Researching the legacy of Richard Hoggart the adult educator

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It is now over 60 years since Richard Hoggart was appointed as staff tutor in English Literature at the University College of Hull. At the same time that Hoggart was appointed, Hull made five other extra-mural appointments, reflecting the planned expansion of the sector. It was also a time when extra-mural departments laid claim to their geographical territories. This was significant for Hoggart because his first appointment was to locate him in Cleveland, some 80 miles to the north of the city of Kingston-upon-Hull. Within a decade Hoggart was to assure his place in extra-mural history with the publication of *The Uses of Literacy* in 1957. From his autobiographical account (Hoggart 1990), it is evident that Hoggart acknowledges that the publication of this book was to prove to be a landmark in the development of his subsequent academic career in mainstream higher education.

Hoggart is often written about as one of the trinity of extra-mural tutors to emerge in the 1950s, who were to play significant roles in the development of what we now recognise as cultural studies. The other two were Edward P. Thompson and Raymond Williams. Both Thompson and Williams were renowned for their commitment to Marxism and historical analysis. Williams published his book *Culture and Society* just after *The Uses of Literacy* appeared, in 1957. At this time, Thompson was working on his voluminous *The Making of the English Working Class*, which was published in 1963.

Each of the three acknowledged the influence of the others' writings, which were to become major works that reflected concerns in post-war Britain for the ‘crisis’ in culture and the role of education in bringing about transformation. According to Hoggart:

> For all three of us the largish books which first brought us to attention were begun during those early years in extra-mural education…we each had a sense of the special social importance of our day-by-day work, a belief in the need for developed minds and imaginations – especially in wide-open commercial pyramidal societies – a sense of the many and major injustices in the lives of working people and so a deep suspicion the power of class in Britain. Thus we all, in our different ways, started on studies which embodied our interest in cultural change, politics, and
communication or lack of communication, between the parts of this greatly divided society (1990, 96)

It is significant that all three wrote these books whilst working as adult education tutors: Hoggart in Hull, Thompson at the University of Leeds, and Williams who began as a tutor with the Workers’ Education Association in Oxford before moving to the University of Cambridge. After Williams died in 1988, his biography became well researched. MacIlroy and Westwood (1993) focused in their book on his life in the 1940s and 1950s when Williams, like Hoggart and Thompson, was most fully engaged in teaching adults. MacIlroy and Westwood (1993) argued that had Williams and Hoggart been in a traditional UK university English department at that time, they would have been ‘simply literary critics’ with a dissident voice. For MacIlroy and Westwood, the experience of teaching in university adult education was very significant in giving Williams and Hoggart the space and the place to reflect, discuss, and critique popular literature and its place in culture.

In this paper, we want to report a detailed investigation of Hoggart’s life as an adult educator, about which little has been known apart from what he himself wrote in the second volume of his autobiographical trilogy, *A Sort of Clowning Life and Times 1940-1959*. It is in this volume that Hoggart describes himself as a ‘wandering teacher’. We have been analyzing why university adult education at the time in the UK offered the space and place for ‘wandering’ into radicalism, not just in social and community action, but in intellectual ideas, producing publications that were to contribute to the transformation of both English Literature and the study of history. Hoggart explains how he had time for writing:

Partly this was because extra-mural university teaching, for all its stresses, does give you – if you are willing to work unusually hard - up to one third of your time free each working day (you take classes in the evenings and prepare for them in the other third of the day); it also provides, because your autumn and spring terms are long, a wonderfully expansive summer gap (though summer and weekend schools increasingly interfere). These are less important impulses to the writing of those books than this fact: that the experience of adult teaching itself shaped and informed the very nature of the works themselves as they developed .... (1990, 96)

In fact, he later adds:

Professionally, the years at Hull, the Fifties, were years of teaching-and-writing. The hyphenated form is meant to indicate that the two activities were almost entirely enmeshed. This is one of the great advantages and pleasure of university external teaching. Your subject may and should be your central professional focus, but you have no captive audience. Your students come to classes by choice and often at considerable inconvenience; their backgrounds vary and their kinds of capacity; they are not examination-selected and semi-captive eighteen to twenty-one-
year olds. Without reducing the demands of the subject you have to ask yourself how you would implicitly justify to your students their expenditure of time and trouble, how best you can link their studies with their own experiences, and what that must involve in shaping a course and finding the proper works to present it (1990, 123)

McGuigan (2006, 200) refers to the extra-mural environment as the 'breeding ground' that was to significantly contribute to the subsequent development of cultural studies as a discipline. This view is supported by Steele (1997), who points not only to Hoggart’s literary writings, but to his ‘extensive’ writings on adult education matters, not so much on cultural studies issues as pedagogical concerns. Hoggart frequently reiterates how the role played by the students (who, according to Blyth (1983) he calls the ‘earnest minority’) must not be underestimated, and stresses their contribution to the classes in experience, enthusiasm and attitude:

(Tawney) and other early tutors also said that their tutorial classes helped redefine their subjects, that social history or industrial relations began to look different if you discussed them for three years, week after week, with adults who had had much living evidence of social history and daily experience of industrial relations, For me much later, similar implicit but powerful challenges to the definition of my subject – English Literature – led me to move out to the area I called contemporary cultural studies.

It might be assumed that those who came to this work more than forty years after Tawney would not find such potentialities in so many of their students .... Nevertheless studying literature week after week for two hours with tutorial classes, I too – and those who started at the same time - was impressed by the capacity, the intelligence and imagination which the most unexpected students would show, whether they were motor mechanics or low-paid clerks, or retired shop assistants or what used to be called ‘ordinary housewives’. (1990, 95)

In the process of our research, a number of issues about historical evidence have emerged that we wish to discuss in the paper. These issues include purely practical questions about accessing sources of data at a time when the closure of university extramural departments means we have lost a potentially rich source of historical evidence of the commitment in the immediate post-war period towards university adult education, as the universities hosting extramural departments have closed them down with little attention being paid to the protection of the rich heritage of the era. Both the authors of this paper have experienced closure of the extra-mural departments in their universities and, in both instances, much historical and archival data appears to be have been lost.
So, what can we know about Hoggart the extra-mural tutor? The first point to note is that Hoggart was appointed to teach in the period that was to be referred to by distinguished adult educators such as Harold Wiltshire as ‘Great Tradition’ (Rogers 1976), and by Blyth (1983) as a ‘unique’ tradition. In retrospect, Hoggart has been seen as representative of that ‘great, unique tradition’. Whereas his peers, Thompson and Williams, had strong political commitments that led them away from being identified with the Great Tradition, Hoggart’s teaching project was to enable the ‘earnest minority’ who would not typically have had the privilege of an education, to benefit from a university education – what we now refer to as access and widening participation. At that time – before any ideas on award-bearing, accredited provision - there was no great drive to encourage the working classes to participate in higher education.

Hoggart’s view, in contradiction to that of Leavis, was that there were working-class people (his earnest minority) - like himself - who were interested and able to study at university level, if they could be encouraged to participate in ‘culturalist’ readings and discussions of literature. In his lecture given in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Glasgow’s adult education department in 2001, Hoggart admitted that he felt as though he was a part of a ‘crusade, centred on the correct conviction that many people, far too many .... lacked the kind of education they could benefit from ...’(Hoggart 2001, 1). Much later in his life, Hoggart campaigned against ‘dumbing down’ popularism, which reflected his early extramural commitments to opening up intellectual endeavours to the working classes, themes which resonated through his The Uses of Literacy. Hoggart was wary of condescension and the patronage of the working-class intelligentsia. He was above all concerned with the significance of the ever-increasing commercialisation of popular culture at the level of the lowest, rather than the highest, common denominator. Hoggart was well aware that he was – in the title of a later published collection of essays, Between Two Worlds; or as Steele (1997) put it: ‘between cultures.’ According to Hoggart, what working-class students needed was more than literacy, but ‘critical’ literacy (Turner 2007; Long and Blackshaw 2000), and beyond that ‘cultivated’ literacy which means arriving at the ability to read other than functionally … it means being more than critical in our reactions to what we see, hear and read, but being open, intellectually and imaginatively responsive. Creative reading, it might also be called. (Hoggart 2000, 197)

Steele recognised the contribution Hoggart made to the teaching of literature to adults in his early years as an extra-mural tutor. One of his earliest pieces of writing on pedagogical issues, was, ‘Prolegomena to the second session’ in The Tutors’ Bulletin (Hoggart 1947). Hoggart thought that literature and the humanities were taking ‘second place to the social sciences in adult education, with the result that those who came for enlightenment were given only ‘bread’.’ (Steele 1997, 120). ‘In effect’, continued Steele,
Ultimately, the aesthetic, the cultural and the political were to come together in an interdisciplinary way to form cultural studies. ‘the minority who came to adult education were being starved of an aesthetic education because of a narrowly political outlook, which argued that workers needed to know how the economy, politics and society actually worked before they could become cultured’ (Steele 1997, 120).

And the ‘workers came for bread’, but ‘they were only given cake’ (Steele 1997, 120). Given the significance of his social class background, it was interesting that Hoggart claimed in this article that adult education students were no longer classified by social class; rather, they were seen as the ‘dispossessed’, a class defined not by its sociological position, but by its ‘cultural loss or scarcity’, a class that was ‘reacting deep down against the vile mass culture of our day’, a theme that echoes throughout *The Uses of Literacy*. The antidote was not submersion in the sociological functionalist analyses, which would only produce ‘social functionaries,’ but ‘the development of the aesthetic sense, the training of taste’ (Steele 1997, 121). In Hoggart’s adult education classes, it would appear that his commitment was to the cultural, not the sociological. At a conference for teachers of English, in the early 1950s, Hoggart talked about the importance of teaching poetry – ‘because literature embodies this questioning of the quality of life concretely and in particular, rather than abstractly and in generalisations’ (as in psychology or sociology).

... the literature class draws those who have become tired or suspicious of the larger abstractions, who feel that literature will speak to their condition better than philosophy or psychology, because it is still dealing manifestly with life they live as persons, the life in which they make love, quarrel, eat and sleep. (1952, 180).

To achieve this, Hoggart was thinking about his approach to classwork. He was coming to the conclusion that what was needed was more intensive study than two hours a week for 24 weeks, and to undertake more challenging tasks that would stretch their intellectual capacities. These were his reflections on the tutorial class:

The tutorial class had the simplicity and tensile strength of most greatly inspiring ideas. It assumed a group of twelve to fifteen adults, willing to come together regularly under the same tutor, for a two-hour meeting. Willing also to commit themselves to attending, so far as ever possible, twenty-four of those weekly meetings throughout each of three successive winters (roughly from October to March). They had to promise to involve themselves in continuous study, steady background reading, and the writing of regular essays and other written work throughout those three years, a very tall order, a very puritanical order straight out of the serious, self-improving tuition which was so strong in parts of the working-class, fed by church, chapel, trade unions and friendly societies. Characteristic
also was the strongly-held belief that this work should lead to no tangible reward. No diplomas, no ‘credits’; knowledge and self-improvement were sufficient rewards in themselves. (1990, 94)

Asking questions about Richard Hoggart as an extra-mural teacher raises issues about the sources of data. Most of his contemporaries, including those appointed at the same time, are already dead, as Hoggart himself acknowledged in the second volume of his autobiography, published in 1991. Eighteen years later, any evidence of Hoggart as a teacher is likely to exist in a range of publications, some of which may have been initially archived (for example, class reports written for the University of Hull), but not kept. Apart from tracking down Hoggart’s own writings about pedagogy how else could we find out about Hoggart the extra-mural tutor? Primary sources of data are now problematic. Hoggart himself is now well into his nineties. We did try to arrange to speak to him through his publisher but were told he was too frail to receive visitors. We were invited to submit a list of questions, which we did but as yet have received no reply. What we have closest to primary data are his writings, but these are secondary sources. Access to these we found somewhat restricted, and were dependent on the tertiary sources provided through Steele (1997).

Of course, Hoggart himself has helped too. In the second volume of *Speaking to Each Other*, there are two significant autobiographical contributions to discussions about his pedagogy. The first of these pays tribute to Professor Bonamy Dobrée (Steele 2008), who taught him at the University of Leeds (where Hoggart was an undergraduate). Hoggart reports that although he felt that Dobrée was ‘rather grand’, and that was deeply impressed by the number of books he owned and had read, he did ‘not seek ‘to imitate him, or to be like him, except in some professional particulars’ (1973, 190). The second focused very specifically on teaching literature to adults in the university extra-mural setting. Although this account has been used to show Hoggart’s distinctive approach to teaching literature (Nixon, 2007, p.64), it is also a classic statement on university extra-mural classes. The language is interesting because it conveys a sense of struggle, not necessarily from the student perspective, but that of the teacher. He talks of a ‘heavy burden’ in being responsible for preparing the classes; he worries about the ‘dangers’ which are ‘numerous’, and the ‘difficult task of trying to establish the right relationship’ – which Hoggart describes as ‘intimate’ – with the students in his classes (Hoggart 1973, 206). His pedagogy is revealed: ‘One proceeds, as far as possible, by question and answer; one has to envisage beforehand the main lines on which the discussion is likely to run, and yet be flexible enough to alter the plan if more urgent issues arise; and one hasn’t to be afraid of an occasional vacuum and so speak too quickly or often’. (Hoggart 1973, 210) Sound advice for any beginning tutor in adult education!
He was pondering the need to work with students to develop more than one speed of reading. To undertake more intensive study students needed to develop their capacity for ‘slow reading that is both thoughtful and sensitive’ (Hoggart 1954, 182). The article written by Hoggart was considering strategies for enabling students to increase their range and depth of reading, going beyond poetry that is ‘overtly moralizing or romantic’. He believed that many of his students at this time were romantic. He gave advice on how to encourage students to increase the depth of their reading, making suggestions for exercises that could be used in the classroom, and through homework. He offered teaching tips for ‘choosing the right time’ to ‘condemn’ students’ work, which could only be ‘for the right reasons,’ and only ‘based on literary judgements’. Hoggart suggested organising working groups rather than what would be traditionally recognised as a ‘class’. Not for the only time, he recommended that teachers should ‘only connect’ with their student groups. His final message to tutors in that early article was to ‘Learn to wait’: ‘We have to learn to wait; to wait during some evenings through a silence of the whole group; to wait until perhaps a number of entire meetings have passed for one or two individuals to speak.’ (1954, 187)

Attached to this chapter were ‘Notes on Extra-mural Teaching’ of the kind that an historian of university adult education might expect to find in university archives, that might have been kept for decades by any Department of Adult Education, including that in Hull. Archives such as class records would give us insight not only into Hoggart’s views on teaching and his students’ learning, but perhaps also a student perspective on his teaching. There would appear to be a paucity of such data, and we now depend on searching for autobiographical accounts, memoirs produced by former tutors and students. Here we are fortunate that Hoggart as a literature tutor recognised the importance of keeping written accounts, and of continuous reflecting – autobiographically - on his life and work. But what about the experiences of botany tutors or the archaeologists who spent much of their time with extra-mural classes on the North Yorkshire Moors, or the geologists paddling in streams and across rivers in the Yorkshire Dales? Where are there stories?

As with any such archival records, including registers, those who work in the sector will suspect the accuracy, the authenticity, the reliability and therefore the validity of such records. But first we must first do more to protect the heritage of such research evidence. In an age of digitalisation, maybe much data is now being stored electronically and could be made more accessible without the researcher having to search through the cellars of condemned buildings or rummage through skips to rescue archives of class reports and evaluation feedback forms. There are examples of what we might call ‘good practice’ emerging. In a frustrating search for a copy of a paper that appeared in Adult Education (Hoggart, 1948), a year before our own library and personal collections of the journal began, we uncovered the article in a vast depository of well over 100 (472 pages) ‘really useful’ documents for
research purpose, put together by Peter Jarvis and Colin Griffin (2003). However, we were only able to access five of the eight pages of the article as an electronic publication, and were unable to find a copy of the complete resources. Even our own university library does not have a copy. But this looks like the kind of very useful historical resources which would enable us to get on with tackling the challenges of historiographical issues that undertaking such research poses, set in contemporary debates about evidence-based practice and research-led teaching.

References

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