices is the guarantee of heterogeneity, and is produced through language, which becomes “the cement that gives shape and meaning to human experience” (Ramirez Garrido, 1995, p. 42)

To begin this approach, I have adopted assumptions and developments in sociocultural psychology to set a discursive mode in which people do not build their literacy processes from loneliness, but rather from cooperation. Furthermore, the importance of this resides in the fact that many of the processes of human behaviour are tied to communication processes.
Thanks to the work of Vygotski, Luria, etc., it can be described how literacy and the interaction processes involved help in the construction of higher psychological processes through the use of mediation tools. Among these tools, which help people to convey social knowledge to individuals, one of the most important is literacy.

One of the strategic aspects of Freire’s thought is his belief that the purpose of literacy is that people learn to say the word, from their concrete reality and to transform their concrete reality. Now it is possible to see how the words that people say are conditioned by the reality in which they live. The important thing is to consider that the power of saying things is not only in how we change the historical and social reality in which we live, but also, how we change ourselves. This contribution of the dialogic approach is one of the lines of work which can help understand what literacy is today. Based on the difference of voices and the importance of social context, my view on multiculturalism and the enrichment that it brings, or the homogenisation of thought – and the impoverishment involved – can take new directions.

There are other elements that I want to consider in this multidisciplinary approach. All of which are trying to connect literacy processes with other disciplines – in some cases far from education, at first glance.

a) The contributions that demonstrate the lifestyles and cultural ways of leaving heterogeneity, breaking the false potential of the Eurocentric discourse. As I will refer later on, this discourse relates to the condescension of oral culture in comparison to the prestige of written language. In this sense it is important to affirm that every culture could be presented as a triumph over chaos (Juliano, 1993), because it allows people to understand the surrounding world. On the other hand, the semiotic conception of culture that Geertz (1987) proposes – a universe of symbols where performances which take on meaning – is related to the breakdown of the discourse that presents the written word, as a symbol of modernity, and oral discourse as pre-modern elements of culture and societies.

b) The notion of linguistic repertoire by Mihail Bakhtin helps to understand that the literacy process is not about robbing people of their words and replacing them, but rather expanding their capabilities and means of expression from those who have already mastered or understood them.

On the other hand, there is the work of the linguist William Labov (1983) and his clear differentiation between the ‘linguistically deficient’ and ‘linguistically different’. Labov shows how anyone – specifically to children – has such mastery of a set of grammar rules that we cannot consider them to be language deficient. In any case, their forms of expression are different and help to build this chorus of voices which leads to the discovery of the other, of the heterogeneous, without which our existence is meaningless.

c) For Gramsci, hegemony is a uniform and consistent way of thinking about the world imposed by the dominant sectors of society through the creation of
a false consensus. That is, the general lines of thought – such as globalisation – are constituted in collective visions based on the consensus created by ideological domination rather than physical coercion. For Gramsci, it is the way to impose a single form of thought.

An essential role in this uniformity of thought is played by the ‘organic’ intellectuals. They are the people who the ruling classes – or subaltern classes – created to defend their conceptual and epistemological interests. For Gramsci, teachers are one of the most important types of ‘organic’ intellectuals, although at this point in time the intellectual par excellence, in the sense of builders and reproducers of hegemony, are the mass media (Williams, 1966). In any case, in our specific framework concerning literacy processes, teachers can be reproducers of the dominant ideology – and not just for what they say, but also how they do what they do – and as builders of hegemony; or they may propose alternative content and methodologies that activate the construction of other hegemonies, creating so called counter-hegemonic spaces. Thus, the choral element of the diversity of voices can be constantly constructed and reconstructed.

d) At the moment, many micro-societies, both rural and urban, are facing transitions. Indeed, it is increasingly difficult for some sectors of society – that represent the majority – to reproduce the traditional social and economic relations, and it is increasingly clear that new forms of social organisation are emerging. These elements of replacing the old for the new bring with them various changes in the development of people and communities (Goguelin, 1990: Lucio.Villegas & Fragoso, 2005).

But what most concerns me here is that the processes of social change that appear and develop around these phenomena of transition increase the risk of people replacing their frames of traditional reference for others, which they neither understand nor master, and that they face unarmed. Understanding these changes and providing people with the tools that enable them to understand what is happening around them should be among the aims of literacy. Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach should not overlook the study of theories and processes of social change and how these changes affect the daily lives of people. I will refer to social change in chapter 4.

e) The growth of the brain and the appearance of the earliest forms of language – linked to this growth – occurred when our hominid ancestors had to start making decisions about one aspect of their lifestyle which was “particularly changing and unpredictable: the conduct of the members of our group” (Arsuaga & Martinez, 1998, p. 203).

This presence of the collective, of the relational as significant elements in brain growth reminds us of traditions such as the school of socio-cultural psychology, or the works by Freire. The process of teaching and learning is only possible if people are side by side. To say this in a time when the dominant thought is specifically individualism and the key word in our society is competition is to recall – and there
are people who have forgotten – that the others share bonds with us. From this perspective, literacy becomes a way of approaching the traditional notions of social justice, equity and democracy (Finger & Asún, 2001).

In short, what are the meanings of literacy? The first element to provide an answer is as a cultural construction because the definition of people’s situation regarding literacy depends on the environment and on the necessary abilities for thriving in this environment. In fact, I can say that literacy is not a homogeneous process. Several literacy forms do seem to exist. As such, it is crucial to talk about literacy linked to people’s daily lives, in the actual place where people live.

On the other hand, literacy is social because it is a collective construction, like any other communicative structure. People draw various conclusions from the diversity of events that occur in their environment. The research of our predecessors is important in order to remind us the importance of dialogue. Only through dialogue can communication exist. It would be impossible to understand, interpret or change the world without others.

WHAT ARE LITERACIES?

According to Belanger & Federighi (2002), “there is not a literacy but rather some literacies” (p. 198, italic type in the original). This statement stems from the fact that literacy has traditionally been considered as the ability to read, write and calculate. But “also all the necessary skills and knowledge to improve the conditions of life and work, as well as the situation and the collective needs of the local community” (Belanger & Federighi, 2002, p. 197). Also, there are different uses of communication – written and oral – in different situations, such as linguistic, cultural, geographical etc. that are specific to a particular social environment and determine the nature of social literacies. As these authors emphasise:

Therefore, pedagogy must be suitable to local environments, to the policies on educational environments, to the policies of publishing and to the policies concerning access to written materials, including newspapers, books, journals, databases, etc. (Belanger & Federighi, 2002, p. 204)

This reflection on the contexts of reading and writing, found throughout the history of literacy, also has to do with the maintenance of minority languages and cultures as elements of social ecology and one of the tasks that literacy processes should undertake, as in the case of Nicaragua (Garcia Robles & Lucio-Villegas, 2014).

Garton and Pratt (1991) state that it also has to do with the ability of oral expression, which links the approaches of Socio-cultural psychology derived from the seminal work of Vygotski and other psychologists (see above). In short, literacy becomes a guarantee for the development of individuals.
The contributions of Popular Education, and substantially the contents derived and recreated from Freire’s thought, suggest that literacy is also a tool with which to read the world and transform it. Therefore, literacy is the ability to read and understand the world while efforts are made to change the surrounding reality in a dialectical process, in which literacy itself would be one of the main themes. Thus, literacy is not just a tool with which to capture and understand the world, but is a powerful tool for transforming it.

Consequently, literacy processes have always been considered dangerous, hence the claims of this noble Englishman quoted by Cipolla (1970):

In theory, the project of giving education to the labouring classes is already quite misleading, and, in practice, would be harmful to their morals and happiness. It would teach the common people to despise their position in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture and other jobs that their position in society has intended for them. Instead of teaching subordination, it would make them agitated and rebellious, as has been seen in some industrialised countries. They could then read seditious pamphlets, dangerous books and publications against Christianity. It would make them insolent to their superiors; in a few years, the result would be that the government would have to use force against them. (p. 80)

Another consideration regarding the definition of literacies is to consider them from a historical point of view. This is important because this is a plural, social and historical concept. We cannot understand literacy outside the context of contemporary reading and writing of each period where literacy processes have occurred or are taking place.

For Graff (1989), the study of literacy has three requisites: i) a consistent definition of literacy to serve for comparison, which should have basic indicators. In this sense, this is to conceive of literacy as a technology for communications and materials to reproduce or decode; ii) the reconstruction of the contexts of contemporary reading and writing of each period; and iii) the fact that, compared with the history of humanity, literacy is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Moreover, in moving the study from illiteracy to literacy processes, it has become the history of communication processes, language and thought. Thus:

The historian of literacy also saw how his task came together with, in many respects, the historian of literature, as well as linguists and anthropologists, but above all, that of the historian of culture. (Viñao, 1989, p. 36)

Extending this concept of the history of literacy to talk about the history of thought has allowed us to consider a series of hitherto neglected aspects, such as oral culture, or the assumption that all transformation in mediation tools which allows communication seems to imply a change in brain structures (Viñao, 1989).
Furthermore, to differentiate between the learning of reading from that of writing, the historical study of illiteracy is compounded by the lack of evidence that allows us to know who reads and who does not (cf. Cipolla, 1970; Viñao, 1984, 1985).

It is, in turn, difficult to explain why some societies instruct their members more than others, and why the phenomenon of literacy is treated differently in some societies. Facts as diverse as the cheapening of paper, the appearance of magnifying lenses or the development of written contracts in rural areas can be considered as elements leading to the development of learned literacy (Cipolla, 1970).

Fernández (1990) analysed the evolution of literacy in different countries in order to draw a number of implications related to the idea of democracy. As noted by Belanger & Federighi (2002):

The question is not whether literacy necessarily leads to democracy […] The real question is whether democracy in a society of masses without social communication technologies that have been developed since Gutenberg in 1457 is possible without universal access to them. (p. 191)

Chapter 5 includes a reflection on this issue regarding democracy. Here is a summary of Fernandez’s contributions:

a. The literacy process is related to the process of building a nation, because one of the distinctiveness of a nation is the language as common skill to communicate or as an element of assimilation.
b. Political power or social organisations have shaped this development. This occurs mainly in the Church, either in the South by avoiding literacy or in the northern countries by potentiating some literate skills, but not others.
c. There is no clear correlation between literacy and school. In fact, Cook-Gumperz (1988) argues that school is created with the idea of limiting and standardising literacy.
d. In the literacy processes there are no major differences between children and adults, but rather between men and women, always in favour of men.
e. The social model determines the literacy focus, and in time, the literacy approach results in societies with different degrees of cohesion.
f. As it shall be seen, there is neither a correlation between literacy and industrialisation nor between illiteracy and rural life.
g. In the learning of literacy, reading always occurs before writing.

From the different approaches presented, and, above all, the change of status between illiteracy and literacy processes Viñao (1984, 1985) led to the following conclusions:

a) The connection between literacy, industrialisation and urbanisation is not automatic. In England, the literacy process stopped during the Industrial Revolution, while in Sweden there was a high level of literacy before it began there. Notwithstanding this, as Cipolla notes:
Education favoured industrial development in several ways. The most advanced countries did not suffer bottlenecks caused by the lack of workers who could read and write. More educated people also meant more open-minded people, and this last situation was particularly important in a time when production processes had to change rapidly thanks to the boost of technological progress and the consequent adoption of new machines. (1970, p. 109)

It is not that literacy alone facilitates an understanding of new technologies, but these literacy processes create the breeding ground that allows the development of these trends.

b) The importance of the Protestantism / Catholicism duality in the literacy process. This element is vital and helps to explain, for example, the aforementioned case of Sweden. On the other hand, it may help explain the literacy boost in Prussia derived from military training.

This duality, which can be considered heir to the approaches by Weber (1984) when talking about the differences between Protestantism and Catholicism, must take into account the restrictions inherent to the reading of scripture that would be posed in the Protestant environment. However, the development, both in Sweden and in other Nordic countries, was already very significant when these restrictions were imposed.

c) It is an element of the modernisation of society. As noted by Graff, “literacy becomes one of the key elements in the larger plot of characteristics and processes that convert a traditional world, pre-modern, into the modern West” (1989, p. 15).

d) The history of literacy has gained autonomy in relation to the history of the school. In keeping with this, a series of differentiating sources for the study of literacy is used. For example, it was used by fiscal, notarial, judicial and parochial bodies, especially for periods before the mid-nineteenth century. Specifically, attempts have been made to measure the number of people who provide their signature. This seems to be a reliable measure of literacy (Viñao, 1984, 1985).

Along with this, the sources generally used, especially since 1860, are the general population census and the statistics for specific social groups: the military or prisoners with the limitations derived from the generalisations applied, especially in the last two cases. Other sources have been used to refer to the printed publications, to the ownership of books, the dissemination of reading or level of education. In relation to these aspects, Guereña (1992) states how a special development occurs with the press and serial novels parallel to the advancement of literacy.

The historical review allows me, in some ways, to consider the variety of literacy and the broadness, diversity and sometimes vagueness sense of the term.
CHAPTER 2

WHO ARE THE ILLITERATE?

If the concept of literacy, and what is more important the consideration of a person as literate or not, has been changing with the passage of time, it seems that an interesting study to propose could be the study of cultural changes and its influence on literacy. Anthropologists such as Goody (1987, 1990) have studied the cultural changes taking place in various societies as a result of the introduction of systems of written communication. These cultural changes, in turn, raise new requirements that must be considered in determining the condition of the literate or illiterate. This kind of endless spiral can lead to the first question: What cultural changes have we observed in our environs in recent years, which we believe may affect the consideration of a person as literate or not? Asún & Finger (2001) pointed three elements: The first one they called Turbo-Capitalism to define the shift from development to trade, the shift from an economy based on producing goods to an economy based on speculation of a free trade. Secondly, they spoke of the erosion of the state – and the welfare state – as provider of some services and the shift to privatisation. Finally, in a more conceptual approach they defined postmodernism as many roads to nowhere. And the latter has to do with the construction of narratives and stories with a spirit of liberation and emancipation.

Who are the illiterate people of today? What was said by Londoño more than twenty years ago is, unfortunately, effective today. Referring to the functionally illiterate, he said:

"Functional illiterates are the working class children, youth and adults of the popular sectors who share socio-economic, political and cultural deprivation, lack of education and limitation in understanding, fluency in the use of the written language, in maths and calculation, and in the basic aspects of social and cultural formation, to face the challenges of modernisation, scientific-technical development and, above all, the changes necessary for their conditions of existence. (1990, p. 52)"

To this I want to add another group: immigrants. This issue is very interesting and I shall come back to it when dealing with transitions from orality to writing, because one of the issues in this case is that immigrants are generally literate people in their own language and perhaps in another, but not in ours. This is coupled with a clear assimilationist desire that confuses social integration with the domain of language, oral or written, of the society which is called the host society, although it seems, at first glance, rather unwelcoming. In any case, one of the distinctive elements of a nation is its language (Pérez Viejo, 1999). In short, it seems there are different kinds of illiterate people and therefore it could be thought – and this is another matter – about the different options and possibilities of edifying literacy processes, always linked to the context and needs of different and diverse people.

The process of blaming illiterate people for their own situation has made them think they should be ashamed of their supposed ignorance – at least in what we
call the educated aspects of society, – which must be constantly hiding the stigma attached to him or, more likely, to her. As Barley noted, quoting an advertisement from a government in Africa:

The illiterate, disabled adult and the lack of information have always been obstacles to the implementation of initiatives conducive to the progress of a country. (2001, p. 51)

This blaming of the victim avoids the collective responsibility and the development of the welfare state, as referred to – in the case of Lifelong Learning – in chapter 1. Other devastating examples of this issue can be seen in Kozol (1990). The most impressive is the man who always changing his work because he is afraid that people could discover that he is illiterate – the man walks his shame from one job to another.

But there is also another important question on this matter of literacies and illiterate people. For Garton and Pratt (1991) literacy also has to do with the development of spoken language. It is true that all their research and work is related to learning in boys and girls, but the fact remains that forms of expression and communication related to orality have been abandoned, and therefore the spoken language is reinforced.

Much of these processes happen at school, which does not seem to present itself today – and perhaps never has – as a liberating space, as the difference between the educated and the uneducated has never quite disappeared. But the educational space is what we have and it is a battleground between the positions of banking and liberating educators. To consider that school is, par excellence and by nature, a reproducer is to do a disservice to education. The school is a battlefield of the essential ideas in order to think about the development of the society where, as Freire says: “There must be radical differences between left-wing and right-wing educators in their use of the same slide projector” (1984, p. 45).

In addition, to transmitting culture and classical culture, as Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams suggested, school plays a key role in preventing the canned messages conveyed by television from manipulating viewers’ desires and consumers necessities. It is in the daily practices where resistance begins and where the school acquires a high and strategic value for change. And those daily practices are questioned by Freire when pondering the equal or unequal use of a slide projector.

In their book, The Reproduction, Bourdieu and Passeron (1981) wrote that school was – among other things – a reproducer of the social order. Cook-Gumperz (1988) says that the school was created to control the literacy processes that, under the tutelage of the people, were beginning to be dangerous to those in power. This would be difficult to convincingly refute. But the battle is fought in the field of everyday work, where practices convert into banking or liberating educators, reproducers or those facing mainstream tendencies to homogenise the life of individuals. And to resist is to be creative, or vice versa and to know what to do on a Monday morning (Willis, 1988).
CHAPTER 2

This issue is especially intriguing because even Cook-Gumperz (1988) suggested that literacy is a type of key that opens doors to new knowledge. But also, and perhaps in a more complex way, literacy and literacy processes indicate which knowledge should be acquired, and which is deemed useful and necessary in our world. In the age of Lifelong Learning, and its role in obstructing the emancipation of the people, it is important to understand what constitutes knowledge, such as endogenous knowledge, which is built by the people (see Chapter 3). Moreover, if what we see is a discourse repeated throughout history, (according to which literacy skills had a magical, mysterious element), then large segments of the population were most likely kept in considerable ignorance.

It is hard to conceive of the last two thousand years of our history without considering the role of schools. However, this cannot be done without considering oral cultures, disparagingly called “illiterate”.

Thus, the importance of reading is inextricably associated to the existence of school, which has ensured the development of this skill, coupled with the social relationships. The sensitive and powerful testimonies spoken – although not written – by the women who took part in the Participatory Research about their own experience of adult education shed light on the meaning of school, as well as on the importance of reading in personal and collective liberation, which, in its turn, creates other forms of awareness and understanding.

Juani: There is a variety of … people, some for some things, others for other things, right? Some because they want to learn, others to meet other people.

Carmen: I realise that the same school helps people to be fulfilled, and to live with each other. Because there are people who, maybe, live a couple of years in this area and do not have friends; they come to the school and …, then they begin to interact with neighbours. And living together helps to unite them, and … er … it’s something that also improves the quality of that person. (extracted from Lucio-Villegas, 1991)

Something similar is still happening with the integration of immigrants, whereby social integration processes facilitate and promote their emersion into a new society and cultural re-creation. In fact, the importance of educational processes in the reformulation and development of communicative forms will be been alluded to in this chapter.

Therefore, the school as an organisation, as a social institution dedicated to education is a strategic element for the development of reading and writing skills. The concept of school can be considered an organised space where educational and learning processes are produced, and learning breaks away from traditional notions of education for the transmission of a given model. There are indeed other models of school and community: the Adult Learning Project in Edinburgh (United Kingdom) is an evocative example where the most substantial elements of Paulo Freire’s method and philosophy in Western Europe are applied (Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 2011).
IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE SPOKEN WORD

Coben (2001) believes that a serious problem with Freire’s proposal is the contradiction according to which functional illiteracy could be identified with oral cultures. In this sense, Coben (2001) also believes that when Freire talks about the process through people emerge from the *Culture of Silence*, he means above all, the written word, disregarding all oral traditions and building a new reproductive system. This is a fascinating subject. In fact, when Freire comments the literacy booklets of São Tomé and Príncipe, he says:

> If it is not possible to write in any place without having practiced writing in a predominantly oral culture like *Saotomense* is, a literacy programme must respect the culture exactly as it is at that time, stimulating the orality of the learners through discussions, storytelling, and analyses. On the other hand, there is the challenging task of teaching them how to write as well. Reading and writing are inseparable moments of the same process: of the understanding and mastering of the tongue and of the language. (1984, p 139.)

From the foregoing it appears that Freire poses a clear preponderance of written over oral. However, many of the scholars and interpreters who have analysed Freire’s works generally disagree with this point. On the other hand, Coben (2001) strongly argues that orality has to do with Freire’s *Culture of Silence*. In fact, Freire moved in a rural tradition, which is basically oral. In this line of rural culture, Fals (1986), when talking about the method of knowledge recovery, history and rural traditions proposes Participatory Research as a method for empowering orality, and thus making it a central element of communication.

The *Culture of Silence* seems to be associated with the impossibility of communication, produced by hegemonic pressures that prevent people from living, more than the impossibility of written communication. Also, the *Culture of Silence* suggests the denial exercised by some men and women to impede the expression of their ideas about the world to other members of their communities, rather than the way they are expressed. What is certainly true, and may possibly be debatable, is that Freire seems to understand that communication forms based on reading and writing are superior, and not just different from oral forms. However, this does not seem like the most appropriate moment to speculate what Freire could have meant, or to interpret his words in this particular point.

In any case, what Freire challenges us to do is to build the transition between oral and written forms of communication which are not based on banking education. The following elements can help individuals and communities in their process of emancipation.

The first element to shed light on this matter is given by Ong (1987), who confronts the dynamics of orality to those of the written word. Based on the works of Homer, this author proposes the ‘psychodynamics of orality’, which give us important elements with which to conclude that literacy gives people the ability to
have their say. For Ong, orality is cumulative rather than subordinate or analytical. It lies very close to the people’s world, which makes it particularly participatory; it is not secluded from these realities, since orality is situational rather than abstract. The word ‘oral’ implies gestures, voice modulation, facial expressions, and the deployment of other, distinct – and perhaps richer – communicative forms than writing. In addition, for Ong writing and the printed word assumes a function which is different from that of memory. Ong’s work on orality is particularly significant at a time when all which is non-tech, not written, or considered modern is criticised as backward forms of communication. Returning to Freire’s discourse and its interpretations, it is important to consider the power of saying the word, the power and strength of some forms of communication that enable us to socialise and meet other people.

This does not mean that the development of writing does not involve progress. Any text can be read several times for various purposes, such as edition. The problem is when the writing in its many forms is presented as the only means of communication available, replacing oral expression, which is considered inferior.

Languages and oral forms of communication have, therefore, a different form of communicative power as that of written expression. The main issue to emphasise is that they are expressive forms. In fact, Eco (1999) explains in The Search for the Perfect Language how U.S. authorities, after seeking different ways to explain to future generations the risk they might incur into wandering through the New Mexico desert as a result of nuclear tests, decided to spread a series of oral, urban legends which would reveal how dangerous the situation was and still is. They thought this would be the only way that would withstand time and convey the precise information far in the future.

But this tribute to orality that guarantees that history, knowledge, legends and dreams will be linked to the future is slightly surprising. In a world where firemen burn libraries and the written word is under attacked, Ray Bradbury converts the people who oppose to that society in ‘talking books’, oral books endowed from the humility of those who see themselves as mere bearers of a valuable good, and according to whom the important element is the good, not themselves.

‘Now, let’s go upstream’, George said. And keep in mind one thing: we are not important. We are nothing. Someday the load we carry [the books they have memorised] with us can help someone. But even when we had books in hand, long ago, we did not use what we drew from them (Bradbury, 1995, p. 174)

Once the importance of orality has been narrowed and redefined, it seems possible to find references that help to build these processes of transition from orality to writing and reading. One of the most interesting differences in this debate between orality and written literacy concerns the discursive modes. Following Ramirez Garrido (1995), difference can be found between an argumentative and a narrative mode. When arguing, a basically conceptual structure is used, while with narration the similarities in life are brought up. But these different genres do not suggest a
form of superiority of one over another, but rather different ways of building social experience. Narrative becomes a story that may be oral or written, but both are based on orality. There are stories that can help adults to build an autonomous thought and therefore become aware of situations around them, often oppressive and, in a truly freirean way, change them collectively.

The argument could be seen as more typical of written modes and lead us on to the path of study. But what really matters with written language is that it allows individuals to contextualise reality and constantly rebuild it. Not through the writing itself, but by changes in cognitive organisation which allow continuous and different re-appropriations of language to configure external reality and make sense of different ways to build inner reality. The control of these new communication technologies has brought important cognitive transformations. Building different, new dynamics and richer forms of social organisation, which may also be more oppressive and exploitative, given the control of the media and technologies that give us the written word.

Literacy has led to the acquisition of new semiotic tools and new communication technology for many centuries. But the emergence of printed literacy has also meant the disregard for oral cultures, deemed primitive and backward. Therefore, it is important to remember that “literacy is the construction of a new communication system superimposed on an existing (orality) which has its roots in the distant past” (Ramirez Garrido, 1995, p. 67). The psychologists of the Socio-cultural school start from the consideration that the great changes which literacy and language have brought collectively have also occurred at an individual level of personal biographies. The structure of individual’s higher psychological processes has been transformed to expand their communicative spaces with the use of new conceptual tools. Again, according to Bakhtin, that there is not human experience without signs, and signs are acquired through social life. “The human experience [Ramirez Garrido says following Bakhtin] is inextricably linked to the actions, to the statements, which always have social life as the background. This is the real or psychological presence of others (1995, p. 51).

The reason why language appears in prehistoric times is one of the most interesting elements of the work of palaeontologists. While it may not be very clear as to when it happened, at which moment in history, some palaeontologists seem to have a clear explanation: language was born in response to the urgent need for people to communicate, and this gave rise to the possibility of organising themselves socially and to live in groups. What is essential in organising social life, – and within it the division of tasks and jobs which were becoming increasingly more complex – is at the basis of the construction of communication processes, and certainly the consideration of primarily social nature of the intelligence and the language associated with it (Arsuaga & Martinez, 1998).

This same process occurs in the area of the ontogenesis. The first form of communication, i.e. the first language, is oral. How then, the philologist William Labov (1983) asks himself, could a person be considered linguistically deficient?
Because before entering school, people know a great deal of grammar rules, and are able to communicate.

An example of this is related to Bernstein’s theory. In his experiment, Hawkins wanted to study language in five-year-old children and its relations to Bernstein’s classical theory of regarding language codes. To do this, he interviewed 300 children, after they had completed the following task: they were asked to look at an illustration composed of four sequential pictures which depicted children playing football; while playing, the ball broke a window; in the last panel, an angry man was leaving the house, while a lady was screaming at them through the window. After viewing the scenes, the children had to write what they had seen. The two basic versions collected are:

1st) Three boys are playing football and one of them kicks the ball through the window; the ball breaks the window and the boys stare. A man comes out and yells at them. because they have broken the window. So they run away. and then the lady looks out the window and tells the boys to leave.

2nd) They are playing football and they kick it and it goes over there; it breaks a window and they stare and the man comes out and yells at them because they have broken it. and they run off and then she looks out and tells them to leave. (Stubbs, 1984, p. 47)

What the experiment shows is that the first story is much more elaborate than the second. The first story is more literary and descriptive, and it can be understood without looking at the illustrations.

According to Hawkins, the second story may be considered less descriptive, less literary. The second version is much more connected to the context of the illustrations than the first, in other words: the pictures are meant to be seen as the story is told. But, as Stubbs points out, “the listener (researcher) can see the illustrations” (1984, p 48, italic type in the original). What it is possible to see is that the first version has a great deal of unnecessary information that dissociates the discourse from the context.

What the experiment intended to demonstrate is the superiority of a literary written form, defined in this case as Bernstein’s elaborated code, which is disassociated to the explanatory context of the illustration. In comparison, an oral form is more linked to the context in which the communication process takes place, and is defined in the scheme of linguistic codes by Bernstein’s restricted code of.

Conversely, I may consider that the second account, linked to the illustrations, has the same explanatory power as the first story, and encourages interaction with the listener. In short, a collective story is often impossible to create only from the closed narrative of a written text.

To summarize, the main ideas are: i) oral forms of communication have, in certain contexts, the same power as written forms; and ii) illiterate people are not linguistically deficient, they can communicate, and have been doing so for many years.
In this regard, Labov’s work is very useful, as he endeavours to debunk the myth
of linguistic deficiency and present the power of orality as an element of stratification
and social change, as can be seen in his work on speech in Martha’s Vineyard or in
his study of the speech of the shop assistants in department stores in New York
(Labov, 1983).

Debunking the myth of deficiency and raising the possibility of change from a
living language, through oral tradition, is very important because, as Labov said,
the definition of deficiency leads to a process of construction of social pathologies
and to the labelling and stigmatisation of illiterate people. Again, in Stubbs (1984)
words:

The model of social pathology of the undeniable differences of language and
culture between different social groups. Then the model falsely interprets
the differences as the cause of academic failure, by a false interpretation of
differences as deficiencies. Then, characteristically, the model continues to
indicate that these deficiencies are transmitted through the family environment
due to, for example, inappropriate practices in raising children. (p. 75, italic
type in the original)

And this process of blaming the victim – in this case the family – ends the vicious
cycle which converts an illiterate person in social waste into someone inactive and
unable to contribute to the functioning of society. Thus, we can ask ourselves what
does this stigmatisation of the illiterate hold? Because Goody (1990) has shown how
disregard for oral traditions of communication and their replacement with written
forms was essential to the process of accumulation of land by large landowners.
On the same subject, in Latin America, are the works by Fals (1986). As Relys
says:

The term illiterate is used with a certain derogatory tone and as a synonym
for ignorant and uneducated. these are people who are fluent in speaking their
mother tongue, conversing with grace and ease, although they used it without
any word corrections, but they do it with property. We must assume that
they are intelligent human beings, aware, with interest, feelings, meaningful
experiences, specific forms of action. The only difference with respect to the
literate population is that their source of knowledge has been from life and not
from school. (2005, p. 14)

However, this idea of the social pathology, of social and cultural deficit seems to
have been broken. “For example, in Hamburg in 1997, one can no longer speak of
‘eradicating illiteracy’ as if it were a disease” (Belanger & Federighi, 2002, p. 200).
At the end, the illiterate is able to express their feelings, and say their own word.
From this, it is possible to find a path to learn different ways to communicate and
share with others.
THE TRANSITION FROM SPOKEN TO WRITTEN

The first surprising element is that, contrary to what one might think, some of the most engaging and stimulating models for explaining the path from orality to writing are not found in adult education, traditionally concerned with obtaining written literacy, but in the work that has been developed by authors in the field of multiculturalism. Here I am reminded the concern for immigrants as a group of people with specific literacy needs.

Possibly one of the most interesting and unique works was carried out by Moore (1995), who analysed ways of teaching normative English used with two young immigrants called Abdul and Mashud. Moore always refers to what he calls ‘normative English’, that is, an expressive and communicative way that is related to the proper use of certain grammatical forms and rules that are linked to forms of expression and linguistic construction, but do not necessarily provide a greater depth within the feeling and meaning of the message. Somehow, Moore separates the dichotomy between orality and literacy. Although Abdul and Mashud have and know some rudiments of reading and writing in Bangladeshi and English, they come from a primarily oral culture, which has, as noted above, unique forms and modes of expression which are different from writing. And in that transition from oral to written forms corresponding to normative English, essential elements of what I aim to suggest appear herein. One has to do with the value of truth in expressions: what they both say, and not necessarily how they say it. Abdul has to write a love story. Mashud has to write the story of his life.

During the construction of the narrative, Abdul is asked about the truth of what he is saying. The teacher guiding him in this task finds it hard to believe in his love story. Moore points out that the teacher questions the universe of Abdul’s realities. It is impossible to escape the Culture of Silence when people feel their realities, whether lived or felt, are being challenged; when their daily life is undervalued; when the knowledge, expertise and the forms of self-expression are called into question. What happens with Abdul is that normative English, with its grammatical forms, syntax, etc. that correct forms of self-expression, becomes the only form of expression and changes the initial idea. Thus, as suggested by Cook-Gumperz (1988), literacy becomes a way of identifying the correct form of knowledge, or indeed its importance and transmission. This is the banking mechanism of which is important to be aware. A far more subtle mechanism is a project of domination to teach the correct forms of expression and thoughts. The following introductory quote by Moore is particularly enlightening:

In his speech at the annual conference of the National Anti-Racism Movement for Education, the linguist Morgan Dalphinis talks about his first experiences as a schoolboy when he entered an English school. After a few days of being in school, Morgan’s English teacher asked the class to do an essay based on an episode in each of their lives. Morgan decided to write a story about some
everyday events of his life in St. Lucia. One of these events was, for example, ‘a man fell from the (banana) truck and his head was blood’. Morgan’s teacher, resisting the temptation to change the unorthodox expression of ‘his head was blood’, decided instead to take Morgan for the content of his writing and asked (in a tone that clearly implied ‘This is not very convincing, Morgan’): ‘Did that happen really, Morgan?’ ‘I felt as if’, Dalphinis confessed, ‘he was questioning my everyday reality. The semantic content [of my writing] was not within their particular framework’. (Moore, 1995, p. 183, italic type in the original)

Mashud, however, found greater freedom in writing the narrative of his life story. At least, and this is the essence of the argument, no one questioned the truthfulness of his story. Mashud was told, shown, and given clues and ways to discover a number of elements that helped make his writing more organised, more suitable to normative English which he was being taught. Thus, Mashud reconstructed the story of his life using new media, new communicative forms that were at his fingertips. For Mashud, writing does not restrict his thought, instead it helps him organise both of his forms of expression and thought. Writing enabled him to structure what he wanted to recount about his life. But nobody told him that this is the only order to write it.

What is essential is that Mashud, in an educational process that could be defined as liberating, is growing and building the story of his life, as well as his knowledge of correct forms of expression by telling his life story using the oral and communicative resources available to him. Thus, the written narrative of his life becomes not only a learning process, but a reflection and rebuilding of his own life. In Freire’s words:

The literacy process has in the illiterate its subject. The fact that it requires the assistance of the teacher, as in any pedagogical relationship, does not mean that the teacher’s help should nullify your creativity, your responsibility in the creation of your written language and in the reading of that language. (1984, p. 104)

Honesty is one of the moral obligations which, despite not being very common, must to be taken into serious consideration. Indeed, Mashud’s teacher, still had doubts about the work done by herself.

There is a third important aspect which perhaps caused some frustration to Professor Montgomery and posed the greatest challenge to her teaching: she had not given Mashud a real explanation of why the original writing would be better after all the proposed changes. (Moore, 1995, p. 204, italic type in the original)

To finalise the analysis of Moore’s work, the notion of the linguistic repertoire drawn on by Bakhtin is presented. As mentioned above, Bakhtin, a Russian philologist who lived between 1895 and 1975, worked primarily on the analysis of Dostoyevsky’s narrative. Although a contemporary of Vygotsky, apparently they never met nor exchanged views, work, research, etc. In any case, it is important to note that
some authors are including reviews, syntheses or reinterpretations of Bakhtin’s works alongside those of Vygotski in order to link the formation of the conscience, language, and psychological functioning (Smagorinsky, 2011; Wertsch, 1988, 1991).

What Moore gathers is the idea that communication skills are more cumulative than substitutive. A speaker, although not yet a reader and/or writer, owns and commands some very significant communication skills. Subsequent academic developments, such as literacy, as the literacy in normative English in the case of Mashud, enrich communication modes, extend expressive capabilities, but cannot and should not replace those everyday communicative forms that have been used and by which speakers have passed on throughout life, (personal messages, family, affections, businesses, etc). It is, then, to treat the literacy activity as a process of creation and recreation of the individual world of adults, compared to the option of building a school against the people, one which is depersonalising and sterilising.

It also means breaking away from the arrogance of a system designed to diminish the dignity of students and teachers which hinders their personal and professional development. This arrogant system is based on a curriculum that is, supposedly, the correct and necessary in order to become competitive. And all this is viewed from the perspective that this system must be based on a true knowledge and not with their personal cognisance that each individual brings to the literacy process.

We try not to draw too sharp a line. While writing helped develop new types of formal logical operation, initially it did so specifying that which was implicit in oral cultures, which were neither pre-logical nor in the least illogical, except in a very limited sense of those words. (Goody, 1990, p.218)

Therefore, in confronting a singular way of thinking, literacy of the difference can be promoted as a way by which: i) each can contribute with their own ideas, culture, and languages; ii) school helps reconstruct and expand the ways in which the world is known, could be faced and maybe transformed. Only in this way can individuals feel that they begin to speak their word.

Habermas (1987) considers that the construction and reconstruction of personal and collective identity based on literacy, as the work on Mashud presents, would: a) provide individuals with the concepts of a socially objective world and of a subjective world; b) allow the development of a personal, reflective tradition, away from the belief that certain cultural, cognitive or communicative forms have more power over others; c) allow the connection of cultural forms with learning processes; and d) give rise to interpretations of the world that would enable people to act in.

In short, it is a proposal towards a form of literacy, the literacy of the difference, where people contribute with their cultural conceptions or their languages. The school experience allows them to reconstruct the different ways of knowing the world and changing it. I believe that it is a path towards the beginning to say our word.
THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ACQUISITION OF LITERACY

One of Goody’s (1987, 1990) thesis, which is defended throughout his work, is that there is a revolution of the means of communication available to people, alongside a revolution in the mass media. In this sense, one of the key elements behind the achievements of ancient Greek culture is the introduction of a phonetic writing system that facilitated the construction of a collective memory and the discussion of developments in the fields of science and philosophy, rather than the presence of the great historical figures of thought, politics or the arts, already known to all (Goody & Watt, 1996).

This means that one of the achievements of literacy at a social level is related to the possibility of building communication processes, among other means by the use of the ever increasing registrations kept over time. Ultimately, what Goody suggests regarding some societies of the ancient world is valid today thinking in terms of the cultural, social and economic globalisation in which we live, and possibly with ‘new technologies’ required for reading, such as the Internet. Therefore, there is a number of extensive changes that fall within the social dynamic in which literacy has the power and ability to change the course of sociocultural processes. But there are other changes as well. As Goody states, “writing is not only a method of remote communication but also a means of distancing oneself from the communication itself” (Goody, 1990, p. 74).

Therefore, substantial changes occur in the individual and personal realms. Perhaps the most fruitful contributions in this field have been made by psychologists of the socio cultural school which I referred to previously.

According to Vygotski, higher psychological processes, such as the capacity for abstraction or the ability to create and manage concepts, are social rather than individual. The process of individual property of these processes occurs through what Vygotski called ‘internalisation’, and this internalisation process happens with mediation tools. The key here is that one of the most powerful mediation tools is literacy. Literacy, therefore, enables the growth of people in both individual and collective ways and within a social framework.

The work of Luria (1987) showed that the power of literacy was also linked to major changes in the economic structure, specifically to a recovery process of collective ownership of the field, with which recovery of personal and collective identity of the people in today’s Uzbekistan should be assumed. Finally, Cole and Scribner (1977), in their study on the Vai of Liberia added another important characteristic to this powerful mediation tool: the construction of literacy processes in an organised framework of education such as that of the school.

In fact, as pointed out again by Goody, “the explicit process [writing] does more than change what was previously implicit, as when something is expressed in writing it becomes a powerful subject for further work” (1990, p. 201).

One of the transformations that literacy definitely brings is the ability to make people more aware, and help them to convey a more elaborate discourse, based on
the capacity to read and reread, and to share in that moment and in the future the word and the word that people edify with and from others.

According to Garton & Pratt (1991), literacy is, among other things, a key to further learning. Literacy opens the possibilities to acquire more knowledge and mental tools. The authors emphasise the role of the people who can already read and write, and construct processes of support and assistance for the apprenticeship and education of others.

In light of the above, I can conclude that literacy is more than a cumulative issue – banking or accounting – to gain useful skills for everyday life. It is a question of discovering a world that enables people to speak, read and understand a culturally complex social world that affects lives, families, jobs, etc.

By analysing literacy experience from her point a view as a teacher, Borrell (2006) presents a series of conclusions. At least two can help answer the question: ‘what good is literacy?’ Borrell (2006) says that literacy is a type of passport that allows citizens to “promote awareness processes to common realities and agreed objectives” (p. 32). It also inspires the world of that which is possible, within the meaning of Freire’s untested feasibility “of the real presence of the people in a democratic society” (p. 32).

But there may be other consequences. Robinson notes:

Writing and literacy are generally seen as forces for good. It hardly needs saying that a person who can read and write has greater opportunities for fulfilment than one who is illiterate. But there is also a dark side […] Writing has been used to tell lies as well as truth, to bamboozle and exploit as well as to educate, to make minds lazy as well as to stretch them. (Robinson, 2007, p. 8)

Going forward, it is possible to see how the spoken words can be severed from their liberating character and used against the path of emancipation. To do so, a brief reflection on currently promoted literacy processes in a factory in the automotive industry is presented. This reflection derives from an analysis of a research conducted completed with the author visit in 2009. The anonymity of those concerned will be fully respected. The reflection was divided into four sections:

1) The factory and the languages used cannot be considered a homogeneous whole. Indeed, there are different contexts of language. Although, the factory has different contexts for the use and performance of literacy skilled tasks and of calculation, it seems clear that the latter is in a very secondary place, at least for the majority of the factory workers.

It can then be argued that there are several different social languages and speech genres in the factory which do seem to create very different, heterogeneous contexts. On the other hand, there are different languages: colours – used as a rule of thumb to replace literacy; drawings – not just plans to guide workers in the construction of the finished product, or part of it, but also drawings that give instructions on how to
store certain materials or perform specific tasks; numbers – usually associated with colours and storage of provisions; barcodes, etc.

The different scenarios and existing processes of reading do not have continuity in written languages. In panels devoted to writing there are no texts because not one male or female worker writes; boxes provided for written suggestions are empty because no one makes suggestions, etc. Clearly, this does not prove the absence of writing, as it can be due to other issues, but it does not seem a very bold conjecture that there is a large imbalance between the levels and uses of reading – with reservations we made earlier regarding the bond, for example, between reading and colours – and applications and demands that exist in the plant with respect to writing.

There seem to be very different levels of literacy clearly contextualised in different performances of different tasks. However, it is particularly striking that these tangible differences in literacy skill production and in calculation have no effect, at least not visible and/or recognised, in the productive work of the factory. And this, in turn, seems to contradict the inference that literacy is used in the factory – especially concerning reading – as an enhancing element of the rational structure of the work, organisation tasks, etc. In fact, it is particularly striking how the removal of garbage and debris from assembly areas – that were not there before and led to creative tasks in the assembly – has been regularised in order to prevent this creative work. The removal, involved streamlining the entire process with no room for improvisation or creativity. In this particular case, the ability to read seems fundamental. In addition to this, reading is associated with different colours, which creates a certain rule that facilitates the same lack of reading by the disappearance of demanding readers.

2) The factory established a difference between implementation tasks and design tasks. This is evident throughout the entire production process. I would go as far as saying that there is another level within each of these categories in which tasks are controlled, in an invisible manner, strengthening the relationships of power in the factory. In fact, the supervisory tasks can play a very important role in all manufacturing processes – including training – and influence how communication is generated, transmitted and forms part of the needs and the literate responses which present – or not – in the working context.

Without delving into supervision, this duality between design and implementation exists across all activities of the factory and also the literacy skill performance of the workers, defining needs, space utilisation and ways in which it can or should be used.

In point 1, I noted that there are different languages and different contexts for using such languages which determine the existence of a framework which, rather than being dual, is heterogeneous in the performance that results from literacy and from the different contexts of its use. This differentiation of contexts and heterogeneous formation are, in my opinion, even more if it is influenced by the aforementioned duality between implementation tasks and design tasks.
3) In previous research concerning the factory, 81% of respondents said they learned by doing. This statement, together with the various levels of skills, the use of reading, writing and numeracy in the workplace and beyond, the actual content of what they read (when they read), showed the primacy of reading over writing. However, it is also important to note that orality remains an element of transmission in the factory, and it has not been replaced by literacy skills.

Two details help us justify my claim. Firstly, the percentage mentioned above: 81% of people reported that they learned their factory job by doing it. Therefore, the tradition of literacy-based learning is weak and sometimes non-existent. 70% started working before or just after compulsory education and approximately 35% said they obtained their diploma when they were already working. This means that basic training in its broadest sense and the development of work are clearly dissociated in the lives and biographies of workers of the factory. For instance, regarding the tasks related to texts written by the workers for a test: the workers performed worse in the texts that do not refer to the factory. It seems clear that the limited literacy skills made it more difficult to decontextualising what they had learnt in order to use it in different contexts and situations. This can be concluded before analysing its implications – or potential implications: the absence of life and school experience in relation to aspects of sociability. The 50% who do not read or 55.9% who say they do not read books reinforces this idea.

The other idea I want to highlight is the high number of people, about 65%, who, when facing doubts while working, ask for help orally. It seems evident that a literacy skilled culture – as the factory aspires to be – is an environment which gives priority to reading and writing as everyday tools to support and develop tasks related to work, and above all, to formally and clearly convey accurate information without which production process cannot be carried out successfully. However, these figures seem to show that: i) learning still seems to occur through informal channels; ii) it occurs in a way more linked to the performance of specific tasks, and at particular times of need, than to planned practice and training activities. The latter seems reinforced with the micro-training experiences, more connected with immediate response than to training strategy in the medium and long terms.

4) There seems to be two training devices in the factory: i) the training centre and ii) another device which is concurrently external and internal. This dual scheme can relate to the general duality mentioned above: tasks of implementation and design, different training, different domains and performances in reading and writing, etc.

This may have created – or is creating – a fracture in the sense that there are different training categories, in the same way that there are different categories within the framework of the factory work. In response to this situation – conscious or unconscious – a number of workers decided they did not want to receive training, as many young students do in compulsory education, as Willis (1988) demonstrated.
This – conscious or unconscious resistance can explain why, after various training activities, they continued to follow a framework that values orality against written transmission of messages and information.

Thus, it can be seen how the words spoken, written or read have given access to people – only considered factory workers accordingly and consistent with the practices derived from a particular application of the concept of Lifelong Learning – in management systems, new technologies and new production systems. The main result of these literacy processes undertaken – these specific processes produced and developed in a particular area and with specific intentions – has been the easiest organisation of people, the simple and effective inclusion of standardised procedures and increased production, while costs are kept low.

Literacy processes can break the _Culture of Silence_ and may facilitate the expression of the people and their development. But they can also be used as practice against emancipation. In the present context it is necessary to undertake literacy processes considering “three steps: awareness, conceptual clarification, and the development of alternatives” (Finger & Asún, 2001, p 155), so that the people, rather than dreaming the words, can decide how they would like to live and build other models of coexistence and relationships. This is where the Participatory Literacy play a pivotal role.

**THE PARTICIPATORY LITERACY**

Gelpi stated

On the one hand, it is an education for development, creativity, invention, cooperation, democracy, participation… the fulfilment of the essential and not essential needs. On the other hand, education is an instrument for oppression, control, segregation. (in Jarvis, 1986, p. 50)

This duality is also present in the process of literacy (see example of the factory above). Then, it is important to ask ourselves how to make these processes genuinely liberating and to enable people to edify democratic processes. And from this question, another arises: if every cultural relation implies a certain dominating relationship, it is possible to develop a true liberating education? (Torres, 2005). My answer to the last question is yes, provided that the processes are truly participatory. As Williams stated,

If man [sic] is essentially a learning, creating and communicating being, the only social organisation adequate to his nature is a participating democracy, in which all of us, as unique individuals, learn, communicate and control. Any lesser, restrictive system is simply wasteful of our true resources; in wasting individuals, by shutting them out from effective participation, it is damaging our true common process. (1965, p. 118)
CHAPTER 2

Starting from the Freirean thoughts on awareness, it is possible to imagine that the major aim of a literacy process is to reach a critical one, as Freire called it. This critical awareness could be reached through Popular Education and other methodologies that are truly participative.

In Freire’s methodology, this participation is guaranteed – among other things – thanks to the definition of generative words in the process of codification/decoding. The core of this issue lies in the process itself as a generator of autonomy and emancipation (see Chapter 1), rather than in the results of the process as words, concepts, etc.

The process of codification/decoding is usually based on images, pictures and other non-written material (Freire, 1965). Goody (1990) states that the first languages – as a means of communication – were logographic languages based on the presence of design and other signs that people can easily understand. Then, when the phonetic alphabet was developed, the forms of communication changed into a more powerful though simpler language.

The process of codification/decoding is also a process which identifies the social problems affecting people in a specific community in a given time. This moment/process to edify collectively the definition of the problems – and the way solve them – is very important because it elevates people to their natural condition of social and political beings – political in the Aristotelian sense: as an individual concerned about the *polis*, the community.

Chapter 5 presents examples of Participatory Literacy, linked to the experiment of the Participatory Budget in the city of Seville (Lucio-Villegas *et al.*, 2009; Lucio-Villegas, 2012). But, it is possible to describe other processes as in the Literacy Campaign undertaken in Nicaragua by the workers and volunteers of the Carlos Fonseca Amador Popular Education Association, in which literacy is not only based on the learning of reading and writing, but also as a way of changing communities, introducing changes in the productive system, improving health in the community, etc. (Garcia Robles & Lucio-Villegas, 2014)

Searching for these aims, encouraging people to become literate and to participate in the life of the community, literacy recovers its “central function of education within a truly democratic context in the perpetual questioning of the status quo” (Dale & Hyslop-Margiso, 2012, p. 134).