

# **The Adult Learning Project in the Age of Austerity [Draft]**

**Campbell<sup>1,2,3</sup> (2019)**

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With thanks to A.L.P.'s current board of trustees and to our learners, the A.L.P.ers.

## **Abstract**

Established in the Gorgie area of Edinburgh (Scotland) in 1979, the Adult Learning Project (A.L.P.) is an 'attempt to translate the philosophy and pedagogy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire to the context of a Scottish inner city area' (Galloway, 1999). Despite its success in promoting democratic adult education (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989; 2011a; Galloway, 1999), cuts to core funding mean A.L.P. currently faces, arguably, the greatest threat to its survival. In an era when adult education bodies throughout Europe endure ever increasing pressure to provide qualifications to participants in recognition of their learning (see e.g. Forrester and Garratt, 2012; Finnegan, 2013, and O'Brien, 2018), A.L.P. remains a space where learners can explore themselves artistically and intellectually through groups including Art Space, Fayre for Women, Aye Write, and Democracy Group. Part case study; part action research and biographical account, this paper provides an intimate and grounded reflection on A.L.P.

**Keyword:** Adult Learning Project, education, austerity, Edinburgh, Scotland, Freire.

## **Introduction**

Established in the Gorgie area of Edinburgh (Scotland) in 1979, the Adult Learning Project (A.L.P.) is an 'attempt to translate the philosophy and pedagogy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire to the context of a Scottish inner city area' (Galloway, 1999). Despite its success in promoting democratic adult education in this urban setting (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989; 2011a; Galloway, 1999), cuts to core funding mean that A.L.P. currently faces, arguably, the greatest threat to its survival since its formation forty years ago. In an era when adult education bodies throughout Europe endure ever increasing government pressure to provide qualifications

to participants in recognition of their learning experience and newly developed skills (see e.g. Forrester and Garratt, 2012; Finnegan, 2013, and O'Brien, 2018), A.L.P. remains a space where learners can explore themselves artistically and intellectually through groups including Art Space, Fayre for Women, Aye Write, and The Democracy Group. Part case study; part action research and biographical account, this paper provides an intimate and grounded reflection on the current state and the future of A.L.P.

Funding cuts are far from a new threat to A.L.P., indeed a deputation from the project challenged the City of Edinburgh Council in 2015 after the reduced income first threatened its future - a common experience of third sector organisations under post-2010 austerity (see e.g. Sutton Trust, 2018; U.N.I.S.O.N., 2017; Campbell and Arya, forthcoming). For example, the City of Edinburgh Council advised that between the 2013/2014 and the 2014/2015 financial years, more than 20% of the Community Learning and Development-related posts were removed as they administered their own funding cuts (C.E.C., 2015) Yet with A.L.P.'s own core funding finally stripped in October 2018, members of project - learners, tutors, and board - jointly decided to undertake action entailing a radical shift away from the reliance on state funding, as previously described by Lucio-Villegas (2009), to become a self-sustaining and exclusively member-directed body. Whilst briefly chronicling the origins of the organisation, this paper provides insight into the recent history and practice of A.L.P. (as depicted in Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989; 2011a; Abeldhay et al., 2013; and others), before considering the proposed reworking of this world-renowned adult education institute (see e.g. Kirkwood and Lucio-Villegas, 2009; Shor, 1993; Darder, 2018; and Evans et al., 2016).

### **Author Reflexivity & Positionality**

The author currently serves as trustee on the board of the Adult Learning Project, and has done so since summer 2018. As such, his insider position affords insight that would perhaps be less accessible to those researching A.L.P. from a distance. The following provides a brief note of the contexts and core elements entailed by this relationship to the organisation. Having joined the board in mid-2018, Campbell has served as secretary, liaising with the membership on a regular basis. Re-elected at the organisation's Annual General Meeting (A.G.M.) in October 2019, Campbell is currently continuing in this role until the current period of uncertainty is resolved. An experienced community education practitioner, Campbell studied Community Education (2012-2016) and Education: Philosophy (2017-2018) at the University of Edinburgh, before commencing his Ph.D. Social Work in 2018 at the same institution. He currently holds an Associate Lecturer post with the University of the West of Scotland's Community Education Department, and co-teaches the University of Glasgow's M.Ed. Adult Education, Youth Work, and Community Development programme. As far as possible, issues of insider research such as assumptions (see e.g. Dickson-Swift, 2008; Dickson-Swift et. al, 2009) and nostalgia (see e.g. Bodone, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; and Breen, 2007) have been addressed by citing any claims about A.L.P. in the work of others.

## **Paulo Freire and Adult Education**

A native of the Brazilian north-eastern state of Pernambuco, Freire was born in September 1921 into a middle class family (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018). Though his family experienced economic hardship during the 1930's recession (Freire, 1996; Albacsete, 2014), Freire graduated from what is now the Faculty of Law at the Federal University of Pernambuco. A Directorship with the Pernambuco State Department of Education followed, and it was during this period that Freire's academic attention began to centre on adult literacies and education as a means for democratic participation (Freire and de Oliveira, 1997; Mayo, 1999). His subsequent understanding of political participation served as a means for social transformation further refined as a result of his work in adult education (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989; 2011; Steinberg and Cucinelli, 2012). More than merely enabling individuals to exercise their citizenship through literacy - a condition of voter eligibility in 1940's Brazil (Leslie, 2000) - Freire sought to facilitate critical thinking, enable 'cultural action in or outside of the classroom' (Taylor, 1993 p.10), and to support what became known as critical pedagogy - an educational method 'where[by] the status quo is challenged' (Taylor, 1993, p. 2). Indeed, Law (1998) suggests Freire's approach permitted a shift from perceiving students as 'docile listeners in the transfer of information', whom Brown (2011, p.xii) notes would be 'free from the discomfort of participating', to agents of change within their own lives.

Following a period of exile during which he resided in Chile, Freire undertook a professorship with the Catholic University of São Paulo, becoming an advisor to the World Council of Churches' Office of Education in Geneva, Switzerland, before settling in the Brazilian city of São Paulo. Freire suffered a heart attack and died at the Albert Einstein Hospital, on 2nd May 1997 (Pace, 1997). Fundamental in advocating critical pedagogy, Freire's influence continues well beyond his death in the works of Giroux (1979; 2011), hooks (1994, 2003), Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997; 2010), De Oliveira (2000), and Darder (2017); as well as within a wealth of Freirian-inspired projects including - several of which will be detailed below. Alexander and McConnell, (2002, p.19) emphasise that '[b]y the 1980's [Freire's works] were amongst the standard titles for under-graduate community education student essays.' Freire, in fact, visited A.L.P. in 1989 during a scholar exchange to the University of Edinburgh. A transcript of his speech (in which A.L.P. is mentioned) is currently stored within the University's Archive Collections and was exhibited as part of *Conectando: Scottish Encounters with Spanish & Portuguese* during summer 2019 (University of Edinburgh, 2019). Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011b) suggest that today there are upwards of 8,000 publications relating to Freire and his work - a radical shift from the handful of articles and texts available in English at the time A.L.P. was formed some forty years ago (Purcell, 2013). Details of Freire's perceptions of the project's ability to embody his educational philosophy and efforts to ensure its effective implementation in practice are discussed in the subsequent sub-section.

## **Adult Learning Project (Edinburgh)**

In the same vein as the additional co-authored chapter entitled *ALP since 1990: a flowering of cultural action* by Galloway et al (2011) included in the second edition of Kirkwood and Kirkwood's book (covering A.L.P. from 1989-2006), this paper intends to provide an update on the realities of A.L.P. today. Similarly, just as Kirkwood and Kirkwood (1989; 2011a) sought to 'convey the authentic voice of ALP' (Brown, 2011, p.viii), this contribution has been drafted in consultation and through conversation with a number of current learners, board members, and others with expertise and insider knowledge of the project. St. Clair (2011, p.88) suggests that even today, the Kirkwood and Kirkwood (1989; 2011a) text provides 'far more authentic insight than many more recent texts'. This paper therefore hopes to make a similarly useful contribution in modernising understandings of A.L.P.

'I'd walked past the ALP Shop a hundred times and thought, 'bloody education - I hate teachers!' I was living in a dump at the time and I'd no job. I hated bosses, too! Then one day I saw an advert in the window inviting unemployed people to learn about social documentary photography. It was free. I didn't want a class. I wanted to learn about photography by taking pictures. Before I knew it, I was in Orwell School taking pictures of the kids for the campaign to keep the school open. I liked the idea of taking pictures of something useful. Then I found I was being asked what I *thought*. That's how it all started.'

- Unnamed A.L.P. learner (in Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011, p.121)

**(i) A.L.P (1979-1999):** Founded in September 1979 in the Gorgie and Dalry area<sup>1</sup> of Edinburgh (Scotland) by 'a group of local women, supported by Community Education workers', the success of a short lived pilot programme<sup>2</sup> allowed four<sup>3</sup> dedicated workers to become employed as A.L.P.'s first adult educator practitioners (Reeves and Bradley, 2019). Within just a few years the project was attracting ever increasing numbers of learners and activists 'allowing [A.L.P.] to expand and incorporate more classes, projects and cultural and political action' (ibid.), with funding provided by the local council following a five year spell as an Urban Aid-funded project<sup>4</sup>. Within just ten years, A.L.P. had become 'an accepted and highly respected feature of the adult education landscape in Scotland' (Brown, 2011, p.xi), with many students and educators eager to engage or visit the organisation to witness and come to understand how Freirean pedagogy could work in practice. Although the tutors held paid positions, their Freire-inspired remit required negotiation between workers, volunteers, and learners over

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Kirkwood and Kirkwood (1989; 2011a, p.3), Appendix #1 shows an illustrated map of the Gorgie and Dalry area.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander and McConnell (2002, p.264) note that this pilot ran in 1977 and provision included 'classes such as English 'O' grade and yoga'.

<sup>3</sup> Crowther and Martin (2011, p.xiii) contradict this suggestion in stating that A.L.P. originally only had a 'trio of adult educators'. Kirkwood and Kirkwood (1989; 2011a), however, address this in stating that the administrative worker joined the A.L.P. team circa six months after their formation.

<sup>4</sup> Urban Aid projects were co-funded by state and local government on a 75:25 split (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989; 2011a).

content and structure of the classes. The somewhat unique nature of the organisation led to 'serious interest [...] from all over Britain and elsewhere' (ibid, p.x), and several similarly inspired projects have emerged in the year since including the Freire Institute operating out of the University of Central Lancashire in Burnley (England; see e.g. Freire Institute, 2019), Partners Training for Transformation during the early 1980's in Dublin (Republic of Ireland, see e.g. Sheehy, 2001; and Sheehy et al., 2007), the Paulo Freire Institute in 2004 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban, South Africa; e.g. see Harley, n.d.), Paulo Freire Democratic Project (P.F.D.P.) - described by Chapman University (California, U.S.; n.d.) as 'a collection of local, regional, and international initiatives based in Chapman University's Attallah College of Education Studies' - and the Paulo Freire Institute São Paulo (Brazil) which works in partnership with the University of California (Los Angeles, U.S.; see e.g. Gadotti and Alberto Torres, 2009). Harley (n.d.) in fact suggests that there are currently around fifty 'institutions around the world which work to stimulate, promote and strengthen Freirian thought and pedagogy'.

Centred more on 'general adult education in a community setting, mostly at a post-literacy level' (Crowther and Martin, 2011) than on the beginner level adult literacy which Freire initially prioritised (Freire and de Oliveira, 1997; Mayo, 1999), A.L.P.'s team of adult educators sought to demonstrate the broader applicability of Freire's work beyond its native contexts of Brazil and Chile, and its literacy-centre focus. With support from the Workers Educational Association (W.E.A.), the A.L.P. team sought to shift away from traditional class type education, hoping rather to operate via themes generated by local residents. This occurred through the organisation's interpretation of the Freirean learning process, which Kirkwood and Kirkwood (1989; 2011a) suggest was identified as a nine-part process, commencing with the creation of community profiles through secondary and primary source investigation, before developing a team of co-researchers who would help generate appropriate themes of local interest. This process, repeated many times over the coming years, allowed the organisation to develop a co-developed curriculum of learning programmes lasting two to three months, with early thematic sessions addressing themes such as barriers to communication between parents and teachers, polarization between different social groups, and the difficulties in dealing with authority figures and officialdom' (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, p.17).

Having initially been somewhat nomadic before an official premises was identified, the A.L.P. shop opened in late 1980 on Dalry Road<sup>5</sup>, Gorgie (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989; 2011a). Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011b, p.87) noted a social and class divide within Edinburgh, stating that '[o]n one side were the tourists and the finance sector and the whisky shops' whilst '[on] the other side were huge areas of bleak council estates leading Europe in hard drug abuse and HIV infection'. It is in part of this latter version of Edinburgh in which A.L.P. were based. Holding down a permanent space allowed the workers to establish relationships with the local community, and partnerships developed between A.L.P. and the local high school, business owners, St. Martin's Church, and workers in local factories. Even with a venue secured, the future of the organisation was never certain. Thus, a campaign group was formed in 1982 that

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix #2 for a photograph of the former A.L.P. base.

sought to identify ways to safeguard the innovative work being undertaken - methods which many education and council officials remained skeptical of (ibid.). Projects, at the time, involved both discussing issues directly (e.g. health), whilst also engaging in reflection - and potentially action - over the broader social situations which led diverse groups of people to experience the same positive or negative health based on factors linked to lived experience and employment opportunities locally. Furthermore, the increased engagement between the A.L.P. workers and the learners through an increasing learning programme led to the formation of the A.L.P. Association which brought together representatives of each group and the paid down (reduced by one member following its integration into the local council's community education provision). Regular A.L.P. Association meetings began to take place, and these have continued to today.

A diverse body of organisations have stemmed from A.L.P. before growing into their own independent charities. Many of the groups were first formed following the identification of problems or issues during co-investigations, which Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011a, p.14) noted would often result in 'the creation of a new community organization in the area, or action by individuals in their own lives'. Examples of new initiatives formed through this process range from the Scots Music Group, the Parents Centre<sup>6</sup>, The Welcoming, and The Damn Rebel Bitches<sup>7</sup>, to the Youth Gaitherin, the Women's History Group<sup>8</sup>, Sangstream, and the Nicaragua Learning Exchange. Much of this occurred with the support of the now defunct Federation of the Adult Learning Project - a body within the organisation that supported the formation of groups which, once self-sustaining, were handed over to the learners to be run independently<sup>9</sup>. A.L.P.'s presence is therefore strong throughout Edinburgh, even in projects no longer associated explicitly with their original supporting body.

During Friere's aforementioned visit to A.L.P. during the late 1980s, Galloway (2008, p.2) noted that the man that inspired the organisation's practice, believed that 'the work of the project needed to connect its activities to wider political movements in order to broaden its political scope'. Galloway (2008) does, however, note that the workers within the project struggled to identify a core socio-political movement with which they could connect in order to 'ignite the political imagination of the participants.' Freire's longer friend and colleague, Ira Shor, similarly noted that A.L.P.'s 'learning programs and action outcomes were situated in the depressed economic conditions of Scotland in the 1980s', and consequently, '[i]ts constituency was being

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<sup>6</sup> The Parents Centre was described by Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011a, p.23) as 'a meeting place for local parents' which was, at one time, based out of the St. Brides Community Centre.

<sup>7</sup> Named after a comment from the Duke of Cumberland's comment on Jacobite women (Craig, 2000) - who has held exhibitions, educationals, and the like, continues to regularly post to an audience of more than five hundred followers via their social media page..

<sup>8</sup> Galloway (2008, p.4) advised that the 'Women's History Workshop was formed to study Scottish Women Past and Present and wrote a pamphlet entitled From Margaret to Mary: A Herstory Walk of the Royal Mile'.

<sup>9</sup> Such handovers have not always been successful, with A.L.P. (2019, p.4) advising that former Art Space learners 'got together to form a peer group however decided they did not want to continue without the Art Space tutor organising the events.'

marginalized and depressed by economic policy in Britain [...] result[ing] in high unemployment, an emphasis on privatization, and a withdrawal of social services' (Shor, 1992, pp.193).

'It isn't about education. ALP learning is about life. It's getting through your daily life learning to deal with people in a more reasonable way. It's listening to others and being flexible enough to change the belief you've been carrying around in your head'.

- Unnamed A.L.P. learner (in Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011, p.121)

**(ii) A.L.P. (2000-Present):** With a diverse range of political, discursive, literacy, and arts-based classes, A.L.P.'s provision has evolved to include The Democracy Group<sup>10</sup>, Fayre for Women<sup>11</sup>, Glory & Dismay, Aye Write<sup>12</sup>, The Local Economy Group<sup>13</sup>, and Art Space<sup>14</sup> (formerly Art Space for Women). The latest edition of Kirkwood and Kirkwood's (2011) *Living Adult Education: Freire in Scotland*, containing an additional chapter from Galloway et al. (2011) offered insight into A.L.P. between 1989-2006, was released more than a decade ago at the time of writing. The new chapter covered until 2006, and the second edition further noted the centralisation of creative and social elements of A.L.P.'s work, observing an 'emphasis on cultural activity, the traditional arts, music[,] and song'.

Based in the Tollcross area of Scotland's capital city since the early 2000's, A.L.P. continued to attract learners from across the city and beyond. Yet, despite the organisation's ongoing popularity (and indeed A.L.P.'s sustained international reputation<sup>15</sup>), the age of austerity has

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<sup>10</sup> A political discussion group, A.L.P. (2019c, p.5) notes that '2018 was dominated by Brexit and the group examined all of the options from no deal, to a second referendum to revoking Article 50'.

<sup>11</sup> A weekly group, A.L.P. (2019c, p.5) notes that '[a]ll members of the groups are over 70 years of age and, because we have a varied and interesting programme, this keeps us mentally alert and increases our knowledge which is really important for our age group.' Members of this group have often cited the social benefit they gain from sustained social encounters with peers of a similar age demographic.

<sup>12</sup> A.L.P.'s creative writing group, Aye Write members 'engage in a creative process of action and reflection, expressing their ways of seeing the world through artistic expression' Campbell (forthcoming). With a fully subscribed membership list, Aye Write remain one of A.L.P.'s most popular groups. Aye Write were formerly known as the Gorgie / Dalry Writing Group.

<sup>13</sup> A.L.P. (2019c, p.5) advises that 'In 2018 the Local Economy Group focused on a range of issues affecting the City Centre including the lack of affordable housing for local people and the growth of the tourism sector.'

<sup>14</sup> A.L.P.'s newest group, Art Space, is a creative space open to women-identifying and non-binary people which has worked with more than eighty learners to date (A.L.P., 2019c). A.L.P. (ibid, p.4) also note that in 2018, 'Art Space changed its name from Art Space for Women to reflect our inclusion of non-binary people'.

<sup>15</sup> In the last twelve months alone, A.L.P. has been invited to produce two case studies for Ledwith's (forthcoming) third edition of *Community Development* due for release in early 2020 (see also Campbell, forthcoming; and McAree, forthcoming); whilst a scholar visited from Kyushu University (Japan), and a contingent of learners from Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board (Republic of Ireland) are due to visit in February 2020. In addition, 'the ALP book' as Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011, p.ix) affectionately refer to their book as, has been translated into both Spanish and Valenciano - courtesy of the Paulo Freire Institute of Spain (Instituto Paulo Freire España), the Centre of Resources and Continuing Education of Valencia, and Dialogos.

threatened to hamper provision. In 2015, a delegation of workers and learners spoke at the City Chambers in protest following the Council's failure to replace the final paid worker following his retirement. The deputation brought forward a petition entitled '*Save the Adult Learning*' before the Petitions Committee in early September 2015 (C.E.C., 2015), calling upon the council to hire a dedicated Community Learning and Development Worker to address the gap in provision since the previous worker's retirement. Successfully progressed to the Education, Children and Families Committee with a recommendation to part-fund post, the petition was ultimately rejected with the Council stating that 'the support currently on offer is at the maximum level currently possible for the CLD service'. Furthermore, the council's report claimed that '[a]ppointing a CLD worker 0.5 FTE would cost £20,000 per annum'; adding that '[t]he cost for this non- priority post would be unjustified and unsustainable in the current financial climate'. Despite continued protests, funding was never reinstated. Instead, A.L.P. has survived thanks to the time and efforts of its members, the board of trustees, assistance from a council-employed community worker (though the council stress that this 'support varies and is dependent on other service priorities; C.E.C., 2015), and a small team of paid sessional educators who take the lead role in coordinating their classes.

Recent years, however, have presented a diverse range of issues. The lack of a dedicated A.L.P. worker means that the capacity to perform the type of co-investigation that occurred during A.L.P. early days is absent. No longer are questions linked to co-investigations a core part of the organisation's operations, rather focus is largely redirected to identifying funding avenues to keep the organisation alive. For a recent sample programme from 2017, see Appendix #3. Consequently, the connections such co-investigations permit between the workers and the local community, whilst perhaps still a desired outcome, are not fostered. Many learners retain a largely positive relationship with the board, but many do not come from or live in the local areas of Tollcross and Fountainbridge - thus sustained engagement can become costly to many learners. Furthermore, the outreach work that the paid workers and team of co-investigators once performed through 'visits to public places in the locality where people come together' do not take place (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989; 2011). Once again, this largely comes down to the lack of staff hours, and, as such, knowledge of the local area stems primary from the board members and the learners' own networks. In addition, the creche once provided for parents of young children attending daytime classes is no longer offered. Many of the current learners are of a more senior age demographic (A.L.P., 2019c), however, and childcare is therefore less frequently an issue.

In addition to commanding international respect, perhaps still tied largely to the narrative told in Kirkwood and Kirkwood (1989; 2011a), November 2010 witnessed an excursion by twenty-three learners to Barcelona (Spain), in a trip affectionately titled *Homage from Caledonia to Catalonia*. A cultural exchange between A.L.P., Escola d'Adults de la Verneda - Sant Martí<sup>16</sup> (a local

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<sup>16</sup> Abdelhay et al. (2013, p.6) advise that an the Escola d'Adults de la Verneda - Sant Martí is an 'adult school run by the participants' associations Agora and Heura' and that holds a formal relationship with the Centre of Classical Studies at the University of Barcelona. For further information on the school, see Sanchez Aroca (1999).

adult learning project) and the Federacion de Asociaciones culturales y Educativas de Personas Adultas (F.A.C.E.P.A.), the trip encouraged learners to consider the broader social existence of local people - including through art, poetry, and a comparative investigation into the ownership and relationship to their respective local communities held by Futbol Club Barcelona (Spain) and Heart of Midlothian Football Club (Scotland). During the visit, learners met with several of the school's creative and discursive groups, as well as having the opportunity to meet leftist political activists at the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (C.N.T.) headquarters. The trip in fact resulted in a special issue of *CONCEPT: The Journal of Contemporary Community Education Practice Theory*, entitled *ALP's Educational Trip from Edinburgh to Barcelona* in which a series of reflective accounts from learners were included (see Aslam et al., 2013; Ní Mhathúna, 2013a; Abdelhay, 2013; Ní Mhathúna, 2013b; Forbes, 2013; Gossip, 2013; Bain and Cabrero, 2013, and Mckendrick, 2011). Although the most well documented, the Barcelona exchange was not the only international link-up between A.L.P. and other organisations. A study trip also occurred in late 2001, the culmination of the *Irish in the Lothians* historical investigation, with learners visiting Belfast, Derry, and Donegal (Player, 2016). The football literacies project, The Glory and The Dismay also visited Hamburg to better understand the realities of utilising the profile of a sports club, in this case Fußball-Club St Pauli von 1910 e.V (commonly referred to as F.C. St. Pauli), to engage local people in issues of racism, homelessness, and anti-fascism (Crowther and Tett, 2011).

At home in Scotland, A.L.P. continued to 're-invent' itself based on the socio-economic circumstances it experienced (Crowther, 2013). The Multicultural Learning Circles were one such group, with Norrie and Abdelhay (2010, p.36) stating that 'Circle' was 'created as the necessity to improve our understanding about cultural diversity through sharing cultural knowledge and celebrating differences with the aim to facilitate the social integration of ethnic minorities, and to challenge the cultural stereotyping of the 'Other' as problematically different'. The project thus sought not merely to facilitate cultural exchange, but rather worked to promote expose, education, and understanding of the diversity within one's immediate community. Indeed, Norrie and Abdelhay (2010) attest that this project permitted learners to question the circumstances in which they found themselves, rather than accepting assumption and expectations as fact.

Despite the challenges experienced in recent years, A.L.P. do retain a number of assets including an agreement with the City of Edinburgh Council for '[f]ree office and meeting space at Tollcross Community Centre in one general purpose room which is prioritised for ALP Association'; as well as an agreement that utility bills raised by the project will be covered by the council's Community Learning and Development budget (C.E.C., 2015). This ensures that, for the foreseeable future, certainly, the organisation will not repeat the challenges it faced during the early years whereby the lack of a dedicated premises resulted in the workers operating out of many available space as the conducted the first six month co-investigation, *Living in Gorgie Dalry*. The 'A.L.P. Room' is somewhat sparsely decorated, with much of the materials retained by the former workers still in storage boxes. There is, however, a large handmade bookcase, designed by a former learner, a black and white photograph of whom is pinned to the wall in

remembrance of his time involved with A.L.P. (see Appendix #4). Recently, two Japanese silk towels have been added - gifts from the Japanese scholar who visited the organisation in August 2019.

### **Future of the Adult Learning Project**

Late 2018 brought the final kneel, with the City of Edinburgh Council stating their intention to withdraw the only remaining funding that sustained three of A.L.P.'s regular groups. Many learners remained committed to the organisation and rallied together for a one-off *Save A.L.P.* public meeting in February 2019. This event was followed by the inaugural gatherings of the funding committee in June 2019 and July 2019 to brainstorm fundraising initiatives to safeguard the future of the project (see A.L.P., 2019a). Resilience is nothing new to A.L.P. members with stories of former learners creating petitions and tales of tutors undertaking direct action to safeguard the future of their projects shared at the *Save A.L.P. Meeting*. This included when the former tutor of football literacies project *The Glory & The Dismay* (see Player, 2012; Campbell, forthcoming b) convinced Heart of Midlothian Football Club to provide a free room-let and to fund the worker after the Council choose to cease funding the project.

Embodying Freire and Shor's (1987, p.185) belief that '[c]ritical thinking needs imagination where students and teachers practice anticipating a new social reality', many of the learners have undertaken their own independent action to protect the organisation, with members writing to Edinburgh's Forth Ward Councillors<sup>17</sup>. A suggestion was even made to morph the Local Economy Group into an action or campaign group similar to that formed in 1984 when A.L.P.'s Urban Aid Funding was coming to an end (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989; 2011a) which, at the time, demanded the expansion of the organisation and called for an increase to five full-time workers - something the organisation could only dream of now. A donation from the Tollcross Community Centre Management Committee, the board responsible for the Community Centre in which the organisation currently resides, enabled A.L.P. to guarantee its existing programme for three more terms (one year), yet beyond that no annual funding stream is in presently place.

With members' ideas ranging from seeking sponsorship and grants for one-off projects to live performances from the Aye Write members, attendees voted decidedly to end the organisation's reliance on council funding. Instead, a radical shift to seeking regular small donations from supporters has emerged as the best supported initiative. Such crowdsourcing models have been increasingly common for a wealth of community organisations as competition becomes ever fiercer for increasingly limited grants (see e.g. Creamer, 2014; and Dinnie and Holstead, 2018). Based on unanimous consensus amongst those present at the aforementioned meetings, the board of trustees have been tasked with identifying the most appropriate mechanisms to permit online and in-person donations of circa £3 per month. Were upwards of

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<sup>17</sup> The A.L.P. Minutes advise that Eleanor Bird (Scottish National Party), George Gordon (Scottish National Party), and Jim Campbell (Conservative Party) were each contacted in September 2019.

one hundred people to support the project on a monthly basis, A.L.P.'s current provision could be continued indefinitely (based on stated outgoings in A.L.P. [2019c]). This is however, as has become increasingly clear, a difficult goal to achieve.

This is, however, a mammoth task. Reeves (2011) once noted the hundreds of learners involved with the organisation, yet at present, circa eighty learners participate in A.L.P.'s regular educational provision throughout the year<sup>18</sup>, many of whom were attracted to the programme by its prioritisation of ensuring all classes remain free to participants. The introduction of a £3 per month donation model must therefore avoid being perceived as a prerequisite for participation. Rather, the wealth of people who have engaged with A.L.P. over the last forty years - encompassing students, academics, educators, and a range of others - will be asked to consider supporting organisation as a means of ensuring its future. A funding application is now being produced by outgoing board members which may provide funding for an A.L.P. Development Worker on one day per month for twelve months who could focus their efforts on reimagining, rebuilding, and indeed realigning the organisation to their original Freirean ideals. If successful, the Development Worker would have a year to attract a significant enough pool of monthly donors that would allow the project to become self sustaining. Furthermore, were the Development Worker to be funded, the initial wave of supporter donations could be ring fenced by the board of trustees for tutor costs, allowing sessions to be run without a series of outcomes and conditions being imposed by an external funder. It does, however, remain to be seen how successful both the donor model and the Development Worker application will be. In this period of uncertainty, Campbell (forthcoming) notes that '[m]embers of all groups remain committed in terms of attendance, but also in their desire to actively participate - demonstrating both Freire's (1972) belief in 'preoccupation' with learning and commitment to 'reflection [...] upon their world in order to transform it' through art (Freire, 1998).

In their 'About Paulo Freire' webpage, A.L.P. (n.d.) cite his reasoning that '[l]earners must see the need for writing one's life and reading one's reality'. There are certainly elements of this which remain true today - particularly within Fayre for Women whose members identify their own learning needs - yet the project has clearly shifted since its formation forty years ago. Even the Fayre for Women group largely invite experts in as guest speakers on a topic of interest, rather than as co-investigators or 'resource persons or consultants' as Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2001, p.14) suggested was common practice during the organisation's early days. Though classes were initially provided in the early 1980's based on local demand, Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011a, p.2) stressed that 'the influence of Freire led to a shift [...] towards programmes aimed at exploring themes and concerns identified by residents' and 'issue-based' educational, and whilst Democracy Group continue to identify global issues for discussion, the Local Economy Group was perhaps the closest dimension of residents' issues generating themes. Due to low sustained attendance, however, this group ceased to operate in early 2019.

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<sup>18</sup> This figure stems from A.L.P. (2019c) which advises that Art Space 'engag[ed] altogether around 30 new learners through social media and events promotion', and that Fayre for Women 'still has 10 women who attend regularly'. There is an additional caveat that The Glory and The Dismay are currently not meeting on a weekly basis.

In the early 2010, Aslam et al. (2013, p.2) described A.L.P. as ‘an umbrella project composed of a variety of learning circles and groups including, but not restricted to, Paulo Freire Reading Group, Small World, Democracy Group, EL Punto, Gaelic Song: Ceilidh nan Amhrain Gaihligh, and (Re)Humanising the City: The Art of Social Activism’, yet today the diversity of projects has greatly reduced. Indeed, Bradley (in A.L.P., 2019b) expressed her fear that ‘[k]eeping the same activities going without ever questioning if they need to change or grow doesn’t sit well with any of [the board members] and we should question what ALP has become’. Alongside this period of uncertainty, however, work has continued which could expand A.L.P.’s provision beyond the Tollcross and Fountainbridge areas, into the more affluent Morningside area - located in central Edinburgh. A community surveying activity undertaken by two board members at during two research sessions at the Morningside Library (conducted on different times and days so as to ensure a more representative sample of respondents) identified computer literacy skills as a key demand from local people. Digital literacy has previously been an element of A.L.P.’s investigatory work, with many learners eager to better understand and engage with technology during the early 1980’s. A remit of both supporting learners to develop their computer literacy skills whilst also addressing caution over the dangers of the digital age was, at the time, believed to be too great an undertaking and, consequently, the project has handed over to the then-neighbouring St. Brides Community Centre. Almost four decades on, however, this technology-focus learning could finally become part of A.L.P.’s possible future remit. In addition, 2019 brought the fortieth anniversary of the organisation and was heralded as a cause of celebration and with it came a return to A.L.P.’s roots through a return to St. Brides Community Centre which hosted the festivities.

## **Conclusion**

In essence, what this case study of A.L.P. demonstrates is the fundamental dismantling of radical and democratic adult learning opportunities by the neoliberal state. Successive recent Conservative-led U.K. Government administrations have shown a complete disregard for vocational learning opportunities aimed at developing the individual’s intellectual and creative capacities, instead prioritising retraining or upskilling to ensure learners are positioned to contribute to the national economy. However, at the same time, where once Crowther and Martin (2011) praised the ‘strong level of community support’ the organisation benefited from, today the ability to A.L.P. to attract significant numbers to protest the cuts to funding has diminished. Though twenty-six people attended the Save A.L.P. meeting in February 2019 and thirteen members joined the first fundraising subcommittee meeting, such active participation was not sustained. The second fundraising meeting attracted just four learners, with the October 2019 Annual General Meeting generating only three board nominations from the thirteen attendees - this being despite conscious efforts being made during the fortieth anniversary celebrations to encourage participants to consider joining the board. In this sense, the praise Crowther and Martin (idib.) offered for the project’s capacity to remain a ‘living’ entity has finally dwindled. Furthermore, whilst the authors suggested that until 2011 A.L.P.’s work could be

understood in three separate phrases - (i) relocating Freire's ideas into an urban context; (ii) opposing the implementation of neoliberalism through the promotion of social relations; and (iii) linking local and global issues - a fourth phase has perhaps emerged, that of (iv) uncertainty.

The issues facing the Adult Learning Project are far from unique. Rather, they are symptomatic of the state of contemporary adult education - underfunded, ever fewer staffed hours, and pressures to progress learners towards qualifications for employment (see e.g. Biesta, 2011; O'Brien, 2018; Fraser, 2018). The organisation was first established the same year that former U.K. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher came to power and implemented an economically-focused and neoliberal order which has, arguably, continued throughout A.L.P.'s existence. Thatcher's era brought what Kirkwood (1991, p.48) described as 'a sense of impotence in the face of de-industrialisation and the loss of community based on work' alongside a 'rage at the imposition of government policies which were felt to cut across the grain of our collectivist and egalitarian values'. That the last decade has witnessed an emboldening of the core elements of neoliberalism (e.g. the rolling back of the welfare state, reductions to community project funding, etc.) is a threat which, albeit far more severely today, A.L.P. has had to navigate almost since its inception. That the organisation has survived for forty years amidst the prioritisation of qualification-oriented education and an emphasis on immediate interventions is somewhat remarkable. It can, however, be no surprise that this survival is, at least in part, due to the reduced emphasis placed on political action.

Crowther and Martin (2011, p.xvi) note that A.L.P. previously held an explicit 'commitment to Scotland having greater control over its affairs'. Whilst an insider observation from this paper's co-authors would acknowledge that a majority of learners and board members continue to advocate increased autonomy for Scotland as a state, no discussions have taken place in recent years that would align A.L.P. to an official position over further devolution or Scottish independence. The latter was a topic of interest to the Democracy Group, though this never extended to the full organisation and membership. The Scottish Parliament's re-establishment in 1999 may have offered an opportunity for a new kind of politics, however given the split between devolved and reserved powers between the U.K. Government and the Scottish Government, national administrations (along with local governments) have, in many respects, continued to implement a neoliberal form of politics. The Democracy Group in fact engaged in organising public events, for example a hustings in advance of the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum (Sommerville, 2014).

Galloway (2008, p.1) previously stated that 'ALP had been conceived in a world which relied on a broad welfarist consensus, one which had dominated British political life for the previous thirty years, but it was born into a world in which much of this would be undone within a decade.' Despite the current hardships faced by the organisation, that its members' remain as committed as ever, demonstrates the ongoing applicability of his (2008, p.1) belief that the organisation must 'engage people in a programme of reflection and action which responded to the spirit of the times'. A.L.P. was once praised for its 'experiment in cultural borrowing', which Brown (2011, p.x) described as 'an acknowledgement that UK adult educators need to escape from insularity

and recognize the possible value of theories and methods that emerged in ‘the South’, yet gone are days of cutting edge implementation of Freirean educational concepts. So too, the A.L.P. partnerships involving the Scottish Education Department, the Scottish Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (S.I.A.C.E), the Workers Educational Association (W.E.A.), and the local council, as described by Brown (2011) and Kirkwood and Kirkwood (1989; 2011a), are a distant memory. So too, it seems highly unlikely that the local council would once again look to employ A.L.P. workers to educate other community education workers in their once innovative methods. The ‘pride’ Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011a, p.ix) suggested the ‘ALP workers, tutors, students, members, and directors can take in their praxis’ has gradually become distant from the state in which the organisation currently exists. The authors expressed their hope in 2011 that further interpretations of A.L.P. ‘w[ould], no doubt, be offered in the future’ (idib, p.x), with Crowther and Martin (2011) later praising the project for its longevity, whilst Shaw and Crowther (2013) further celebrated the organisation for its ‘ability to demonstrate, through practice, the applicability of Freire’s ideas beyond the boundaries of ‘underdeveloped societies’ and beyond the teaching of literacy’. It is therefore unfortunate that this latest chapter in A.L.P.’s history is one of uncertainty and hardship. Crowther (2013, p.2) stressed that over decades of practice, A.L.P. ‘has been re-inventing itself, introducing new theoretical resources and relating to new constituencies to adapt to the changing times’. Based on the circumstances the organisations faces today, it becomes clear this this moment once again presents the need to either re-invent itself or face accepting that it no longer operates in the Freirean-inspired role it was founded upon.

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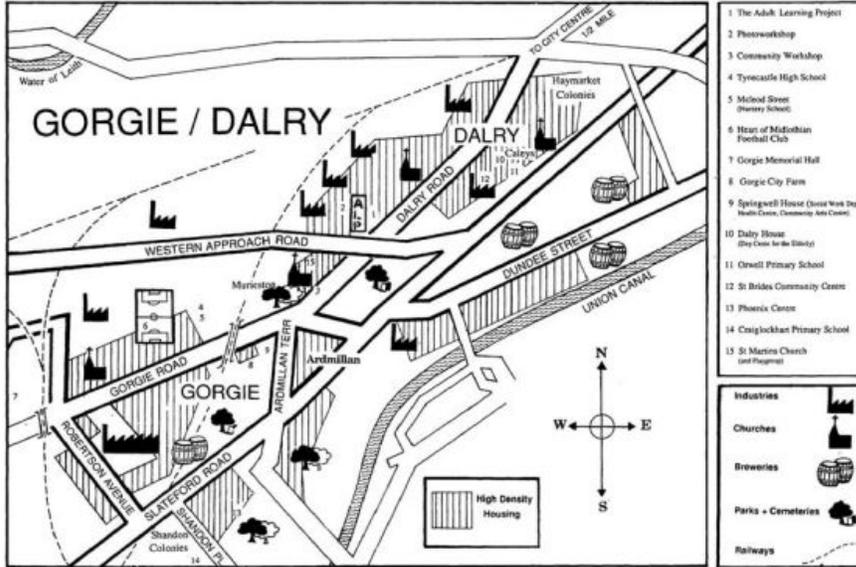
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# Appendices

## Appendix #1



1. Map of Gorgie Dalry

Taken from Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011a, p.3).

## Appendix #2



A photograph of the former A.L.P. base (Google Street View, 2019)

## Appendix #3

# THE ADULT LEARNING PROJECT (ALP)

Free Adult Education Classes for 2017

at Tollcross Community Centre

## The Democracy Group

A space for democratic participation, with content negotiated by the group, and discussion and dialogue around issues such as Brexit, Human Rights, Government Finance and Local Tax.

**Mondays**  
4:45 - 6:45pm

## Fayre For Women

We are a self-educating group of women. We plan programmes with talks given by members, speakers and visits to interesting places. We support each other and share useful information.

**Tuesdays**  
1 - 3:30pm

## Glory and Dismay

A group for football fans to build writing skills, improve communication skills and meet others. Will include guest speakers and occasional events.

**Thursdays**  
7 - 9pm

## Aye Write!

Weekly, informal writers group. Bring along your own pieces to share with others. Very relaxed and supportive. Beginners welcome.

**Fridays**  
4 - 6pm

## DRB Women's History Group

This group sheds a light on heroines of the past and records them for future generations. Share and learn in a supportive and cooperative place.

**TBC**

### New Groups!

#### Art Space for Women

A space to create art and to explore gender, art and social justice.

This group will look at how wider global factors impact on the local economy and community.

#### Local Economy Group

Get in touch or come along to one of our open meetings on the 4th Friday of every month.



Tollcross Community Centre,  
117 Fountainbridge,  
Edinburgh, EH3 9QG  
01312285800

[alp.association@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:alp.association@hotmail.co.uk)

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A sample programme of recent A.L.P. provision (2017).

Appendix #4



Photographed: One of the A.L.P. learners pinning up a photograph of the late member who handbuilt the bookcase.