Ettore Gelpi, *Education des Adultes: Inclusion et Exclusion. Manifeste pour une Democratie Internationale,* ('The Education of Adults: Inclusion and Exclusion. A Manifesto for an International Democracy'). Rennes, ATOPIES, Documents pédagogiques du DESS COGEF – No. 4, Conduite et Gestion de projets en Éducation et Formation. 189 pp., 1997.

In my workshops for adult educators, I sometimes ask participants to tell me 'something that they *know* is true'. The question raises the issue of how we construct knowledge, and of the mechanisms that we use to validate that knowledge. What causes me to 'know', for example, that today is Tuesday and not Wednesday? Are my beliefs based on perceptible evidence, on social convention, or some edifice of reasoned deduction? Is there a difference between these various types of knowledge, and if so, what is the nature of that difference?

Of course, an important characteristic of 'knowing' is that not everyone agrees so readily about most things as they do about naming the day of the week. The world is too complex to be reduced to a single set of interpretations, and we must rely on our individual subjective understanding in order to negotiate the complexities of everyday life. Similarly, the act of learning is dependent on our ability to make sense of the infinite variety of stimuli that make up the realm of our perception. To achieve this remarkable feat, we need to engage in the collective act of knowledge-building, for there is nothing of value that we can know alone.

Unlike schoolchildren, adults have the capacity to collectively define the issues that they investigate, the science they wish to construct. Thus, any reflection on the subject of adult learning must address the issue of what it is that is being learned, in other words ask, 'What is the knowledge being created or shared?'

Ettore Gelpi's book, subtitled *Manifesto for an International Democracy* is both an analysis of the current ideological trappings of knowledge construction in Europe and the developing world, and an appeal to justice and equity via the powerful medium of adult education and training. For Gelpi, there is no act more laden with political authority than that of knowing. Populations whose basic needs are most wanting often find their identity distorted or threatened by knowledge propelled in the wake of so-called developmental determinism. In this manner, education can become an 'instrument of violence' in our post-colonial times. However, that observation runs with a corollary: adult education also represents a powerful tool for emancipation, and it needs not be confined to dominant paradigms. This is exemplified by recent initiatives within the labour movement, where paradoxically much of the attention has focused on unemployment – the semantic opposite of 'labour'.

The value of knowledge is largely tributary to the interests that it serves. In this

sense, the only 'true' knowledge is such that provides the knower with instruments of self-fulfilment. Gelpi observes that adult education may result in people making political choices that run contrary to their own interests. Similarly, the exportation of educational programs from rich to poor countries tends to marginalise local culture and reflect a hegemonic, rather than a democratic agenda.

Part I of Gelpi's book is devoted to issues of marginality and culture, culminating in an analysis of the relationship between Western Europe and Mediterranean Africa in chapter 6. Here we recognise the author's ability to consider both features and defects, advantages and inconveniences, conflicts and compromises as part of a larger, fecund dialectic between historical forces. We could have been presented with the usual assortment of post-colonial recrimination and resentment, but rather, Gelpi balances the 'conflict and richness' of Euro-Arab relations, and the historical interchangeability of the roles of victor and vanquished. He also points out that the traditional meeting places of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are now enriched with a growing culture of agnosticism both in Africa and Europe. He calls for a review of the relations between the two continents, and proposes a thoughtful realignment of economic, political and cultural exchanges. In chapter 7, Gelpi calls for the increased independence of international administrators in order to avoid the commodification of multilateral co-operation.

In Part II, Gelpi exposes professional/vocational training as an inadequate response to global de-structuring. He distinguishes between the notions of work, employment and citizenship, three areas where adult education can make a difference, but only if it addresses the collective dimension of human experience. By individualising education and training, we become reliant on the false notion of 'competence', which Gelpi equates with 'competition'. In the context of globalisation, much of what passes as vocational education becomes an 'alibi to persuade workers in the North and South to reduce the cost of labour by increasing its intensity.' This, warns Gelpi, is a political agenda. Therefore, adult education must respond to the larger political/economic/cultural issues of production and work, rather than be contained within the ideological enclosure of individualistic, competency-based training.

Ettore Gelpi's book, *Education des Adultes: Inclusion et Exclusion* raises fundamental issues that challenge our current thinking in the areas of adult education and training. It offers a global perspective on the politics of exclusion and the role of adult education both as a potential accessory to the exclusion process, or as a valuable opposing force. While carefully avoiding a sanctimonious or moralising tone, Gelpi succeeds in depicting the urgency of action in the face of fundamental world issues which inform and are informed by the adult education experience.

Paul Bouchard,
Concordia University, Montreal