# Open Source Learning

## A Key to Multiculturalism, Citizenship, and the Knowledge Society

*By Peter Merry, Engage! InterAct*

## Contents

**Engage! InterAct,**
**Bemuurde Weerd WZ3,**
**3513 BH Utrecht,**
**Netherlands**
**Tel: + 31 30 251 3182**
**Fax: +31 30 238 7517**
**Email: interact@engage.nu**
**Web: http://www.engage.nu**

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## Introduction

Societies in the industrialised world are confronted by many challenges at the start of this new Millennium. We are at one of those points in history of change and transition, where the old way of doing things is increasingly under question, and the next set of guiding principles has yet to emerge clearly and be accepted as the foundation of our new way of doing things. It is a period of tension, risk and opportunity. It is essential to get ideas out and debated that promote a world of respect, power-with and creativity, and this Paper is offered in that spirit.

This Paper focuses on three of the major issues facing our society today, ones which are likely to be key battlegrounds in the struggle to shape the coming era: multiculturalism and diversity, citizenship and participation, and the Knowledge / Information Society. It reveals fundamental connections between the demands we are grappling with in those fields. It then goes on to suggest an approach to learning, named here for the first time as Open Source Learning, which aims to equip people to engage positively with all three of these major challenges on a fundamental level. There are three main sections to the Paper: i. exploring the problems and challenges, ii. the foundations of Open Source Learning, and iii. approaches, methods and structures for Open Source Learning.

The analysis, ideas and even approaches to learning themselves are not new. They build on the work that has been done over the last few decades in the field of intercultural learning, citizenship education, non-formal education, globalisation and power in social change. What is new, is the connections that have been made between the issues, and the link to an approach to learning that goes to the heart of the way people and our society function. It does therefore have implications for issues beyond the three focused on here. The reason these three have been chosen, is due to the current interest and concern around them at public, private and institutional level. The focus is Euro-centric, as most of our experience has been in that region, although some of the key sources quoted are from the U.S.

In the spirit of Open Source Learning, this paper is offered as a first attempt to pull these ideas together and propose some solutions - Version 1.0. It is not a collection of tools and methods – those will hopefully come later. We hope that it will trigger interest and debate, and urge you to send in any comments that you have, based on your own experience. As we trial and develop these approaches at Engage!, and are exposed to other analyses of these issues in society, we will update and expand this paper. Comments we receive from you and others will be part of that process.

So, engage those critical faculties, get reading, thinking, nodding in agreement, grunting in disagreement, scribbling in the margin, discussing with colleagues and friends - and let us know what you think.

## Exploring the Problems and Challenges

*Multiculturalism, Diversity and Difference*

"Ethnic, religious, social and aesthetic multiplicity is an inescapable condition, within nations as well as in Europe at large", writes Arne Ruth, former newspaper editor in Stockholm[1], quoted in an article by Michael D. Higgins[2], elected member of the Irish Parliament and former Minister for Arts and Culture. Almost everyone seems to agree that our societies are going to become more multicultural over the coming years. The big question is how well we are able to manage that. Ruth is not optimistic about the way things are going at the moment:

> In Europe of today, intolerance, jingoism and new forms of violence and destruction is on the rise. … The concomitant fear of chaos is exploited by right-wing populism, ethnically defined nationalism, neo-Nazism and religious fundamentalism.

The spread of cultural uniformity and a loss of control over one's economic life, perceived by many as coming from the U.S., and often called "globalisation", has been identified as one of the reasons for people feeling less secure about their own identity, and hence latching onto what is often narrow nationalism and racism in the search for some kind of hook to hang their identity on. This is clearly potentially very dangerous as it sows the seeds for prejudice and discrimination. Professor Benjamin R. Barber:

> What ends as Jihad may begin as a simple search for a local identity, some set of common personal attributes to hold out against the numbing and neutering uniformities of industrial modernisation and the colonising culture of McWorld.[3]

James Hillman[4] also sees a risk of cultural narrow-mindedness due to the amount and speed of information that we are confronted with in today's Knowledge Society. Given the way that we are exposed to so much external stimulation, he suggests that we are almost bound to select one way of doing things and repress others, quite simply to stay afloat. As our realities get increasingly complex, we are more likely to hold onto our way of doing things as a kind of lifeboat, leading to the risk of panic and defensive hostility when faced by other cultures, other ways of doing things[5]. In Hillman's words, everything now becomes "subordinated to the one tyrannical pattern. All otherness gone. One has become totally oneself and now one suffers from totalitarian rule"[6].

It is a big challenge to go beyond this fear of difference in people, and it cannot simply happen on a surface, cognitive level. Umberto Eco identifies what he calls "L'intolérance sauvage", claiming that intolerance of difference and the unknown is as natural for children as the instinct to want to possess what they desire[7]. His concern is that we may be able to refute far-right, racist politics logically, but if it is tapping into a more fundamental instinctive dislike for that which is different, then we will have to engage people on a deeper level.

If Foucault's analysis of the way the structures of our society have "normalised" us and shaped us to be uniform are correct, then combine that with Eco's ideas, and the challenge could not seem much bigger. Foucault[8] believes that people's behaviour in industrialised countries has over time been more managed in order that the governing powers can better

control what is happening in the society. This was always done, he claims, in the name of the welfare of the population. Gradually there was a more detailed objective codification of groups and individuals, through division and categorisation, leading to "finer and more encompassing criteria for normalisation", in order to better control society:

> The power of the state to produce an increasingly totalising web of control is intertwined with and dependent on its ability to produce an increasing specification of individuality.

One result of this increased specification and categorisation is that people end up identifying themselves with their category, and their perception of difference to people in other categories is increased. Combine this with our innate fear of difference, and you have a recipe that is far from producing the respect for and celebration of diversity in a multicultural society that we would like to see.

Foucault's analysis also leads onto the next key issue - citizenship. In order for people to want to participate in and contribute to the development of our societies, they need to feel that they have some kind of influence and power. When, however, you have a society structured in the way Foucault describes, geared up to ensuring our control by our leaders, it is no surprise that you encounter a certain amount of apathy and passivity amongst your people. They will only act if they feel they are really going to have an influence.

## *Citizenship, participation and motivation*

> We are drifting towards an unfreedom that can best be summarised as the transition from a concept of citizenship - with implications for interdependence, transcendence of the self, solidarity and indeed justice - to a concept of consumerism that is market driven, individualised, privatised and insatiable of satisfaction. Such a transition promises us a *homogenised* future, our tastes commodified, our experience of communications changed from one of active symbolic exchange to one of being passively entertained.

> There probably never was a time when we needed more the capacity to be reflective, to consciously articulate philosophical options. Yet Europe has never been weaker in philosophy and public intellectual discourse.[9]

What democracy should be is "a state of perpetual low-level conflict - severe enough to agitate citizens into action, and mild enough to prevent that action from boiling over into violence"[10]. Higgins (above) clearly believes we are moving in the wrong direction, that citizens are not feeling "agitated" enough to get involved in their democracies, leading to a lack of the necessary low-level conflict, and resulting in the stagnation and apathy that has alarmed the politicians into putting citizenship so high up the agenda. Without the people's participation in a democracy, it ceases to be a democracy, and the politicians authority and mandate is undermined.

Higgins identifies "consumerism" as the threat to citizenship. This would seem to contradict Foucault's analysis, as the criticism of the current consumerist society is that governments seem to have "lost" all power to the markets - but maybe it is just that the disempowering structures that Foucault was identifying, in the time he was writing about, prepared the way for the control of the market and the marketeers. In both scenarios, the citizens are required to be consumers, either of government policy, or of the products of the market. The obsessive drive by governments for economic development has brought us to where we are today, and the same specialisation that Foucault referred to still plays an essential role, with governments needing "specialisation as much from its producers as from its consumers and also their full commitment to the ideology which puts economic growth first" (Ivan Illich)[11].

Illich believes that so much of our lives has been institutionalised, that there is very little room left for initiative and self-development, particularly in terms of developing self-confidence and a critical mind. He describes the institutions of our society as being "designed for life-long bottle babies wheeled from medical centre to school to office to stadium":

> The hospitals that spew out the new-born and reabsorb the dying, the schools run to busy the unemployed before, between and after jobs, the apartment towers where people are stored between trips to the supermarket, the highways connecting garages…

All, he believes, an "anthropologically vicious attempt to replace the nests and snakepits of culture by sterile wards for professional service"[12]. Everything is controlled and our lives can almost run on auto-pilot. Illich has also termed this an "expertocracy" where we are expected to hand over our power and trust to the experts – e.g. in education, health, food and governance. We just have to get on and play our role in helping our country or region to be primarily an economic success, and everything else will be taken care of. This is structural disempowerment, and can only damage our hopes of motivating people to sit up and take notice of what is happening around them, and get involved in the development of their society as active citizens.

Paolo Freire, a Brazilian educator, saw society as moving towards a "culture of silence of the dispossessed":

> Rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they were kept submerged in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were practically impossible[13].

The oppression in industrialised societies is not so overt as it was in Brasil, and in some ways, that makes it harder to engage with. The first thing you have to do is to name and unmask it, which is what this first section is an attempt to do. This is the way that Freire saw society going:

> Our advanced technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us and subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system. To the degree that this happens, we are also becoming submerged in a new "culture of silence"[14].

It is breaking the "culture of silence" that has grown up in our democracies that citizenship education must be all about.

Education has of course a key role to play. The way people are encouraged to learn, to approach new information, from when they are very young, has a big influence on the approach people then take to engaging in their society. If people are encouraged just to listen and learn from the teacher, projecting the idea of the teacher as the source of all knowledge who will pour learning into the receptacles which are their students, then it seems likely that this is the approach people will take to other leaders in life. If my Government, or another "expert", tells me something, then I should just listen and learn. Freire called it the "banking concept of education":

> The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world.[15]

Unfortunately too much of education today still seems to have a power-over - power-less teacher-student relationship. There is not enough emphasis on giving students more initiative in and control over their learning and development. It can therefore not be seen as too much of a surprise if the power-less attitude is further developed in our relationships to the democratic institutions. The disillusion with these institutions today is a the kind of apathy you expect from people who see themselves in a power-less role. As Illich says, "By making people abdicate the responsibility for their own growth, school leads many to a kind of spiritual suicide"[16].

It is important to see the challenge we face on that level. So much of our society is structured and works in a power-over way, that we must not underestimate the impact that has on us as individuals, the way we see ourselves and our own power relationships to others. "The patterns in our minds reflect the patterns of power in our culture"[17]. Our very way of perceiving our reality is heavily influenced by the context within which we lead our lives. Walter Wink:

> The ego is also a web of internalised *social* conventions, a tale spun by the Domination System that we take in as self-definition. We are possessed not only by the ego as an autonomous *inner* complex, but also by a heteronomous *outer* network of beliefs that we have internalised.[18]

Wink believes that the major problem of society today is that we are caught up in what he calls the Domination System, by which he means a way of living in which power-over - power-less relationships prevail, and within which the use of violence as a way of solving problems is deep-rooted. It is not just a question of mental attitude, it is a "spiritual disease". He quotes Joel Kovel:

> Domination is always more than a power relation. It is a spiritual state of being. The dominator exerts power by extracting being from the dominated. … Domination always entails more than injustice. It wounds - and it intends to wound - the very soul itself.[19]

What is important to remember in Wink's analysis is that the people who end up dominating are as much victims of the System as those who are dominated. It is a framework of relationships which our culture has developed over thousands of years - Wink traces it all the

way back to Babylonian creation myths, and brings it right up to date with a quotation from a "highly placed officer at the Pentagon": "Sometimes it feels like it's just a massive system that got going and no-one knows how it happened or how to stop it."[20]

The task now is to try and lift everyone out of the system, without getting caught up in responding to those in dominating roles with the same kind of oppressive aggression that they have used towards others. We need to rewrite the rules of the game, of human interaction - no less than a challenge of quite literally mythic proportions. The first stage is to name and unmask this system, so here is a taste of that analysis.

James Hillman also traces the history of power-over relationships a long way back. Power has traditionally been about subordination - dualisms of active / passive, master / slave - rooted in the idea that "work can happen only at the expense of power required to move inert matter"[21]. In education terms, the teacher is the "power" and the student the "inert matter".

As Jung said, "to assert self over other, whatever that other may be, puts the other down"[22]. Hillman refers to Shakespeare's play, Julius Caesar:

> Mastery invites slavery of one sort or another. … Caesar is called tyrant, ambitious, mighty, master, lord…; these epithets of power at the same time reduce the populace to "You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!"[23]

This relationship, be it structural or inter-personal, reduces the dominated to victims. In this state, people do not feel motivated to participate or take initiative. The message is that the real power lies elsewhere. R.D Laing:

> Each person claims their own inessentiality. … In this collection of reciprocal indifference, of reciprocal inessentiality and solitude, there appears to exist no freedom. There is conformity to a presence that is everywhere elsewhere.[24]

As the power-less feel their lack of importance or influence, their "inessentiality", so they start to ignore those with the perceived power, and give up trying to engage with them at all. In denial of oneself and the other, apathy rules. Wink quotes an "East European": "People are rarely imprisoned for their ideas … because we're already imprisoned *by* our ideas"[25]. This is worryingly true of the "Western" world today, and lies behind the perceived need to vigorously promote the concepts of active and democratic citizenship. That work however must happen on a fundamental level, that transcends the stagnant relationships of the Domination System, and stirs up people's sleeping spirits. Otherwise those spirits will be awoken by the other extreme - authoritarian leadership that feeds on people's fear of difference through stirring up hatred in order to fulfil their own wounded need for power-over. As Ouspenksy said:

> "Progress" and "civilisation", in the real meaning of these words, can appear only as the result of *conscious* efforts. … The unconscious activity of millions of machines must necessarily result in destruction and extermination. It is precisely in unconscious involuntary manifestations that all evil lies.[26]

*The Knowledge Society*

So what does all of this have to do with the Knowledge Society (a term that is being used to describe the phase our society is moving into)? We have already made a couple of links to how the large amounts of information we are exposed to might impact on our behaviour. The key point that lead us to make this connection was the fact that the kind of qualities that people say we are going to have to have in order to work well in the Knowledge Society are very similar to the kind of skills we need people to have if they are to be able to live happily in a multicultural society and to participate in the development of that society as active citizens.

It should not be that much of a surprise, really, as dealing with diversity has close links to the idea of dealing with a large amount of information. Also, having to be proactive in our search for the right kind of information, has parallels with the motivation for engagement that is a pre-requisite of citizenship.

The Knowledge Society operates with a high level of interactive complexity, exposing us to the world of uncertainty more so than in the past. As we perceive this change in our society, we are developing "declining confidence in established pyramidical and compartmentalised forms of governance and participation, which themselves are increasingly ill-adapted for flexible response"[27]. This analysis comes from Lynne Chisholm, who is developing a strategy for lifelong, non-formal education for citizenship within the European Union. She sees a great importance in equipping people with the skills to be able to engage fully in the more complex world of the Knowledge Society:

> In social environments characterised by contingency and plurality, it becomes not only desirable but also essential to foster the personal resources, the competencies and the interest to participate actively in the community and in the political process.[28]

As we are exposed to ever more varied information, we are going to have to learn to work with that diversity and negotiate the differences that we are confronted by. Otherwise the risk is that people withdraw into their simple way of seeing the world, with all its defensive rejection of difference.

Charles Handy, a social and organisational analyst and writer, sees countries all over the world grappling with this problem.

> The Japanese themselves worry that their educational system is no longer preparing people adequately for a complex and shifting world. Other countries are also puzzled as how best to deliver this new form of property. Intelligence may be the source of wealth, power and freedom, but, inconveniently, real intelligence is not a substance, it cannot be pre-packaged, sorted and delivered as if it were a consumer product.[29]

The kind of skills that are needed are far more about process, about our way of approaching things, than the skills we have traditionally been taught in our schools. This is how Handy describes the skills needed for people working in the Knowledge Society:

We need to be able to recognise and identify problems and opportunities. We need to be able to organise ourselves and other people to do something about them, and we need to be able to sit back and reflect on what has happened in order that we can do it all better the next time round - … conceptualising, co-ordinating, consolidating.[30]

Lynne Chisholm also identifies some skills needed for success in the Knowledge Society. People are going to need to be able to work with dynamic forms of knowledge, in network environments, and in complex and fast-changing problem-solving contexts. To do that, they will need to be "well-informed, critically reflective and agile, self-confident and ingenious people who are able to act with responsibility and autonomy in a complex personal and social world"[31].

Dr. Howard Williamson (a lecturer, researcher, youth worker and government advisor on youth policy) while working with a group of students at the Student Forum in Prague in 1999, came up with a useful acronym of necessary skills - FREUD: Find, Retrieve, Evaluate, Use, Defend.

What is exciting about this, is the way that the kind of skills that employers are now asking for, and that governments are beginning to realise are needed for the new economy, are the same kind of skills that would enable people to be open-minded in a multicultural society, and engaged in their role as citizens. Thus we have a set of skills that if developed in people would have a positive impact on three of the main issues confronting our society today - multiculturalism, citizenship and the Knowledge Society - and meet the needs of public and private sector alike. Open Source Learning is an attempt to provide an approach to learning that does just that.

## The Foundations of Open Source Learning

*Skills, Qualities and Values*

The key element which unites the three different areas we are focusing on is the question of how we approach things:

➢ In terms of multiculturalism and diversity, it is about how we approach difference, in order to be able to live and work positively and creatively with it
➢ In terms of citizenship and motivation, it is about how we approach our role in society and those in power, in order to feel like taking initiative and getting involved in shaping the world we live in
➢ In terms of the Knowledge Society, it is about how we approach the large amount of information and knowledge that is now accessible to us, in order to be able to handle it efficiently and appropriately

In order to achieve these three things, there are certain skills and approaches which we need to develop. They are listed in the table below, alongside a contrasting quality for comparison[32]:

| Open Source Learning | Contrast |
| --- | --- |
| Power-with | Power-over |
| Win-win | Win-Lose |
| Adult-Adult | Parent-Child |
| Partnership | Domination |
| Enabling | Authoritarian |
| Both / and | Either/or |
| Flexibility | Rigidity |
| Nonviolent negotiation | Violence, force |
| Enabling | Indoctrinating |
| Active Engagement | Passive Consumerism |
| Critical Thinking | Receiving Knowledge |
| Self-confident | Insecure |
| Autonomous | Tribal |
| Responsible | Obedient |
| Contextualisation | Categorisation |
| Connections | Divisions |
| Co-ordination | Pointing the Way |
| Creativity | Obedience |
| Cultural Transformation | Status quo, stagnation |

Open Source Learning should help people to develop those qualities and approaches, and the methods and facilitators themselves should be models of them.

It is important to state clearly that this is not a value-free approach - far from it. In fact, the approach is an extension of a strong set of values - a belief in all people, in the importance of

helping everyone to unfold to their maximum potential, and a belief that deep down, that potential is a force for good. It is rooted in a belief that a world of domination and Power-over will never succeed in creating a place in which people can live happily with themselves, each other and their natural environment.

Freire was very clear about the values that need to infuse education for empowerment:

> If I do not love the world - if I do not love life - if I do not love people - I cannot enter into dialogue. […] Founding itself upon love, humility and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the participants is the logical consequence.[33]

In our way of thinking today, love and power are often opposed. If you have power, you cannot exercise love, and if you work for love, you have no power. Hillman points out how important it is to correct this way of thinking and reclaim power and love for what they really are, otherwise all we end up with is "a loveless power of tyranny and control, and a powerless love that can wish but not will"[34].

It is through the values listed above, that we need to help people to look at the world - the key point is that Open Source Learning is an approach that by its very nature helps people to develop the necessary characteristics. The combination of the values and the process is of the essence. As Fritz Schumacher said:

> The essence of education … is the transmission of values. … [We must] think and feel with them, [they must be] the very instruments through which we look at, interpret, and experience the world.[35]

In Open Source Learning, the way we approach and treat people in the learning process reflects the way we would like interpersonal relations, society and organisations to work and be structured. The process and the content go hand-in-hand. This is essential to be able to engage with the deep-rootedness of the Domination System described in part one. We need to start working in a new way on the mental, emotional and spiritual level, in order to root out the domination disease. Ireland's former Minister for Art and Culture, Michael D. Higgins also realised this:

> The achievement of cultural diversity and a respect for diversity of culture is much more than an administrative matter. It is a matter of morality made imminent and consensually established. It has to do with values that define our humanity. […]
>
> The yearning for an authenticity of the self is accompanied by an acceptance at a more general level of the requirement of transcendent living. From such flows community and the related ideas of solidarity, justice and trust. It is much more than a contract. … It is of the spirit.[36]

## Beyond Certainty and Control

Central to Open Source Learning is the letting go of certainties, the release of the desire for clear answers, the acceptance of a continually changing reality - an understanding of a world far from equilibrium, in which we receive continual feedback, which in turn should result in our picture of reality continually evolving.

This requires a letting-go of control - opening up to ambiguity and uncertainty. In the Domination System, we are used to either being in control, or being controlled. When we lose control over one area of our lives, we frantically try to assert control over another (a basic theory of therapists). It all becomes a mad circus of control freaks. To be able to let go of that need for certainty, of control in that sense, and being comfortable in that state of awareness and openness, is actually a far greater state of self-control.

By looking at the world in this way, with no hard truths or fixed realities, stereotypes and prejudices become illogical (good for multiculturalism); we are drawn into our world, made aware that every action produces a reaction, and therefore we feel motivated to participate in that continual process of change (good for citizenship); and we can take the faster flows of information and knowledge into our stride, without having to continually pin down a conclusion (good for the Knowledge Society). Ambiguity must never be sacrificed for the sake of time or simplicity of message. Umberto Eco believes the role of the intellect is to "expose ambiguities and bring them out into the light of day. […] Sometimes we have to resolve certain problems  by showing that there is no solution"[37].

## Systems Thinking

This approach has much in common with what has been called Systems Thinking, which is based on the way the natural world organises itself. There are three important links to Open Source Learning. Firstly, Systems Thinking looks at everything as self-organising systems, with a fixed web-like pattern of organisation, with new information continually flowing through, and the structure continually changing in response to the feedback it gets from the information. This is based on the theory of autopoesis, which "shows that creativity - the generation of configurations that are constantly new - is a key property of all living systems"[38]. The importance of this is the fact that instability is the accepted reality - within a flexible structure. Digesting this is key to the letting go of certainties and control.

The second link is in Systems Thinking's emphasis on the fact that everything exists in a context - the context within which we see it and the context of our understanding of reality. When we observe a situation, our interpretation of that situation is based on all the experiences we have so far that we can relate to that situation. We then make a judgement about what is going on. Capra quotes Heisenberg: "What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning"[39]. Given that we cannot ever have experienced everything possible about anything, we are therefore dealing with "approximate knowledge". Our "cognition" is only a "*representation* of an independently existing world"[40]. This should humble us, and if we take on board its implications fully, allow us to let go of that search for certainties and control, avoiding ill-informed pre-judgements ("prejudice").

This way of looking at things means that "the properties of the parts can be understood only from the organisation of the whole … Systems thinking means putting it into the context of a larger whole"[41]. The implications of this for dealing with difference are that we can therefore never know everything about someone, and we must try and understand how "the essential properties of an organism, or living system, are properties of the whole, which none of the parts have"[42]. So looking at someone and making a judgement about them based on the sole fact that they are black, white, Protestant, Catholic etc. makes no sense whatsoever. Systems Thinking focuses on patterns rather than parts - on the relationships between parts, rather than on the parts themselves.

The third link is with the idea of the organism continually responding to new information through "feedback loops". Capra cites Hubert Maturana, who in the Santiago Theory on cognition and communication, developed the idea that "communication is not a transmission of information, but rather a co-ordination of behaviour between living organisms through mutual structural coupling"[43]. Maturana said that a system could only learn when it was "structurally coupled", that is to say in a constant dialogue with external stimuli - in the same way that communicating birds form a duet. This is important in terms of the idea that we must be constantly open to new ways of seeing things, ready to constantly alter our picture of reality, both as individuals and institutions, thus developing greater complexity and openness. Capra:

> One of the most striking life-like properties of hypercycles [of feedback] is that they can evolve by passing through instabilities and creating successively higher levels of organisation that are characterised by increasing diversity and richness of components and structures.[44]

In terms of the student-teacher relationship, Systems Thinking means both sides assuming that they don't have all the answers, that they are in a relationship where the learning takes place in both directions, and where more emphasis is put on the process of communication between them than the content itself. Achievement or success in this field is harder to measure, but then that is also part of the nature of this approach. Ivan Illich:

> Personal growth is not a measurable entity. It is growth in disciplined dissidence, which cannot be measured against any rod, or curriculum, nor compared to someone else's achievement.[45]

This approach creates a dynamic tension - another way of describing the web-structure with all the information flowing through it. Tension is essential in society and learning if we are to avoid stagnation, rigidity and fixed power relationships. James Hillman uses power here in a power-with sense:

> To believe that a system works best when it works smoothest is a simplistic model. … Power wants trouble; power as the play of forces enjoys the reluctant complexes that will not submit, the team member who won't just adapt, the disobedient son who challenges decisions. These components of any system serve the power of the whole, keeping it in a state of high tension.[46]

*Think Subtly, Act Simply*

The benefits of being open to difference and complexity, being able to hold oneself in that state, mean not only that we will be able to act more positively when faced with difference, feel more alive to engage in society, and be able to manage more complex amounts of information. It results in our actions being grounded in a way in which the next step reveals itself clearly and naturally. As Hillman says: "Actions of clean and clear simplicity require a mind of complexities. For action to be direct and single, thought must be diverse and plural"[47]. He draws a comparison with the Renaissance, where:

> Single-mindedness was splintered into a pantheon of possibilities. Meanings proliferated. Yet action during this same period was spectacularly decisive and enduring. Scientific experiment, global exploration, financial innovation and artistic accomplishment were carried out boldly, all the while paradox and subtle innuendo governed thought.[48]

Hillman sees the future of leadership as being rooted in the successful management of difference:

> Leadership entails learning the patterns … so that one does not fall prey to the monotheistic simplification of "one size fits all". As Handy says: "Differences, then, are necessary and good for organisational health. Monotheism, the pursuit of a single god, must be wrong for most organisations".[49]

Once we have let go of the vain search for concrete answers, we find ourselves immersed in the flow of reality, in touch with the present, and able to take decisions which are as fully informed as possible. In this state, "the leader's power would reside in a behaved intelligence, defined as an exquisitely fine-tuned attention linked immediately with a reflexive response"[50]. This kind of leader "anticipates what's in the wind, has a sense for the invisible, the hidden" and is able to identify what Machiavelli called the "occasione" to act, managing the "complex causes of Fate and Fortune". At the same time, we must make use of our powers of self-awareness, and it is then, according to Schumacher, that we "attain to the level of a person, to the level of freedom. At that moment, we are living, not being lived"[51].

When we are open to complexity and diversity like this, our voice takes on what Hillman calls "real authority" -

> not narrow expertise, but that old mental virtue called estimation, the capacity to make value judgements by seeing not just all the angles but also seeing deeply into the long-term roots and ramifications of an issue.[52]

Simplistic judgement has no place here. Complexity and diversity lie at the heart of our way of seeing and understanding things, and give us the ability to make judgements that are deeply in tune with the reality we are faced with, lending an air of authority and simplicity to our words and actions. As Hillman says, "Think Subtly, Act Simply".

*Love your Enemy*

If we are to stand by this subtleness and complexity, we need to confront the question of how we deal with people whose actions we feel strongly opposed to. As mentioned in part one, we are nearly all caught up in the Domination System, and our approach to people exercising power-over *must* be one rooted in power-with. Wink spends much time emphasising the importance of this - that we do not get caught up in the roles that the Domination System encourages, but rather go beyond that system and create a new way of doing things and treating people.

> We can hold out for the transformation of oppressors because to some degree they too are victims of the system and at some level have felt conflicted. … They are being played with every bit as much as their victims, though they are, of course, highly rewarded for playing […]
>
> We are simply to proclaim to them that they do not exist as ends in themselves. … It is a curious fact that people already sense their belonging to that greater whole. Regardless of their ethical barbarity, they want to be treated by others according to humane values. People know in their bones that kindness is right and that domination is wrong. [We] merely have to remind them of what they already, at some deep level, know.[53]

This is a very sobering but also uplifting thought, and can be applied either to the institution we are trying to transform in our struggle for social change, or to the person whose behaviour we find triggers the strongest emotions of dislike and anger. The engagement must remain in the form of power-with dialogue, not missionary preaching. Wink: "We can work for a society which will not make people good, but in which it will be easier for them to be good."[54]

The major risk if we do not adopt this power-with approach, is that we will simply end up being formed by the powers we try to transform. Wink again: "Our hate almost invariably causes us to respond in the terms laid down by the enemy. Unaware of what is happening, we turn into the very thing we oppose". He quotes Blake: "They looked at one-another and became what they beheld", and Jung: "You always become the thing you fight the most"[55]. The only way to avoid this is to play a different game, respond from a place of power-with.

It may seem far from the worlds of multiculturalism, citizenship and the Knowledge Society, yet this is simply an extension of the key concepts of being open to otherness, and going beyond the ill-informed judgements of finalities and certainties. It also carries with it the value of respect for all human beings, and for the context within which we find ourselves. It gets away from the narrow absolutism of racism and bigotry, denying the existence of an "absolute enemy", and thus undermining the reliance on "absolute weapons for their utter annihilation"[56]. As Wink says, "It is not enough to become politically free; we must also become human"[57].

## Open Source Learning in Practice

### Critical Thinking for Conscious Action

Developing critical thinking is one of the key tasks of Open Source Learning. The ability to filter information, to question given situations and to get feedback from all the information and external stimuli that we are exposed to, is at the heart of learning for multiculturalism, citizenship and the Knowledge Society. The old theologians used to call this ability Diakrisis, believing that without it you would become a "dupe of the devil" and a "mouthpiece of your mentor"[58].

Ouspensky also identifies this engaged attitude as key to human life:

> The evolution of humans is the evolution of our consciousness. And consciousness can not evolve unconsciously. The evolution of humans is the evolution of our "will" and "will" cannot evolve involuntarily. The evolution of humans is the evolution of our power of doing, and doing cannot be the result of things which happen.[59]

Nelson Mandela also reinforces the importance of critical thought, based on his concrete experience in South Africa: "It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given", and "an educated man could not be oppressed because he could think for himself". Albert Camus refers to students who were successful and happy due to the attitude of their teachers: "they were judged worthy to discover the world". All of these quotations were given in a speech by Dr. Howard Williamson[60]. He described this ability as being able to "read situations", so that hopefully you can make the appropriate judgement for you and that specific situation at that point in time. This a skill essential to all three of our focus areas.

### The Role of the Educator

It is difficult to find the right word for the person who dedicates themselves to facilitating this kind of learning process for people. The problem with "facilitator" is that it implies almost no input in terms of content, and therefore no dialogue. Educator will be used here, drawing on the tradition of Paolo Freire and others in that vein who have called themselves this. Clearly the implications of one-way preaching that could be read into the word are not part of this concept.

Howard Williamson came up with a nice comparison - rather than being the "Sage on the Stage", the educator should become a "guide by the side"[61]. It is their role to help the student to discover answers for themselves, through a process of stimulation and dialogue - to help them "develop" (literally, to "unfold") to the maximum of their human potential. Freire has also called it "problem-posing education"[62].

James Hillman compares the ideal educator to an alchemist:

> The alchemist conceived his art to be one of operating with natural forces in such a way as to release the innate potentials locked up and waiting for articulation. All things, if

properly tended, could become gold. This alchemical analogy remains viable today for thinking about the application of power innate in others, maximising through discretion, rather than direction.[63]

This is the power-with approach, power reclaimed, as described by Starhawk:

> The power of a strong individual in a group of equals, the power not to command, but to suggest and be listened to, to begin something and see it happen. The source of power-with is the willingness of others to listen to our ideas.[64]

It is important to remember that this does go beyond simple facilitation of what comes out of the student(s) present. There is a role for input and stimulation from the educator. In Paolo Freire's adult learning sessions, there was a basic structure that involved firstly all the students "saying their own word", i.e. a chance for everyone to express themselves in some way, at a minimum to say their name, so they and others hear their voice - more usually a chance for the students to express their opinion and / or experiences in relation to the issue to be explored. Following that there is a space for external input and stimulation from outside the group of students, be it by the educator or a guest. This input is based on the experience that that person would have had in relation to the subject. Thirdly, there follows dialogue, where students and the external person think about all that has been said by everyone so far, and then question and develop the ideas. The final stage is the chance for a summary, where everyone is asked to say what they have learned from the session.

It is important not to mistake a power-with approach as prohibiting the use of "experts". Experts should simply be seen as people who have some interesting experience in the field you are exploring, who it would be stimulating to listen to and dialogue with. It is also important not to mistake this approach for an absolutist drive for horizontalism and leaderlessness, where "no head dare stick up too high. … Respect, admiration, awe go by the board. … A new tyranny emerges: the absolutism of equality"[65]. It is about encouraging people to show what they know, to celebrate their potential, whilst at the same time leaving space for others to be able to do the same.

This is where the ability to let go of control, and allow oneself to be in the moment, is so precious for the educator. It is very easy to find oneself thinking about what the next step is, how to change the subject etc., and stop being present with your student(s). There is no doubt that they feel the drop in attentiveness, and the discussion often then goes dead. The job is to try and maintain total concentration and presence, tuning into the deep psyche of the group[66].

Something which seems to be lacking in our societies today is training in those kind of skills for educators. This is one area of development that Engage! InterAct hopes to be able to contribute to during the coming years.

*Structures and Methods*

This paper is not meant to be a manual of structures and methods for the implementation of Open Source Learning. It is meant to provide the foundations from which these can be developed. However, there are some examples and experiences from the past that might help to point us in the right direction.

The Danish Education Act from 1975 shows a remarkable tendency towards a power-with approach to schooling:

> Schools should prepare pupils for participation and co-determination in our democratic society in order that they can assume co-responsibility for seeking solutions to common problems. Freedom of expression, intellectual liberty and democracy must therefore be the foundations upon which the school's existence is built. …
>
> The planning and detailed arrangements relating to all educational matters, including the choice of curricula content, teaching methods and organisational structure, must be decided jointly by the teachers and the pupils.

I have no idea what became of these good intents - maybe someone out there could let us know?

Globalisation and the Knowledge Society are impacting on people in different ways, and we therefore need learning structures that are open and responsive to their different needs. It is important that these structures are strong and supportive - Open Source Learning is not a way of learning that people are used to, and therefore a major role of the educator will be in helping to support the student learning to learn in this way. Howard Williamson points out that the autonomy of the 1960s forgot about the need for this kind of support. In those circumstances, autonomy seems to the student much like another word for neglect. It is important not to repeat that mistake. Training and methods for educators in this support work is another field that needs developing.

Ivan Illich went into quite some detail with his proposals. He saw three main purposes underlying a system for learning[67]:

1. To provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives;
2. to enable those who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn;
3. to provide the opportunity for all those who want to present something to the public to do so.

According to Illich, people are likely to want access to materials, their peers (colleagues, fellow students, companions), educators, and elders (to help them decide on their next steps, and share their experience). In order to achieve that, he saw the need for four concrete arrangements to be in place:

1. Reference services to educational tools and spaces
2. Skills exchange - details of people willing to share skills, and of the conditions

3. Peer matching - a communication network enabling learners to find a partner in their learning
4. Reference service to "educators-at-large" - a database of people, skills, conditions etc.

Another idea from Illich was that of the "Learning Partner Initiative"[68]. This would involve some kind of directory where people can input the title of an article, film, book etc., which they would like to discuss with someone else. People could then match themselves up, through a search system. Illich saw these initiatives as valuing "the unpredictable outcome of self-chosen encounters above the certified quality of professional instruction"[69].

Nowadays we have the ideal technology to make these things happen easily, with the internet - a development that was not around when Illich was recording these ideas. They would not be difficult to set up, and maybe systems such as this exist already - let us know of any you come across!

In terms of approaches and methods, I will only cite one important experience, which triggered some of this thinking. I was in the training team for a 12-day Training for Trainers course for young people in Europe[70], and more by instinct rather than consciously, I think, the training team of five managed to create the kind of dynamic tension that is mentioned above. It was evident in the number of participants who came to us after a few days, requesting "feedback" from the team. What I believe they were looking for was some kind of concrete positions from the team - they wanted to know what we thought. Deliberately we had avoided doing that, always turning the questions into other questions, turning people back to examine the issue for themselves.

The reason some people found this difficult, is because it confronted them with parts of themselves they may not have felt too happy about. This in particular contributed to the tension. Had the team stood up and pronounced the Right Way to Do Things, then this would have provided the perfect target for those who were most insecure to release their tension onto and attack. As time went on, we did get engaged in debate, but tried to be as careful as possible not to have our view interpreted as gospel. This is always going to be difficult, of course, due to the simple fact that you are part of the training team, but generally it succeeded. We also had in place feedback mechanisms, in the shape of small group discussions, for both the methods we were using and the personal development of the participants. Again the fact that we were open to having our methods analysed and criticised (and were ready to defend them where appropriate and engage in dialogue) gave a special atmosphere of collaboration to the course. By the end of the course, most of the participants had clearly undergone a very important experience - and one of those who complained to us most strongly at the start came to us at the end and said that she now appreciated why we had done things that way, and was grateful for it.

With the Knowledge Society in mind, Lynne Chisholm notes how the transmission and production of knowledge are increasingly closer together and integrated "within a continuous cycle of innovation in a collective context"[71]. Our learning processes must reflect that reality, and this is what Open Source Learning is all about. Knowledge is created as you go along, as student and educator explore and learn together.

A final important element to that cycle is the continuous evaluation and development of the learning methods, based on the feedback from the experience of the students and educators. If the process itself starts to stagnate and becomes rigid, then there is no way it can claim to be teaching the skills of openness, transformation and flexibility. That will ensure the "continuous cycle of innovation" that is key to the success of Open Source Learning.

## Why "Open Source Learning" ?

This name was inspired by the Open Source approach to software that has been developed on the internet, particularly the Linux systems. The keys to all software are freely available to anyone, which means that many different people are contributing to the dynamic development of the software, based on their experiences of working with it. It is all in the common interest.

The name also seems so appropriate because:

➢ There is no fixed end-product, no definitive answer, and the methods are continually under development and should remain open to all who experience them.
➢ The educators, traditionally seen as the source of all wisdom, invite the student to share their experience, to make mistakes, learn and grow together.
➢ The individuals who are the source of ideas and action that shape our society should remain open to difference, to challenge and to change. They should feel no need to hold onto static ideas as unquestionable truths.
➢ The approach is connected to the source of human well-being: respect, creativity and goodwill. It aims to keep that source open.

## Notes

[1] Arne Ruth, <u>Culture, Arts and Politics - the capriciousness of Universal Values</u>, Paper delivered at Conference in Mont Tremblant, Canada

[2] Michael D. Higgins, <u>Drifting Towards a Homogenised Future</u>, in *The Aisling Magazine*, No. 27, Lughnasa 2000

[3] Professor Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995) quoted in Ibid., 52

[4] James Hillman, Kinds of Power (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1995), 190-1

[5] One of my favourite definitions of culture is "the way we do things around here".

[6] Hillman, op.cit., 191

[7] Umberto Eco, <u>La Migration, la tolerance, l'intolérable</u>, in *Cinq Questions de Morale*, (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1997), 162-5

[8] Foucault, M., *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin, 1984), 21-2

[9] Higgins, op.cit., 48-9

[10] Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers - Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 192

[11] Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Education, 1971), 71

[12] Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work* (London: Marion Boyars, 1981 ), 20

[13] Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1972), 10

[14] Ibid., 13

[15] Freire, op.cit., 47

[16] Illich, *Deschooling Society*, op.cit., 65

[17] Starhawk, *Truth or Dare* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 96

[18] Wink, op.cit., 159

[19] Ibid., 101

[20] Ibid., 81

[21] Hillman, op.cit., 99

[22] Jung, *Psychological Types* (1923), quoted in Hillman, op.cit., 95

[23] William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar,* I i 34, in Hillman, op.cit., 100

[24] R.D. Laing, in Wink, op.cit., 99

[25] Wink, op.cit., 100

[26] P.D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 52

[27] Lynne Chisholm, <u>The educational and social implications of the transition to knowledge societies</u>

[28] Ibid.

[29] Charles Handy, *The Empty Raincoat* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1994), 204

[30] Ibid., 207

[31] Chisholm, op.cit.

[32] Inspired by Wink, op.cit., 46/7

[33] Freire, op.cit., 63-4

[34] Hillman, op.cit., 245

[35] E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (London: Abacus, 1973), 66/7

[36] Higgins, op.cit., 51

[37] Umberto Eco, op. cit., 17-18

[38] Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life* (London: Flamingo, HarperCollins, 1996), 216

[39] Ibid., 40

[40] Ibid., 263

[41] Ibid., 28/9

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 279/80

[44] Ibid., 94

[45] Illich, *Deschooling Society*, op.cit., 45

[46] Hillman, op.cit., 146/7

[47] Ibid., 246

[48] Ibid, 247

[49] Handy, *Gods of Management* (London: Pan Books, 1995), 39, in ibid., 225

[50] Ibid., 152-3

[51] E.F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Abacus, 1978), 39/40

[52] Hillman, op.cit., 161

[53] Wink, op.cit., 97 & 167

[54] Ibid., 71

[55] Ibid., 195-6

[56] Ibid., 30

[57] Ibid., 277

[58] Hillman, op.cit., 143

[59] Ouspensky, op.cit., 58

[60] The speech was at the Students Forum 2000, Prague Castle, on the theme of Developing Values for Education in a Globalising World.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Freire, op.cit., 54

[63] Hillman, op.cit., 210

[64] Starhawk, op.cit., 10

[65] Hillman, op.cit., 99

[66] Ibid., 109-115

[67] Illich, *Deschooling Society*, op.cit., 78

[68] Ibid., 26/7

[69] Ibid., 74

[70] Council of Europe Youth Directorate, Training for Trainers, European Youth Centre Strasbourg, March 2000

[71] Op.cit.