

BOOK REVIEW

Clancy, S, *Sir George Trevelyan, Residential Adult Education and the New Age: 'To Open the Immortal Eye'*, Switzerland, Springer, 2023, 275 pp., ISBN 978-3031-359-545 (hbk)

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This is a novel book expertly written by a leading researcher in the fields of political and adult education (AE), lifelong learning, and social justice. Sharon Clancy, Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership and Management, brings extensive experience as a voluntary sector leader, chief executive officer, and chair; serving as a commissioner, communications officer, and co-editor, while leading international events and research on education inequality, social change, and historical AE (ResearchGate, 2024; University of Nottingham, 2024).

This reader-friendly book transports you back in time; but it may not be the typical book to take on holiday. The subtitle "*To open the immortal eye*" accurately describes Clancy's actions throughout the book by investigating the history of the Shropshire Adult Education College (SAEC), a residential Adult Education College in the United Kingdom (UK), and its impact on the New Age movement. Her meticulous research - originally her Ph.D. study - includes photographs and over a hundred interviews with former students and staff, documented in the Appendices. These make the book a reference guide for scholars, educators, researchers, and policymakers, providing a vivid depiction of what 21st-century education should entail; grounded not only in theory, but also in practical insight, by understanding the complex interplay between educational ideologies, societal values, and institutional structures (Alpaydin & Demirli, 2022). This informative work in the context of AE encourages social change, echoing the thoughts voiced by researchers, particularly Sir Richard Livingstone and Barry J. Hake.

This peer-reviewed exploration of residential AE is part of Palgrave Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning series. Endorsed by researchers like Colin Waugh, Mark Freeman, Barrie Trinder, and Linden West, it investigates the interaction between policy and provision in this sector. Despite its length and intensity, the book is bound to enhance the reader's understanding of residential AE and lifelong learning, regardless of one's degree of competence. Indeed, Clancy's research reveals how Sir George Lowthian Trevelyan, SAEC's Warden, developed innovative AE courses.

Unravelling history's complexities in the first two chapters, and their impact on present-day actions – the book invites “backward travellers” (p. xii) to dwell on historical insights with agency in the future of residential AE (SpringerLink, 2024). Clancy pays tribute to Trevelyan's fascinating forward-thinking methodology and innovative educational philosophy. Particularly, by incorporating spiritual and esoteric subjects, and a holistic approach inspired by the Danish Folk High School movement and Grundtvig's ‘School of Life’ (p. 26). The aim was to cultivate flexible citizens through tutorial-based learning necessary to fostering relevant societal change (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2009), dialogue and experiential learning.

Chapter 3 explores SAEC's historical trajectory from medieval origins, highlighting its dissimilarity from children's education and the tension between self-directed and state-controlled paradigms. The narrative examines pivotal moments like monastic learning, Mechanics Institutes, and Settlement movements, revealing how residential AE reinforced societal stratification. To further immerse the reader into the correct mindset, Clancy explains Lollard's revolt and how the mercantile class led to shifts towards mental cultivation while Industrialisation adapted education to societal needs (Alpaydm & Demirli, 2022).

Chapter 4 is central to this book because it explores SAEC within theoretical frameworks and historical perspectives, emphasising AE's role as a catalyst for social change and highlighting the author's conviction that AE is a response to and a creator of societal transformation (Mayo, 1994). This is done by drawing parallels with medieval notions of education concerning the cultivation of free individuals (Keddie, 2018). Moreover, Chapter 4 discusses the struggles between individualism and collectivism, integrating theoretical perspectives from Paulo Freire and Raymond Williams that underscore the transformative potential of AE, and conscientisation as particularly relevant in understanding education as a tool for raising social consciousness and collective action (Fiallos, 2011).

Chapters 5 and 6, analyse SAEC's transformation from post-war hardship to the 1960s, and its scope; highlighting socio-political dynamics, ideological underpinnings, and the tensions between tradition and progressivism in repurposing historic country houses for education. This adds value to literature by placing the reader in the correct perspective appreciating the scenario, the College's impact on society, its strengths under Trevelyan's leadership, his aristocratic background, inclusivity, and his successor, George Toms. Clancy does not explicitly highlight the College's limitations. To mention a few, for instance, although Trevelyan's commitment to inclusivity is impressive, his aristocratic background might have posed challenges in fostering a truly inclusive environment. Despite striving to democratise educational access, highlighting SAEC's role in postwar educational reforms; and providing vital insights on leadership, ideology, and institutional dynamics that help shape SAEC's enduring legacy, the College may have struggled to reach marginalised or underrepresented communities.

In Chapters 6 and 8, Clancy (2017) depicts Trevelyan as an educational pioneer and a charismatic New Age leader. Considering class-based, political, and cultural perspectives, Clancy examines the importance of memory, place, and space in understanding the significance of SAEC, utilising oral history and archival materials to uncover and re-present its story, exposing the transformative impression on students and staff.

Details of Trevelyan's visionary leadership explained in Chapters 7 and 8, are evident in SAEC's evolving curriculum, which encompassed diverse subjects reflecting his interests, personal struggles, and unique vision of cosmological, spiritual, and ecological unity.

Trevelyan's educational legacy is shaped by his experiences in Germany, craft apprenticeship, and wartime involvement with the Army Bureau of Current Affairs; while his dynamic engagement with diverse ideologies reflects his progressive ethos. Clancy explains that Trevelyan's experimental approach - inclusivity and interdisciplinary learning - faced tensions with local demand and intellectual stimulation. This is unsurprising given Trevelyan's tendency to push boundaries to extremes, especially when shifting towards elitist and esoteric courses that ventured excessively beyond mainstream educational significance. This criticism ultimately led to financial instability, culminating in SAEC's closure under Toms' tenure in 1975.

In relation to this, Chapter 9 further examines SAEC's legacy and its demise. Trevelyan's contributions to New Age thinking, environmentalism, and sustainable development are scrutinised, emphasising holistic education and

spiritual interconnectedness. Clancy discusses the future of residential AE, amidst challenges like privatisation and commercialisation; questions the alignment of mindfulness with societal inequalities (Rashkova, Moi, & Cabiddu, 2024; Oman, 2023), advocating for AE's core mission: fostering social change (Mayo, 1994; Thompson, 2018). Clancy also emphasises the transformative potential of residential education (Clancy & Holford, 2018; Lenehan, 2017). This chapter calls for re-evaluation and utopian thinking to revitalise education and democratic dialogue (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2009).

In sum, this engaging book intertwines personal experiences, inviting readers to critically examine the complex post-war AE dynamics and legacies of institutions like SAEC.

Clancy's core argument on education, particularly amidst democratic crisis, is crucial. She presents the book as personal and political, urging action, expressing anger and sadness, while aligning with Williams' concept that true radicalism fosters hope over despair (p. xi-xii). Through a process of "looking forward backwards" (p. xii), Clancy aims to explore alternative educational visions for radical humanist social change, providing practical insights rather than focusing solely on theoretical frameworks.

Written in an organised and logical manner, with detailed narratives supported by numerous citations from trustworthy sources, the book is an outstanding reference and source of information.

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