

Education for Social Change: The many histories of Woodcraft Folk

A symposium co-organised by UCL, University of Brighton and Woodcraft Folk

15 September 2018, University College London

To mark the transfer of Woodcraft Folk's archive to UCL,¹ and working towards Woodcraft Folk's 100th anniversary in 2025, *Education for Social Change* examines the organisation's long-standing and innovative engagement with children and young people. The event will explore Woodcraft Folk's contribution to progressive educational practices and philosophies designed to promote young people's empowerment, the development of their critical thinking, and the confidence and ability to participate in many different levels of decision-making (from familial to national). Woodcraft Folk's aim, since its inception, has been to utilise education as a tool for social change towards the 'fashioning of a new world'. The symposium will evaluate these contributions, examining how the practices of Woodcraft Folk have framed the experience of adolescence over the last century, often in opposition to the prevailing social and cultural norms, and, equally importantly, it will explore how young people have articulated their identities and experiences inside the organisation over the same period.

In so doing, the symposium will examine not only the place of Woodcraft Folk within a broader set of progressive educational approaches but also its distinctiveness in how these ideas were (and are) understood and acted upon. Crucially, the symposium will explore not only the successes and achievements of the organisation but, in the spirit of critical engagement with the archive and histories, also those times when Woodcraft Folk failed in its ambitions or struggled to meet the challenges of changing approaches and values.

This symposium is intended as a forum for the exchange of new and original research on the history and impact of Woodcraft Folk in relation to studies of youth and of progressive education. It aims to bring together researchers from a range of backgrounds and perspectives, inside and outside Woodcraft Folk. We hope that the symposium will result in a book of edited contributions developed from the papers presented. As such, participation in the event also involves a commitment to work towards publication.

Suggestive (but not exhaustive) areas for exploration include:

- How far can the aims and principles of Woodcraft Folk, and its activities (camping, group night activities, badge work, etc) be understood in terms of progressive education? To what extent do these mirror or oppose practices of other youth organisations?

¹ Parts of Woodcraft Folk's archive were previously stored at the LSE. From 2018 the archive will be transferred to UCL, where it will be supplemented by significant amounts of previously uncatalogued and unavailable material from the organisation and elsewhere, and where it will be developed for use in a range of educational and archival projects.

- To what extent can Woodcraft Folk be positioned at the vanguard of progressive educational practice in Britain? Has Woodcraft Folk influenced progressive educational developments, and/or does it adopt and adapt ideas and practices from elsewhere?
- To what extent has Woodcraft Folk had a clear relationship with the Labour Movement? To what extent has Woodcraft Folk provided a political education similar to that of other socialist and democratic youth movements (for example, International Falcon Movement / Socialist Education International)?
- In what ways has co-operative learning been central to Woodcraft Folk? How can this be understood as part of its relationship with the Co-operative Movement? How has that relationship shifted over time?
- How far have the educational practices and objectives of Woodcraft Folk been able to reflect and adapt to changing priorities and struggles in society, such as pacifism, feminism, environmental politics, anti-racism, civil rights, LGBTQ+ and disabled rights? Can we characterise Woodcraft Folk as a radical and disruptive organisation or a more guarded and traditional one?
- Woodcraft Folk has a strong and proud tradition of internationalism. What has this meant for the educational work and other activities of the organisation? What are its relationships with international youth groups, past and present? How has internationalism impacted on members and their sense of a global outlook?

Please submit proposals for 20-minute presentations to Annebella Pollen a.pollen@brighton.ac.uk by 30 March 2018, including a title, a brief abstract (300 words) that explains how your paper will address the symposium themes, a 2-3 sentence biography, and your contact details.