

Learning Outside the Academy

International research
perspectives on lifelong learning

Edited by

**Richard Edwards, Jim Gallacher
and Susan Whittaker**



Learning Outside the Academy

Learning that takes place outside the academy has been an important area of research in a number of countries in recent years. Experiential learning, informal learning, community-based learning and learning in the workplace have become significant areas of research, practice and policy, in particular as attempts have been made to provide avenues for recognition of such learning within the formal institutions of education and training.

Drawing upon international research into these areas, this book examines empirically and theoretically how different strands of research can contribute to each other, thereby enhancing the understanding of learning in diverse contexts. The expert contributors draw upon their own research in these areas and reflect on the methods used when conducting research and the challenges posed.

Looking at a diverse range of issues the book offers a vital snapshot of current research topics including:

- European policies of non-formal learning
- The combination of work and learning
- Knowledge and learning in social movements
- Possibilities for further research.

The contributions to this book are based on material presented at the second international conference on lifelong learning held at the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, UK. In establishing a wider framework for debate about the meaning and significance of lifelong learning, this timely and thought-provoking book will provide practitioners and researchers in the field with a relevant and contemporary discussion on some key and topical ideas about non-formal education.

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Introduction

Tangled up in learning

*Richard Edwards, Jim Gallacher and
Susan Whittaker*

Introduction

It is a truism that much learning takes place outside of educational institutions. It is a truism with a history. Yet it is also the case that the majority of research on learning has focused on the institutionalized and structural arrangements of formally provided education and training, in particular schooling and higher education. This focus has meant that learning in domains outside the academy has not received as much attention as it might, despite the fact that most of us spend only a limited time as students in formal education and training institutions. Even among children, learning *outside* of schooling is not a major topic of research. For those beyond adolescence and early adulthood, learning in the many contexts of our lives, however defined, is something that we just do. Don't we?

This book is a contribution to a wider body of work that has developed that focuses on researching the lifewide and lifelong learning in which people engage outwith education and training institutions. This work has emerged and developed in a range of areas, around notions and practices of informal learning, experiential learning, work-based learning and community-based learning. While not new, these strands of research have gained greater profile due to policy-led developments in many countries, particularly those of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to promote cultures of lifelong learning. The implications of this higher profile are of course ambiguous, as greater attention can also result in greater regulation through quality and assessment regimes. Thus, within the academy, there is much interest in what goes on outwith it, with all the power and colonizing dynamics potentially and actually associated with this.

Each of these areas of learning outside the academy are contested. Different conceptual framings are drawn upon to help make sense of them and to provide different illuminations of the practices of learning and their significance. These conceptual framings tend to reflect the wider positions and debates in education on what constitutes the knowledge base for the subject. While too crude to consider as a dichotomy or continuum, these framings range from the technical – questions of effective pedagogy – to the political; from learning theory to political economy.

Thus, in relation to work-based learning, for instance, one finds positions that seek to maximize the learning undertaken in and through the workplace as a form of job enrichment, alongside views that this is an enhanced form of exploitation of an already exploited labour force. Similarly, in relation to experiential learning, there are those who view the recognition, assessment and accreditation of this as a challenge to the formal curriculum, while others view it as a colonization of the lifeworld. Many of these differing positions are represented in this book. For instance, the chapters by Linda Cooper and Judy Harris draw on learning theory to examine learning in social movements and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) respectively, while Helen Colley and her colleagues seek to provide an analysis of informal learning informed by political economy.

We are entering deeply contested waters therefore. However, one thing is shared by all those with an interest in learning outside the academy. This is the view expressed by, among others, the contributors to Chaiklin and Lave (1996), that all social practices involve learning, even if the way in which these practices are conceptualized is more contentious. What is also clear is that there is a complex quilt of research into this learning, with sub-arenas and their associated networks, conferences and journals. People interested in experiential learning do not necessarily relate directly to those interested in work-based learning. There are conceptual affinities between informal learning and experiential learning, but these are not always explored in the literature. Community-based learning tends to engage with work-based learning simply in opposition to 'the new work order'. Inevitably these are gross over-simplifications and generalizations. There are of course crossovers and connections. We are tangled up in learning therefore and learning theory may itself be in a tangle. There are also empirical and conceptual borrowings and shared trajectories of enquiry. Many of these are highlighted in the selection of chapters of this text as part of an attempt to foster greater awareness of the quilt and less concern with the patches of which it is made. As Tara Fenwick indicates, we are finding patterns. The foci for individual chapters may vary, but conceptually there are many shared threads.

However, in writing this, we are aware also that such an attempt may be dubious and perhaps is designed to fail. It assumes the differences in the quilt can be reconciled or at least 'stitched up', when different research communities may desire to mark their differences and themselves as different from each other. In other words, to locate oneself in a particular domain is to mark oneself and what one does as different from others. For instance, to engage in community-based learning marks one specifically as concerned with learning outside the academy and the collective learning of communities. This is different from the more individually oriented concepts of experiential learning or those focused solely on the workplace, where the collective has a more specific form and goals. Thus, despite and maybe because of, concerns for a more cumulative approach to educational research, particular parts of the quilt like to be positioned and/or are positioned as different in order to establish the distinctiveness of their contribution. Research here is a tactical and strategic arena of manoeuvre marked by a range of

discourse communities and not simply a cumulative building of a rational truth. Part of the rationale for this text is to try and challenge those positionings, but even as we might make the effort, the quilt is being tugged in many directions and stitching does not last for ever.

Who is naming what?

Under the sign of lifelong learning, a great deal of attention is being given to those diverse domains outwith educational institutions and other structured learning opportunities wherein people are held to learn. The workplace, the home and the community are all held to be domains of learning, within which there are specific sites. In this sense, learning is distributed across the social order and embedded within social practices. However, insofar as we expand our concept of learning to embrace apparently all domains of life, we might be said to start to lose the conceptual basis for talking specifically of a learning context. What is specific to a learning context which is not to be found in other contexts? Who names these contexts as learning contexts? How are they named?

These questions are important insofar as the discourses of researchers are not necessarily shared by those who are engaging in practices within the domains identified as contexts of learning. Researchers may identify homemakers as learning a range of skills and understanding from experience, but for those people, the significance of the social practices may rest simply in that, homemaking. Researchers may identify the literacy gains from playing interactive games, but for the people concerned, they may be simply playing games. Researchers may identify workers as learning the culture and habitus of the workplace, but for those concerned, they may be simply getting by. The meaning and significance of social practices can therefore vary. The same practices can be invested with different meanings based upon the situations in which they emerge. From an educational perspective, if people do not identify themselves as learning outwith the academy, they may not draw upon the resources and relationships available to them for learning in other domains, including within the academy. For the people concerned, the fact that their practices are not signified as learning may be important for their own situations and identities.

Who then has the authority or power to rename such practices as learning, with all the associated connotations of formal education, and particularly schooling? On one side, we may suggest that this re-signifying of social practices opens up opportunities. By naming practices as learning, we provide routes and avenues through which educational and social mobility might be supported, or, more radically, existing exercises of power in the social and educational orders may be challenged. We suspect all the contributors to this book view their work as trying to challenge dominant perspectives in different ways. If we recognize ourselves as learning individually, organizationally and collectively, are we not in some ways more effective? Are not these the assumptions underpinning calls for lifelong learning, learning organizations, learning regions and a learning society?

This point is encapsulated in the discourses of empowerment that are to be found in certain strands of research.

However, signifying social practices as pleasure, fun, anything but learning, might also be considered a form of distancing or resistance to being part of the social order. Why learn? Here then the discourse of learning may be considered not a challenge to established order, but rather may involve an incorporation into that order. Extending learning extends the regulation of experience through education, one of those 'actions at a distance' that are sometimes identified as part of contemporary governing. Further, insofar as our social practices are all identified as learning, some may be given greater value than others through processes of accreditation. This extends the traditional role of education in valuing particular forms of learning, providing for a greater range of socializing and regulating practices through which the social is ordered and divided.

The danger is in seeing this as an either/or situation: either empowerment or regulation. And in homogenizing, say, all work-based learning as either at one end of the spectrum or the other. This is the rush to generalization and the grounding of the meaning of practices that dogs much educational research – researchers revealing the 'real' meaning of practices to the unenlightened. Obviously this is a caricature, but there is something in it nonetheless. It also points to important challenges for those researching these arenas.

Researching learning outside the academy

The question of naming underlines two of these challenges to researchers. First, if participants in a research project do not see themselves as learning in their day-to-day practices, how can data on their learning be gathered? This has been a classic issue for researchers examining participation in learning outside formal educational environments. It is one explored explicitly in the chapter by Veronica McGivney and demonstrated in a range of other chapters. For many people, learning is what takes place in structured education and training. Following the progress of one's soccer team through websites and fanzines is not learning. Thus, responses to surveys and the like may tell us little, other than what we want to know, as the understanding of what is being asked may vary significantly. Similarly, sitting in a coffee house with a group of friends discussing the pros and cons of wind power may involve learning from some perspectives, but is also an interesting conversation to pass the time of day with others. The question is raised then of why we should worry about whether learning is taking place outwith the academy and why we should bother researching it.

This is deliberately provocative, as at one level we might say that educational researchers should focus on education, as that is their area of expertise. Branching out into these other arenas results in them spreading their wares thin, and also in them encroaching, sometimes unknowingly, on existing research in other terrains, for example, sociology, organizational studies and cultural studies. These are turf wars in research perhaps, in which educational researchers stake a claim

to practices which are understood differently through other traditions of enquiry. What is sometimes lost in this is that those other traditions often have a range of methodological and conceptual framings and approaches, which make the educational researcher seem somewhat naïve. When engaging in an interpretative or qualitative enquiry, how many educational researchers identify specifically with which tradition of interpretation they are working? There are many, and they have implications for what type of evidence is collected and how, and for what conclusions can be drawn. What marks research from scholarship from opinion, if anything?

There is a question, therefore, about the extent to which studies of learning outside the academy find out or discover something or re-signify it, that is, give it a meaning that is other than of those who participated in the research. We make of it something other than those who live it. All social practices may involve learning, but whether learning is the critical dimension to the meaning given by those engaging in those practices is another matter. And insofar as we mark these practices as learning, in what sense are they transformed and with what consequences? We find this particularly acutely in relation to research in tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is, by nature, well, tacit. Insofar as we research tacit knowledge and try and identify it, it immediately stops being what it is. As we surface tacit knowledge, it becomes explicit. For educational purposes, this might be pedagogically useful, but paradoxically it turns our focus for research into something other than itself. The educational focus of research into social practices outwith the academy might then be said to be transformative in terms of making those practices other than they are for those concerned. The patches of the quilt are not found, but are made by the intellectual technologies of research practices.

This points to research as a transformative practice with associated ethical and political issues regarding its effects on participants. For instance, if researchers identify the learning from experience of a person and, as a result, that person seeks accreditation for that learning, because they now understand their practices differently, what happens if they are then told they have inappropriate or insufficient learning? What does this tell them about their experience?

Values and power

There are other ways in which there is a strong ethical and/or political base to researching learning outwith the academy. We want to be able to recognize people's diverse learning and capacities. We want to be able to value the lifelong and lifewide aspects of learning through life. We want to provide evidence that learning is more than what one learns in schools and other educational and training institutions. We want to recognize that learning is wider than that associated with a formal curriculum. For many, therefore, the interest in experiential, informal, community-based and work-based learning is part of a wider challenge to established institutions and curricula, which select and value some learning

and ways of learning over others. This is clear in most of the chapters in this book, including those by Lyn Tett, Jim Crowther and Salma Ismail. It is clear in the discursive thread that runs through many chapters of making the 'invisible' 'visible', which begs the question of how we know it is there if it (learning) is invisible.

However, this can itself result from, and in, some unsustainable dichotomies and binaries. Structured education and the institutions of education and training, can be positioned in an inherently negative light, denying the legitimate learning of those variously named others. Here learning outwith the academy takes to the barricades against the institutionalized power of the social order as represented by educational institutions. Such learning, particularly in its informal, experiential and community-based forms, is held to be in some ways more worthwhile and/or authentic than that occurring in institutions.

This oversimplifies, but it does not take much reading of the chapters herein and the wider literatures to see the value basis of many of the claims made. When clearly articulated, this is as it should be. Such challenges are legitimate, as education and curricula are not settled once and for all. However, some caution is also necessary. Is all learning outwith the academy worthwhile? We expose our own values base in answering this question, but the answer has to be no. Learning from their own experience often results in people becoming violent abusers of others. In tightly knit communities, we may learn to relate to each other, but not to others from different groups and communities. Learning outwith the academy is therefore not inherently worthwhile.

We might also raise the question of whether institutionalized curricula are inherently bad. As long as there are educational institutions, then there will always be curricula and these are always a selection from the social orders of which they are part. Selection means valuing some things over others and this is inherently contentious. These are legitimate debates, from which are derived what is to be valued as learning. And it is perhaps not surprising that the educational research community, itself usually part of the institutionalized structures of education, contributes vociferously to such debates.

Nothing is inherently worthwhile in either learning or curricula, but there can be a danger of using learning as a rhetorical device through which to attempt a critique of the selection, values and power embedded in the existing formal curricula. But on what authority? This is part of a bigger question, as the authoritative exercise of power may be considered somewhat different from power which is exercised in other ways, for example, coercion or seduction. But it also points to the need for the surfacing of assumptions about values and power in the discussion of learning outwith the academy.

Linking learning

What is perhaps significant in much of the research in the many arenas of learning outside the academy is that it does not stop at exploring learning in different

domains. It often then seeks to find or make links between everyday learning and that which goes on in educational institutions. Often it is those within educational institutions who are seeking to engage with this learning, more than it is people in these other contexts seeking something from the institutions.

The research linking learning in different contexts is often framed within a set of binaries. For instance, in cultural psychology, there is a distinction made between everyday and formal/scientific learning (see contributions to Murphy and Ivinson 2003). In the realm of applied linguistics, the focus is on vernacular/contextualized and formal/decontextualized literacy practices (Barton and Hamilton 1998) framed within the everyday and educational experiences of learners. In educational research, the debate has become focused around either informal or experiential learning and formal learning.

There is the identification of a gap between these binaries, an exploration of how these gaps come to be and how they might be overcome, in order that learners' resources can be realized in formal educational institutions. Learning in different contexts may involve different types of learning for different purposes, so we might need to question the extent to which, as educational researchers and pedagogic practitioners, we should try to overcome the gaps. And of course whether movement across domains is possible in any unproblematic way which does not lead to the re-signification of experience. The rationale for such an approach is often that education is not recognizing or developing the full potential of learners because it is not mobilizing their full resources in formal sites. However, as we have indicated, this tends to deny conflict and difference in and through learning. It assumes the inherent worthwhileness of education that denies the very struggles in and around it, where some people seek to keep a gap between their lives and what is educationally available. As a result, we may misconceive the pedagogical issue and, perhaps more importantly, we may frame issues in educational terms when they should be framed more appropriately in other ways.

This text

The chapters in this text do not address all of the above issues, at least not explicitly. However, in different ways, they exemplify the issues we have raised for those interested in research outwith the academy. We have brought together an international group of researchers with a wealth of experience in researching learning outside the academy. Some might see themselves as contributing more to one patch of the quilt than others, such as community-based learning. Others may draw upon and contribute to a number of patches. It is our intention in putting together this text to try to illustrate that there is indeed a quilt of shared interests and orientations, even if each patch may have a distinctive pattern. The chapters herein have been developed mostly from papers presented at the Second International Conference hosted by the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning in Glasgow in 2003. These papers have been substantially rewritten and developed

for this text. We would like to thank the contributors for allowing us, if only in passing, to stitch them up.

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Part I

Theory, methods, concepts

Chapter I

Informal learning

The challenge for research

Veronica McGivney

It is widely accepted that much of the learning we do as adults takes place not in educational centres or institutions but in contexts such as the home, the workplace or the local community. Most people engage in a diversity of unstructured learning activities related to their daily lives, acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills, intentionally or incidentally, in social interaction, on the job at work, in managing a home and raising a family, in the pursuit of leisure interests or in activities related to culture, politics or religion. This is usually described as informal learning although there is no consensus on an exact definition of that term.

Extrapolation from the findings of a national survey conducted in Canada (Livingstone 1999) suggested that Canadian adults spend about 15 hours a week on such learning compared to 3–4 hours on more formal, structured learning activities. However, learning that does not involve a course or programme of study but which arises out of people's everyday lives and experience has received relatively little attention in education research and is largely neglected in education policy. While policy-makers routinely acknowledge that a significant amount of learning take places outside a formal education context, they seem to attach little importance to it. In the Skills Strategy (DfES 2003: 117), which sets out the British government's priorities for post-compulsory education, there are three explicit references to informal learning although the concept is neither defined nor expanded upon. They include a commitment to 'working towards greater European recognition of informal and non-formal learning' but there is no mention of what these terms mean or how the commitment will be met.

Adult education practitioners themselves are often confused about what is meant by informal learning. When I was looking at the subject several years ago, many people working in the field proposed as possible case studies of informal learning organized, taught and structured courses which had many of the features of formal provision, simply because they were delivered in a relaxed manner in community venues. Many of us feel uneasy about trying to define and capture the elusive broader and often incidental learning that is not part of an intentional learning episode or that takes place outside of a structured learning context. Putting a research spotlight on this, however, can lead to a deeper understanding

and appreciation of the whole process of learning. It shows that the contexts in which learning takes place and the ways in which learning is acquired, are integral to and as important as *what* is learnt.

Sources of informal learning

There are various ways in which informal learning is acquired. The most obvious one, experiential learning, has received some research attention (see Kolb 1984) drawing on the insights of Dewey (1938) and Lewin (1951). It is particularly relevant to the workplace where research has found that a significant proportion of learning is actually embedded in the work situation (Eraut 1999).

Social interactions such as networking and engaging informally with others in social spaces such as coffee and meal breaks can also be an important source of learning. Lave and Wenger's (1991) influential concepts of communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation highlight the fact that learning can be as much a social and collective activity as an individual one.

It is also often found that community activism – shared activity arising from involvement in local issues – results in significant learning:

Practically every community action initiative – from parents pressing for day-care facilities or a safe street crossing, to villagers attempting to build an irrigation system, to tenants' groups presenting schemes for rent reform, to demonstrations against local industry's intentions to build a car park on public play space, to campaigns for a nuclear freeze – exhibits a strong educative dimension in that the adults involved are engaged in a continuous process of developing skills, acquiring knowledge, and, reflecting on their experiences, mostly in collaboration with other adults.

(Brookfield 1986: 159)

Foley's (1999) study of social and environmental movements in Australia demonstrated very clearly how social protest and collective action can lead to the development of organizational, social and communication skills as well as to a deeper and more critical understanding of society.

Another important context for informal learning is active involvement in voluntary groups or organizations such as housing associations, credit unions, clubs or single-issue groups. Elsdon *et al.*'s (1995: 47, 49) large-scale study of learning in voluntary organizations found:

An astonishing range and intensity of learning, attitudinal change and development fermenting in most LVOs [local voluntary organizations] in addition to whatever is assumed to be their range of activities Rather than 'unintended' this is unpremeditated learning, an uncovenanted access. ... All groups mediated at least some deliberate learning (that which

objectives promised). The significant finding is that all mediated at least some unpremeditated learning and change.

Researching informal learning

Given the range and intensity of the learning acquired in these and other contexts, it is surprising that it has attracted relatively little research focus. It is, however, a difficult area to research for several reasons. Due to its scale and diversity, it is impossible to assess with accuracy the full extent of informal learning – the submerged part of the ‘iceberg’ identified by Tough (1971, 1978) some decades ago. Second, learning is often not the primary motive for engaging in an activity; the motive is the activity itself. We do not always learn just for the sake of it but to achieve another purpose. People who spend a lot of time gardening may learn in the process where to place plants; which ones prefer sun and which flourish better in shade; how to enrich the soil; how to get rid of certain pests; how to propagate seeds or prune bushes and shrubs. It is probable that most would refer to the development of such knowledge and skills not as ‘learning’ but as ‘gardening’, even if it involves following instructions from a book or manual. The same would apply to many other activities in which learning is not the principal purpose.

Another reason why researching informal learning can be problematic is that, as it is often unplanned and incidental, it tends to be neither recognized nor described as learning. Eraut *et al.* (1998) and Foley (1999) have found in relation respectively to the workplace and voluntary activism, learning is often tacit and embedded in action. A significant proportion of learning at work, for example, is embedded in the work situation itself:

Our research shows how strongly [informal learning] is situated in the work itself and in its social and organizational context. ... Learning at work more often results as a by-product of the pursuit of work goals than from the pursuit of learning goals per se.

(Eraut *et al.* 1998: 26–7)

Similarly, while learning is an important dimension of the activities of many voluntary and community organizations, it is often tacit and a by-product of other objectives (Polanyi 1966).

There is also a persisting tendency in the adult population to connect the term ‘learning’ exclusively with compulsory education and to disregard forms of learning that do not have the characteristics people associate with the formal system. Many therefore find it difficult to reconcile learning that occurs during their daily activities with their conception of learning as something formal and structured:

Formal episodes of learning such as degree courses, attendance at training colleges, formal training courses organized by the employer at work and

so on tend to be immediately identified by survey respondents as learning activities, but they are less clear about including informal, unstructured types of learning. This is particularly true of some learning at work that is seen as 'just part of the job'. It is also true of some types of non-vocational learning because the purpose of the activity is seen as fun rather than learning.

(Bainart and Smith, quoted in Edwards *et al.* 1998: 40)

I first came across this tendency some years ago when doing research into adult participation in learning. The study included discussions with participants in a range of organized and structured (non-accredited) Workers' Educational Association (WEA) courses. The learners involved unanimously and with some passion refused to describe what they were doing as 'learning', largely, it seemed, because unlike compulsory education, it was experienced as informal and enjoyable (McGivney 1990). A more recent survey of community attitudes to education and training found that some individuals who initially denied that they were engaged in any form of education or training were actually participating in community-based, non-accredited courses or other intentional learning activities in organizations where the main remit was not education (Bowman *et al.* 2000).

The greatest problem confronting those conducting research into informal learning is therefore the narrow conception many of us have of 'learning' and an associated lack of awareness of much of the learning we actually do.

How to capture informal learning

The main challenge for research is to capture a process that is not always conscious or recognized and identify the ways in which people acquire and utilize the knowledge and skills they gain informally and often unintentionally. Some methods may be more effective at achieving this than others.

Surveys designed to measure participation in learning are unlikely to reflect the full scale and scope of adult learning. Although the National Adult Learning Surveys (NALS) (SCPR 1997, Fitzgerald *et al.* 2002) and the NIACE annual participation surveys (e.g. Aldridge and Tuckett 2005) employ relatively broad and inclusive definitions of learning in order to identify the range of (intentional) learning in which adults engage, their overall emphasis is on participation in organized learning programmes. To assess the extent of this is, of course, the principal objective of such enquiries. Many of the questions are therefore worded in a way that reflects the formal education system. They ask respondents about their level of educational attainment, the subjects they have learnt and the skills and qualifications they have acquired. This language inevitably influences the nature of responses. To take just one instance – the question about the subjects respondents have learnt. The word 'subjects' in this context is strongly associated with the curriculum of compulsory education – Maths, Geography, History, etc. Yet there are many forms of learning that are difficult to put under a conventional academic subject label: learning gained independently through performing specific

tasks or seeking specific knowledge; shared and collective learning related to local or environmental issues or arising from voluntary activism; learning acquired in community activities such as forming a choir or producing a newsletter; broad and exploratory learning programmes where the content has evolved in consultation with learners. The use of the word 'subjects' in a survey may encourage the perception that only participation in a traditional, subject-based course counts as 'real' learning. If respondents feel that what they have been learning cannot be described as a 'subject', then they might well question whether it can be defined as learning at all.

Thus whatever the definition of learning supplied, surveys that employ the language of formal education may deter people from reporting some of the learning in which they have engaged, even when this includes structured courses, because it may not be perceived as 'proper' or 'serious' learning. In all probability, therefore, national participation surveys may significantly underestimate the scale and intensity of adult learning as a result of restricted understandings of the term 'learning', reinforced by the wording of some of the questions.

Questions asking what people would like or intend to learn (another standard element in participation research) again focus attention on 'subjects'. If you ask people what they wish to learn, most automatically try and frame their response within a standard educational paradigm, i.e. they will think of a structured course or programme in a conventional subject or skill area because they believe this is what is meant by the question. In the UK, some may then specify a subject (often English, a foreign language or computer skills), although it is often found that they will not necessarily participate when courses in those subjects are available.

What people would like or need to learn may not be defined as learning at all. As an outreach worker once pointed out to me, many individuals require not learning but information or help with issues arising in their daily lives. Although we may perceive these as learning needs, they will not. This proved an important insight. I have found in a number of localities that the most pressing concern of women in poor circumstances is how to communicate to people in positions of authority their anxieties about the local environment, inadequate public transport or problems with their children's health or education. Understandably such concerns are never seen or expressed as learning needs that can be addressed in a conventional, subject-based course. However, skilled adult and community education workers have been able to identify the potential for learning implicit in such concerns and organize learning activities (such as discussion groups, talks from outside speakers, group work on communication and assertiveness skills) that can help the women to deal with them (McGivney 1991, 1999).

One way of drawing out adults' broader learning experience and their learning needs is to take a sub-set of an original survey sample and ask them questions not about the learning they have done or wish to do, but about their activities, interests and aspirations. A complementary qualitative approach can fill in some of the gaps and enlarge significantly on the inevitably superficial trends revealed in surveys.

This approach proved effective in research I conducted for the Pre-School Learning Alliance in the UK on the impact on adult users of active involvement in local pre-schools. 'Active' in this context meant joining the management committee or helping out on a voluntary basis with play sessions, fund-raising and the organization of outings and social events. The aim of the first of these studies (McGivney 1998) was to investigate the nature and extent of the learning adults (as opposed to children) acquire in a pre-school. In the first stage of this research, I conducted a postal survey of over 600 current and former adult users of ten diverse pre-school groups (playgroups, nurseries, mother and toddler groups) in different areas of England. The questionnaire used open-ended questions as well as prompts to ask users about the benefits they felt they had gained from their involvement and whether and how they were utilising any new knowledge and skills they had acquired. It also provided an opportunity for respondents to comment on their overall experience as part of a pre-school community.

The survey had a 50 per cent response rate (311). It indicated that some (approximately 20 per cent) respondents had engaged in formal and non-formal learning activities provided at the pre-school (attending pre-school courses on health and safety, child development and working with children; attending workshops or talks by experts on health, nutrition or legislation relating to children). However, it yielded relatively little information on any informal or experiential learning they had undergone thorough voluntarily helping in the pre-schools.

In order to elicit more information on this dimension of learning, follow-up, semi-structured telephone interviews were then conducted with 50 respondents across the ten locations. During the first few of these I found that it was counterproductive to ask directly what interviewees had 'learnt' as a result of their voluntary activities in the pre-schools, as they associated the word 'learning' only with participation in courses or activities organized to transmit specific information. Some strongly resisted applying the term 'learning' to anything else they had done, partly because of its connection with compulsory education; partly because they were too modest to describe the outcomes of their involvement in a way that might seem to inflate their importance.

I needed therefore to rephrase my questions and avoid, at least initially, use of the word 'learning'. Instead of asking interviewees what they had learnt through their activities, I asked a range of open-ended questions along the lines of: could they identify any new knowledge and understanding gained as a result of their voluntary activities in the pre-school? Did they feel they had developed any new skills or that they could take on new tasks as a result of what they had done? This was a far more effective approach and a number of interviewees who had given little or no information about their informal learning in their survey responses, felt able to reflect unselfconsciously on the range of knowledge and skills they felt they had gained informally through their involvement.

The interviews indicated that virtually all the women (and one man) had acquired a significant amount of new information – about children, their development

and how they learn; about the value of creative play; about health and safety; about legislation, child protection and other legal areas relating to children. Many recognized that they had gained new and potentially transferable skills such as helping children to learn; organizing group events and outings; chairing meetings; budgeting and hiring staff; fund-raising and putting together funding bids for local regeneration projects. They also referred to the development or improvement of 'softer' skills such as communication skills, social skills and team-working as well as more informed parenting skills, leading to improved family, social and working relationships.

None of the interviewees initially identified or described the processes leading to these outcomes as learning and few had mentioned these aptitudes and skills in their responses to the survey. However, in discussion, they realized that through taking on voluntary management roles, through performing certain new tasks, through observing and working with groups of children and through listening to and watching pre-school workers, they had learnt far more than they had previously suspected. In consequence, the word learning took on a new and broader meaning for them. As one said, 'it's difficult to realize what one learns. You have to sit back and think about it' (McGivney 1998: 35).

What seemed important in the interviews was to get individuals to reflect first on the nature and purpose of the activities they had engaged in. People often do not realize the extent of their learning until they are given the time and opportunity to think about what they actually do. This in turn can bring realization of the learning that flows from different activities. Interviews which offer individuals an opportunity to reflect on what they do in different contexts can yield valuable insights into the nature and intensity of their informal learning and encourage awareness of how it impacts on their daily lives and work performance as well as on their behaviour and attitudes.

Focus groups can also offer an important opportunity to reflect on learning. Encouraging people as a group to consider and identify their learning and how it has been acquired can be a means of collectively raising consciousness, jogging memories and combating the modesty that prevents some people from acknowledging their own knowledge and abilities (others often do it for them). Focus groups can also help to identify the collective as well as individual impact of engaging in a 'community of practice' as found in my two subsequent research studies for the Pre-School Learning Alliance, both looking at the impact of pre-schools not only on individual adult users but on the local community (McGivney 2003, 2004).

Some have employed a more systematic approach, using participant research to help identify and categorize informally acquired knowledge and skills as they develop. Ongoing participant research in Canada on the learning that takes place in cooperatives (Schugurensky *et al.* 2004) asks individuals to rank their knowledge, skills and attitudes on a five-point scale both before and after an activity relating to the cooperative. These are then grouped under particular themes such as decision-making, organization and team-work. This has proved a

useful way of encouraging reflection on learning and making people aware of their tacit and emerging abilities.

Other studies have used a combination of methods. Research to identify the learning that takes place in voluntary organizations (Elsdon *et al.* 1995) utilized case studies involving observation of a range of organizations and their context, and programmes of individual or group interviews, supplemented by informal conversations with other people to obtain secondary evidence of the effects of membership. Such methods yielded rich and important data in a generally under-researched area.

A battery of different methods have also been employed to capture what and how learning is acquired in the workplace. In Canada, for example, current research to elicit information on learning activity in the pharmaceutical industry involves case studies which combine observation, semi-structured interviews, micro-observation and small focus groups (Belanger 2004). In Britain, information on informal learning in the workplace has been obtained by using response scales to discover which methods of acquiring knowledge and skills workers consider most effective in helping them to perform their job (Felstead *et al.* 2004). The survey, which involved interviews with nearly 2,000 employees, found that participation in training courses and the acquisition of qualifications were rated significantly lower, in terms of their helpfulness in improving work performance, than a range of less formal activities such as doing the job, watching and listening to others, being shown things and reflecting on performance. Ninety per cent of respondents, particularly those lower down the occupational hierarchy, such as operatives, claimed that they had acquired most of their work-related knowledge and skills through actually doing the job. Those at the upper end of workplace hierarchies (e.g. managers) attached greater value to formal instruction and training but still rated less formal ways of learning more highly as a means of assisting their work performance. In short, Felstead *et al.* found that learning perceived as acquisition (see Sfard 1998), involving the obtaining of facts, constructs and concepts was less valued by workers as a source of help for job performance than learning perceived as participation (taking part in activities, doing the job, watching and listening to others).

Valuing informal learning

To cite these findings is not intended to suggest that informal sources of learning are intrinsically 'better' or of greater importance than formal instruction, but to highlight their value. The overriding priority given to formal learning in policy and the stress on qualifications as a proxy for skills, lead to a significant undervaluing of the skills and knowledge people derive from other means. For example, a great deal of significant learning goes on in the workplace that is not formally acquired or certificated, although it may be of vital importance to the employing organization. Despite the strong policy emphasis on the need for 'upskilling' the working population, skills surveys suggest that the labour market suffers as much

from underemployment as from skills shortages and as much from unutilized learning as from deficiencies in learning (Felstead *et al.* 2002).

The learning that people acquire in other contexts is also insufficiently recognized and utilized. Although there have been attempts to map and categorize the skills and competences women acquire in unpaid work in the home, in order to provide the link between experiential skills and those required in the workplace, there is little evidence that this work has been expanded or adequately utilized.

This is probably because there is a hierarchy of what is valued as learning. People are generally considered to have little knowledge and skills outside of those gained in formal education and we are judged and rewarded more for our formal than for our actual learning. Academic subjects and disciplines are considered to be the superior areas of learning while experiential learning is accorded least esteem and status. Yet, as Eraut (1997) has argued, if learning is defined as a change in a person's capability or understanding, then it should encompass informal learning at work and in household situations. That this generally does not happen is because vested interests are at stake. There is a monetary and status value attached to formally acquired education and skills. If greater importance were attached to informal learning, we might have to revise the way in which society is socially structured and economically rewarded, for example, pay women for homemaking and caring for children and other relatives. The routine undervaluing of knowledge and skills developed informally, such as the competences developed in child-rearing and managing domestic affairs, has a negative impact on the way people are viewed and valued in our society, leading to disparities in employment opportunities, salaries and pensions.

Links between informal and formal learning

Policy-makers in England feel uneasy about informal learning because it is so broad and disparate and because of the difficulty of identifying and measuring its benefits. There is also a tendency to perceive learning mainly as an individual process conducted in isolation from the social and community contexts in which people lead their lives. The increasing priority given to formally acquired skills and qualifications is likely to maintain a divide between formal and less formal learning.

However, these different dimensions of learning are often interlinked. A conclusion of the important Colley *et al.* (2003) study that most learning contains both formal and informal attributes highlights the interrelationship between informal and organized learning in different contexts. Moreover, it should not be a question of either/or but both. People who learn informally in a range of contexts can then have their knowledge and skills extended through a structured and taught learning process (Engeström 2001). This is, in fact, what often happens.

My own research has suggested that informal learning is often a dynamic and evolving process. People start learning informally for a variety of reasons arising out of their immediate interests, priorities and concerns. Although this learning

may not be conscious or recognized, it can lead to the identification of explicit learning interests and needs. At this point individuals and groups are often ready to move into intentional and structured learning activities (McGivney 1999). The pre-school research provided a good example of this. Some of the pre-school users I interviewed had been motivated by the new knowledge and interests they developed to enrol in education or training courses and sometimes to seek qualifications. None of these had previously considered engaging in a formal learning process.

It has also been found that activities related to personal and leisure interests frequently lead to participation in more formal learning. 'Since a sustained leisure interest requiring study or practice is such a clear indicator of participation in later learning ... it would be foolish to ignore the implications for the creation of a wider learning society' (Gorard and Rees 2002: 109–10). It would also be foolish to ignore the implications for labour market participation. Although the 2005 British government is obsessed with qualifications as a means of developing 'employability', the irony is that it is often informal rather than formal learning that leads to this end. Informal learning in a range of contexts can lead to the development of the kind of skills and capabilities that the government is anxious to promote in order to enhance personal employability and national competitiveness. Research in the voluntary sector, for example, found that the skills acquired from active membership of local groups had helped 'an encouraging number' of previously unqualified adults to enter the labour market (Elsdon *et al.* 1995).

Given these findings, it would be in the interests of educational policy-makers to commission more research into informal learning and the ways in which it interlinks both with formal learning and the workplace.

The implications for research

Although many useful insights have already been derived from the different approaches mentioned earlier, we need more empirical research into learning that does not take the form of participation in formal education or training. More, for example, could be done on developing qualitative research methods that might give us a deeper understanding of informal learning and how it is acquired and utilized in different contexts.

It is undeniable, however, that informal learning is extremely hard to quantify and its impact difficult to demonstrate without in-depth and multi-faceted studies conducted over a period of time. No research approach is totally unproblematic. For example, direct observation to explore the learning acquired in a given situation and the conditions that encourage or inhibit learning, is time- and resource-intensive and can be difficult to organize and implement. There may be resistance from the people involved as well as issues of confidentiality. There is also the difficulty of knowing what happens in people's heads, what they are learning and absorbing at any given moment. Case studies and surveys involving

interviews and focus groups can be fruitful so long as they are conducted with sensitivity and avoid the language of formal education.

Although research into informal learning often involves encouraging individuals to identify and provide evidence of their tacit knowledge and abilities, mechanisms such as APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) can be bureaucratic and expensive to operate. Moreover reservations have been expressed about the dangers of codifying informal learning and 'reinterpreting' it to meet academic requirements as this could reinforce the idea that only the latter counts as valid learning (Fraser 1995).

There are still a number of relevant research questions that could be pursued, for example:

- What is the relationship between conscious and intentional (imposed or required) learning and the *actual* learning that takes place in contexts such as the workplace?
- How can employers be helped to recognize and utilize the existing skills of their workforce? According to Unwin and Fuller (2003), in an expansive workplace learning environment, non-work-related learning is valued and encouraged and employees are given time to develop and reflect on their learning outside the workplace. An interesting research task might therefore be to investigate the impact on individuals' paid employment of informal learning derived in other contexts.
- Related to this, can the lessons from expansive learning environments, such as some voluntary organizations, be drawn upon by employers to help them develop a greater learning community ethos in the workplace?
- And finally, what is the relationship between a person's informal and formal learning and to what extent do they enrich or extend each other? To what extent can knowledge of the nature of informal learning and how it is acquired be utilized in pedagogical practice?

Research into these and other aspects of informal learning may help to promote greater awareness of its role and usefulness. The emphasis given to formal learning in education policy and research restricts our understanding of the scale and intensity of overall learning. Whether we view learning as a means to an economic end, as an empowering and liberating process, or as a social process involving participation in a community of practice, the learning that goes on outside a formal learning context may be as valuable and worthy of attention as that which takes place within it.

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Theorizing pedagogy within social action contexts

A case study of a South African trade union

Linda Cooper

Introduction

The trade union movement, with its several million members, can be seen as one of the most significant 'adult learning institutions' in South Africa, historically and currently. Over time, trade unions have invested considerable resources in organized education programmes for their members. However, the most pervasive and significant processes of learning within the union movement are arguably those associated with workers' broader involvement in their organization where – through their experiences of organizing, meeting, taking collective decisions and engaging in collective action – knowledge is shared and new understandings are sought and produced.

As researcher and educator, I have contributed to the processes of learning and education within the South African labour movement, and have also learnt from the innovative ways that workers share knowledge in the context of such collectivity. This has led to a desire on my part to document and theorize the processes of learning, education and knowledge-production within the trade union movement.

As a point of departure for this project, I consulted the growing body of literature in recent years on informal learning. Much of this literature is concerned with the changing nature of social and production relations under globalization and, associated with this, the emergence of new forms of 'working knowledge' and notions of 'the learning organization'.¹ This literature has been the object of extensive critique (see, for example, Edwards 1995, Gee *et al.* 1996, Jackson and Jordan 2000). Of particular relevance to my interest in workers' learning within the context of their own organizations, Mojab and Gorman (2001) have argued that the 'learning organization' has proved of little benefit to the majority of workers. Moreover, it seeks to extend capital's social control over workers through exerting greater control over workers' learning and knowledge. Most of the literature on the learning organization tends to assume that all organizations are guided by the logic of profit-maximization and the compulsion to compete successfully in the global marketplace. I concluded that the task of developing and refining theories of learning and pedagogy in informal social contexts could

be enriched by extending research to different kinds of organizations, including those – like trade unions – which have primarily a social purpose, and which seek to challenge the dominant logic of global capitalism.

Another body of literature on informal learning focuses on learning in social movements, and the significance of social movements for new knowledge production (see, for example, Finger 1989, Eyerman and Jamison 1991, Welton 1993, Spencer 1995, Holford 1995, Crowther *et al.* 1999).² Although more directly relevant to the trade union context, the main focus of this literature (with the exception of Eyerman and Jamison) is not on theorizing in pedagogic and epistemological terms the processes of learning or nature of knowledge in social movement contexts. Kilgore (1999), Foley (1999, 2001) and Newman (1994, 1999) have all pointed to the need to develop a ‘theory of collective learning’. A central contention of Foley’s (1999: 47–8) work is that

in order to understand informal and incidental learning in social action and sites we need to develop analyses which take account of specific social contexts, and which treat all aspects of adult learning as socially constructed and problematic. This requires both a broader notion of context and more detailed, specific analyses than are usually found in adult education theory.

Foley (2001: 85) argues that what is required in order to understand ‘the what, how and why of informal learning in everyday and popular struggle’ are ethnographies of communities, but ‘with the learning dimension added’.

This chapter is based on my attempts to develop such an ‘ethnography of learning’ in a specific social context: that of a South African trade union. It outlines my efforts to answer the question: what theoretical resources can best conceptualize the processes of learning and education, and forms of knowledge in an organizational context which is informal, collective and oppositional in relation to key centres of social power? And how can we theorize such learning and knowledge in ways that do not simply render them a negative image of formal, academic learning and knowledge?

In the course of my research, I encountered a large body of theoretical material concerned with questions around how to describe or categorize different forms of knowledge and learning. I encountered this over an extended period of time in an iterative process of moving back and forth between my primary data, the conceptual material and an emerging analysis. This chapter presents the theoretical material in a way that seeks to capture something of this dialectical process. It begins by briefly introducing my case study and some of the key moments in the life of the trade union on which I draw to illustrate my arguments. It goes on to show how I tried to make meaning of the concrete situations I was observing via two opposing theoretical perspectives: situated learning theory and Bernstein’s theory of pedagogy, and how each – in their own way – were limited in their ability to theorize the rich processes of learning and forms of knowledge I encountered in my research. I then proceed to show how other theoretical resources – in particular,

historical-cultural theories of pedagogy, and theories of the 'everyday' – offered a more fruitful interpretive framework for my work.

A case study within the South African labour movement

The research project on which this chapter is based involved a case study of the Cape Town branch of a national, local government trade union. The union is one of Cosatu's³ largest affiliates, although its membership has declined in recent years as a result of post-apartheid restructuring of local government and policies of privatization. The Cape Town branch has a majority of male, 'coloured' workers who speak a working-class dialect of Afrikaans, and African workers (isiXhosa-speakers) are in the minority.⁴ Data collection included ethnographic observations of different events within the life of the union, as well as group and individual interviews, where union members were invited to engage critically with my interpretations.

This chapter will draw on examples of processes of learning and forms of pedagogy and knowledge in three sub-sites of the union:

- The union's organized education programmes, in particular, those targeted at newly-elected shop-stewards, aimed at introducing them to the union's constitution and their roles and responsibilities as workplace representatives;
- Meetings of shop-steward committees where reports on issues such as privatization, local government restructuring and wage-negotiations were delivered and debated;
- A three-week national strike of municipal workers in July 2002 over wages, which began with a march by thousands of workers through the centre of the city.

In the following sections, I analyse aspects of these events through the alternative lenses of different theoretical perspectives.

Learning in the trade union as a community of practice

My initial observations suggested that workers' experiences play a key role in the processes of learning within the union. In union workshops, training materials adopt a learner-centred approach that foregrounds critical reflection on experience, while in union meetings, much learning takes place through successive 'experiential learning cycles', where workers share and compare their experiences, and interrogate them in order to draw out their broader meaning and significance. Experiential learning theory (Kolb 1984, Boud 1990, and Mezirow 1991) is useful for illuminating these processes, but I was mindful of the critiques

of experiential learning theories for their individual, phenomenological focus on the 'independent' learner, and for their view of reflection as primarily a rational, cognitive process (Fenwick 2003).

I was impressed by the work of Ball (2003), who applies the notion of 'community of practice' to the trade union as an organization. He points to the usefulness of this concept in the trade union context where 'members are joined together, as a community, and their shared identity and perspective are generated *through their engagement in their primary practice*' (Ball 2003: 301, emphasis in original). He argues that it may be appropriate to consider trade union activity as a whole (both within and across different trade unions) as engagement in a common 'community of practice', with trade union education per se as only one part of that practice.

I was drawn therefore to the situated learning theory of Lave and Wenger (1991, see also Lave 1996, 1998, Wenger 1998) because of its focus on organizations or institutional settings where teaching and learning are not the primary purpose of the organization, and its notion of 'learning in communities of practice', which captures not only the action-embedded nature of learning, but also the collective/shared dimensions of learning and knowledge construction that are so central to the trade union context. Lave emphasizes that we need to see 'thought' not only as a cognitive process, but also as embodied and enacted:

'What you know' may be better thought of as doing rather than having something – 'knowing' rather than acquiring or accumulating knowledge or information. 'Knowing' is a relation among communities of practice, participation in practice, and the generation of identities as part of becoming part of ongoing practice.

(Lave 1996: 157)

The notion of learning and teaching as 'doing' was useful for analysing learning in the trade union context where knowledge is often tacit and embodied in action. Knowledge as 'action' was perhaps most visible during the strike. On the first day of the strike, an air of festivity surrounded the march and the heightened emotions of thousands of toyi-toying⁵ workers communicated a sense of confidence and their absolute conviction that justice was on their side. The messages that workers wanted to communicate to their employers and the public at large were not only on the placards carried by the marchers, but were embedded in the collective action itself. On my visits to the union office over the following days, I witnessed activity that was quite frenzied – unconscious, unaware, unreflective – in the midst of the extensive learning clearly taking place. For example, my field-notes reflected: 'everywhere there's a sense of action – togetherness – people running around. It looks chaotic but they seem to know what they're doing. They're in this together. A shared experience – so much can be left implicit or tacit'.

'Action' and 'the body' also play key roles in organized trade union education. In union workshops, 'old-timers' model the roles, values and identities that 'newcomers' are expected to acquire. For example, in one shop-steward training

workshop I observed the facilitator (an organizer who had himself previously been a shop-steward) 'teaching' the role of the shop-steward through a performance that was laced with emotion and humour. My field-notes reflected:

He speaks with lots of examples – embedded in workers' experiences, and he speaks 'Kaapse taal'.⁶ He struts up and down – giving life to the 'belligerent shop-steward' role ... His body language is expressive: he walks, talks, gesticulates, play-acts ... role-plays the language, the mood, the tone and gestures of 'the good shop-steward'.

In the day-to-day processes of organizing or meeting, learning occurs primarily through 'guided participation' (Rogoff 1984: 147). Under the mentoring and guidance of more experienced worker leaders, and through participation in this community of practice, new shop-stewards are apprenticed into their roles, acquiring the shared values, identities and forms of participation expected within the organization.

Wenger (1998) argues that we all participate in multiple communities of practice at once, and that boundary practices – where people traverse different communities of practice and introduce elements of practice from one community into another – can play an important educational role. This concept helped me to recognize the 'richly diverse field of essential actors' (Lave and Wenger 1991: 93) who – by virtue of being 'boundary workers' in some sense or another – step into the educator role at different times and in different sites within the union. For example, older workers bring valuable experiences from other periods in history, while other workers bring much-needed information from outside structures and forums in which they sit as union representatives. One shop-steward who played a leading role in the branch had an unusually rich set of involvements in multiple forums. He represented his branch in higher (provincial and national) structures of the union, had attended a course in adult education at a local university, and was involved in numerous community forums. He was a plumber and the union's representative on a national, tri-partite policy body engaged in developing new water policy for South Africa; he had attended local and international conferences where he had met environmental activists from around the world and engaged in international advocacy around water issues.

Despite situated learning theory's heuristic value in many respects, I found it downplayed or neglected issues related to power relations. Lave and Wenger do acknowledge the dynamics of power that are likely to arise within a community of practice, in particular between 'old-timers' and 'newcomers'. However, their 'implicit message is that communities of practice only work well when conflict and inequalities are smoothed over' (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003: 178). Fenwick (2003: 51) has argued that 'the situative perspective also seems silent on the issue of resistance in communities where tools and activities may be unfair or dysfunctional. Is such resistance also considered meaningful participation?'. Furthermore, situated learning theory does not provide a means for analysing how

broader historical and structural relations of power (based on race, class, gender, language or culture) might reverberate within the dynamics of any community of practice. Given that issues of power, resistance and the struggle to transform societal power relations are so central to the trade union's existence, I turned to an approach which puts power issues back at the centre of pedagogy.

Pedagogy, knowledge and power in the trade union context

Basil Bernstein's work provides a sophisticated conceptual language with which to identify different kinds of pedagogy and different forms of knowledge (Daniels 2001) and, through his classificatory scheme, he attempts to theorize how 'macro', societal power relations are translated into the 'micro' power relations of the classroom. According to Bernstein (1996), one way in which power relations are embedded in the pedagogic context is in the relationship between educator and learner. He distinguishes between two main forms of pedagogy: a humanistic 'competence' model of pedagogy, where the educator plays a facilitative role and the learner largely determines his/her own learning goals; and a more overtly didactic, 'performance' model of pedagogy where there are explicit, externally-determined criteria for successful learning transmitted by the educator to the learner. Bernstein makes the point – important in relation to non-formal and informal education – that power is not only exercised in the overtly hierarchical teacher-learner relations of 'visible pedagogy' (usually associated with performance pedagogy), but is also exercised in 'invisible pedagogy' (usually associated with competence pedagogy), although here, the hierarchical relationship is implicit and covert. It is not unusual to find a 'pedagogic pallet' where different 'mixes' of competence and performance models and modes can take place.

Bernstein's categories helped me to make sense of the distinctive combination of different forms of pedagogy that I observed in union education programmes. On the one hand, the union's education policies are committed to a learner-centred approach that values workers' experiential knowledge and foregrounds active and participatory methods involving critical reflection on experience (competence pedagogy). The union's pedagogic *practice* however is a complex mix of competence and performance models, and visible and invisible modes of pedagogy, but with performance pedagogy and visible pedagogy predominating.

This mixed pallet of competence/performance pedagogy is directly related to another distinctive combination of features in union pedagogy. On the one hand, the union's education policies are committed to building workers' democracy and control over their organization. This was evidenced in the words of the Provincial Education Officer facilitating the shop-steward training programme, who urged that: 'The union is not that building over there... . It is you and the workers ... what we want is a union where workers are involved in the decision-making ...'. At the same time, the union's education practices are politically and ideologically

'directive'. An example of this was in an educational debate organized within the branch, where the General Secretary of the union argued:

... we live in a society made up of two classes – there's a class that rules and there's a class like us who sells our labour to those classes that owns the factories, that owns the mines, that owns the means of production. There are two classes in society – two primary classes.

Even 'invisible' forms of pedagogy, for example, the extensive use of group activities in union workshops which draw on learners' experiences as their starting point, were directive as they had clearly predetermined outcomes. For example, in the shop-steward training programme, a session dealing with 'representing workers' interests' included three group activities. The notes to the facilitator read:

There are a number of key points⁷ that need to be made during this session. You can make some of the points through an input, and you can make some of them through activities. The best would be to use a combination of inputs, activities, and summarizing key points after the activities, to make sure the important points are made.

The ideologically-directive nature of union pedagogy seems to be in direct contrast to some radical traditions of popular education which have emphasized that the educator should not pre-empt the answers to political questions, but should play the role of problem-poser rather than problem-solver (Newman 1993). This raised a question for me as to whether union pedagogy's ideological directiveness rendered it undemocratic in nature, an issue which I will return to later in this chapter.

Bernstein (1996) sees power relations embedded not only in pedagogic practice, but also in the very structure of knowledge and, more importantly, in the boundaries between 'scientific' and 'everyday' forms of knowledge. He distinguishes between 'vertical' knowledge discourses which are text-based, systematically structured, with specialized languages and modes of inquiry on the one hand, and horizontal ('everyday') knowledge discourses which are usually oral-based, local and context dependent, tacit, and multi-layered.

While I found Bernstein's notion of a mixed pedagogic pallet helpful in illuminating the distinctive combination of forms of pedagogy in union education programmes, his division of knowledge into a number of binary opposites proved to be too static and inflexible a lens through which to theorize the forms of knowledge drawn upon. For example, it is questionable whether a neat distinction can be made between 'concrete' and 'abstract' or 'contextualized' and 'de-contextualized' forms of knowledge in the union context. During the mass march of municipal workers through Cape Town on the first day of the strike, I was struck by how the messages of the march were both deeply contextualized in the experiences of the

strikers, but also existed at a high level of generality and abstraction. Some of the placards carried by the strikers read:

Phantsi⁸ managers and councillors eating themselves fat while the workers starve!
 Down with Gear,⁹ Starvation wages
 To Hell – It's War!
 Privatization equals Retrenchments equals Poverty.

The union's strike pamphlet made links between workers' wages, the government's macro-economic policy, the 'apartheid wage gap', and privatization, while the speeches on the march linked workers' struggles with class analysis, history and the goal of socialism. This time of mass action seemed to be a time of 'theorizing the world' at a very broad level.

Communication in union meetings frequently assumed the form of anecdote or storytelling, but rather than having only 'local' or 'particular' significance, these forms of storytelling almost always (implicitly but often explicitly) had a very clear, more general point or lesson to make. 'Stories' often included a strong analytical and conceptual component and their purpose was to illustrate both particular as well as general points.

It seems important not to collapse 'site' into 'form of knowledge'. Although my research focused on learning and knowledge outside of the formal education system, it did not necessarily follow that this site is one of only experiential knowledge, or that elements of formal, hierarchically-organized kinds of knowledge cannot be found here. One of the most distinctive features of knowledge in trade union pedagogy is its *hybridity*: workers draw on many different forms of knowledge ranging from more vertical to more horizontal knowledge discourses. For example, in union meetings, education workshops, and during the strike, workers at various times grappled with concepts related to labour law, political economy, social theory, and history. However, they also expressed knowledge of community needs, of oppression, discrimination and exploitation, and of comradeship.

Closely connected to the hybridity of knowledge in the trade union context is the dynamic and dialectical movement between different forms of knowledge. For example, in the shop-steward training workshop participants were asked to discuss the question: 'What gives management power?'. The Provincial Education Officer (PEO) re-contextualized workers' experiences within a more specialist language, through a process of successive layering and inter-weaving of experiential and conceptual knowledge:

PEO: Why does management have power? Why do workers need protection? ...
 It is management and employers against the workers. So why do we need a union?

SHOP-STEWARD 1: So that workers can also have a voice...

PEO: Why is it so difficult for workers to have their say?

SHOP-STEWARD 2: He [the employer] is his own boss ...

PEO: He owns the means of production – the machines, electricity, buildings, and the workers – he takes what you produce – and goes and sells it at a profit.

My case study suggests therefore that knowledge in the informal, collective and social-action context of the trade union shares features of both vertical and horizontal knowledge discourses, and these articulate in interesting ways. It seemed to me that what makes trade union knowledge distinctive is not so much its 'everyday-ness' in the Bernsteinian sense, but rather the way it weaves together different categories of knowledge and thus *transgresses* the boundaries proposed by dualist accounts. The strike – with its combination of mind and body, abstract and concrete, cognitive and emotive, and local and global meaning – was the setting where this infringement of boundaries was most tellingly achieved. I found myself trying to devise new categories which could capture the dual- or multi-faceted nature of knowledge in this context, for example: 'embodied knowledge' (which incorporates both the physical and the cognitive), and 'impassioned knowledge' (which incorporates both the intellect and the emotion).

I also sought out theoretical approaches which avoided the dualism embedded in Bernstein's work, but which could account for relations of power, and processes of resistance and struggle seemingly absent in the situated learning perspective. This led me to the rich body of work of Vygotskian and post-Vygotskian scholars.

A dialectical, historical-cultural approach to learning in the trade union context

Vygotsky (like Bernstein) distinguished between 'scientific' and 'everyday' knowledge. But in contrast to dualist approaches, it is not the difference between these two forms of knowledge that is as important as the *relationship* between the two in the processes of learning. Vygotsky argued that there is constant interaction between scientific and everyday knowledge, and it is this that lies at the heart of learning within the zone of proximal development (Guile and Young 1998). The Vygotskian notion that learning is a process of dialectical interaction between different forms of knowledge helped me to make sense of the inter-weaving of different forms of knowledge described above, which was so common in this context.

The significance which Vygotsky attached to history in the processes of learning also helped me to understand the role of the trade union organizational environment itself in reproducing knowledge. The post-Vygotskian, Scribner (1997), in her studies of learning at work, argued that the organizational context is an integral part of the dissemination of knowledge by virtue of the fact that it embodies 'organized, social knowledge', in particular, historical knowledge. The trade unions of black workers that emerged in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s have been described as 'laboratories for democracy',¹⁰ where workers

drew lessons on how to organize under conditions of severe repression, and developed principles and practices of participatory democracy. As these 'lessons' became part of the union's day-to-day rules and rituals as an activity system, they became 'intelligence sedimented in organization' (Scribner 1997: 313). In my case study, union members who participate in the rules and rituals of the organization today can be seen as learning from and appropriating the knowledge of previous generations of workers.

Vygotsky viewed learning as a social and culturally-based activity, in which symbolic tools of mediation – and language in particular – play a key role. The post-Vygotskian literature on the central role of language as a tool of mediation provided a rich resource to help me understand the processes of educating and learning within the union. I was to discover that Wertsch's work in particular (Wertsch 1985, 1991, Wertsch and Smolka 1993), which draws on Bakhtin's notions of multivoicedness, dialogicality, and social languages, would help me to make sense of the prominent role that language – acting together with 'the body' in the form of *oral performativity* – plays in facilitating learning.

In union workshops and meetings involving grassroots membership of the union, the use of language is distinctive and involves the use of a performative speech genre. This speech genre incorporates elements such as code-switching, ventriloquism, storytelling, and repetitious use of language, combined with strong body language and frequently embedded in strong emotions of humour or anger. The use of code-switching (between English and Afrikaans, and occasionally between Afrikaans and isiXhosa) was striking in the shop-steward training programme. For example, in a session focusing on 'What is the Union?', participants debated the question of 'Why does management have power?'. When two groups of participants responded that it is because 'management is more educated', the facilitator intervened and asked: 'Does more education mean: *this oke is slimmer as ek?* [this guy is cleverer than me?]. Elsewhere, he declared: '*... 'n Huis sonder 'n bybel is nie 'n huis nie ...* [A house without a Bible is not a house ...]. Each and every shop-steward must have a Constitution in order to understand how the union functions'. Another organizer, facilitating a session on labour law, spoke in English when explaining a more abstract legal point, but switched to Afrikaans when dealing with how the shop-steward should fight a particular case. In other words, Afrikaans was often used for the particular, the vivid example, and to mobilize personal and emotional resources, while English was used for the more formal, the more distanced and the more abstract.

What is the pedagogic significance of this speech genre or the elements of which it is comprised? Code-switching, for example, is a very widespread phenomenon within the South African urban environment and is seen historically as part of an attempt to circumvent the restrictive laws and practices of apartheid. Today, it acts symbolically as a form of accommodation, symbolizing the values of democratization: equality, coming together, mutual understanding and respect (Slabbert and Finlayson 2002). By the use of this speech genre, it is arguable that union educators are able to acknowledge the multiple cultural identities of

workers in the union, as well as build a new, inclusive, working-class identity and communicate the importance of equality and respect amongst workers.

Meetings were frequently marked by the use of repetitious language, sometimes in an almost evangelical tone, and clearly intended to evoke emotions for the purposes of constructing values, and reinforcing workers' combative, unionist identity. This is illustrated in the statement below by one shop-steward who summarized the discussions of his fellow-workers in one municipal depot meeting:

So we are saying that we need to re-organize the method of service delivery; we are saying that we are short staffed; we are saying that there is 'dead wood';¹¹ we are saying that we don't have protective clothing or proper tools; we are saying that there is no proper training: computer training, driver training, customer care, ABET;¹² we are saying that we are being bullied, we are being forced out of our offices down to the bottom – from the White House to the dog's kennel ...!¹³

Ventriloquism (speaking through the voice of the 'other') was also common and served to parody management or the 'bosses' and reinforce the boundary 'us' and 'them'; for example: 'They [management] treat us like dogs: take your bone and go and lie down ...!'

While impassioned speeches and lively storytelling predominated in workshops and meetings, during the strike, there was an overall shift from this languaged discourse to the carnivalesque use of the body as a tool of mediation, as seen in workers' toyi-toying, marching, dancing, singing and sloganeering. The widespread 'trashing' (upending of garbage bins) that some strikers engaged in seemed aimed literally and metaphorically at enacting a world 'turned upside down' (Bakhtin, in Gardiner 2000: 61), making visible labour that is usually invisible and thus undervalued.

Oral performativity is deeply embedded in the history and culture of Black South Africans generally, and in the history and organizational culture of the trade unions specifically. Gunner (1999: 50) describes orality, performance, festival, spectacle and image as 'the central resources of African culture'. In the union context, they act powerfully to construct identity, and include workers within that identity. These cultural resources should not be seen only in terms of their carnivalesque functions; they also have an analytic function, an ability to offer social critique, and to communicate abstract and global messages (Gunner 1999).

In the union, the use of these historical/cultural resources has a democratizing function because it facilitates widespread participation by members of this community of practice. These culturally-embedded tools of mediation afford 'ordinary' workers a voice, the opportunity to give expression to their experiential knowledge and to contribute to the moral and ideological 'rules' of this community of practice. Thus the extensive use of culturally embedded, symbolic tools of mediation helps

to make possible the widely distributed and shared educator role within the union. I would argue that both these factors – the distinctive tools of mediation and the very dispersed nature of pedagogic authority – ensure that the ideologically directive nature of union pedagogy discussed earlier in this chapter is not simply imposed from above by a (often more formally-educated) union leadership; it is also given a grassroots content from below. This means that the ideologically directive nature of union pedagogy is not necessarily incompatible with workers' democracy and control of their organization.

Pedagogy for subversion, transformation or accommodation?

Bakhtin's notion of the 'everyday' as a source of subversion, resistance and 'utopian impulse' (in Gardiner 2000: 17) provides a useful lens through which to view the transformatory orientation of learning and knowledge in the union context. A 'utopian impulse' was perhaps most visible in the strikers' demands for change and transformation, and in their vision of a 'united working class' and 'socialist future'. But the 'hidden potentialities of the everyday' were also visible in the routine functioning of the union. For example, in union meetings participants engaged in critiquing their own organization as well as broader power relations in society and the dominant political discourse. The dialogical nature of meetings allowed particular visions of future possibility to be articulated: a future where the union would 'belong' to its members; where a 'decent future' for workers' children and grandchildren would be assured; and where no longer would 'the rich get richer and the poor poorer'.

Engeström (2002), another prominent post-Vygotskian, is primarily interested in learning which is transformatory in orientation and in the role that contradictions play in this learning. He argues that at the heart of what he calls 'expansive learning' lie contradictions which demand creative solution. Therefore, tensions and contradictions are productive of new learning and knowledge. I would argue that it is possible to view the union as an activity system whose members are grappling with significant tensions and contradictions that characterize post-apartheid South Africa, where the possibility exists of a 'breakthrough into learning activity' in the sense of 'going beyond the given' (Engeström 2002: 51). The strike in itself may be seen as an example of what Engeström has described as 'imaginative praxis'.

At the same time, however, what became increasingly clear to me over time was that there were tensions and contradictions being experienced within the union that did *not* seem to be moving towards any immediate resolution, but which instead seemed to trap workers into an ongoing 'dance' between resistance and accommodation. For example, municipal workers seemed caught between their rejection of the privatization of public services on the one hand, but on the other, working to show that they could do the job 'just as well' as private contractors. While workers were critical of privatization and outsourcing, it was clear that

the ideology of 'corporatization' of public services had influenced unionists' and workers' thinking around privatization, and compromised their resistance to this. Union members grappled with problems of having to negotiate with union members who had moved into management positions and with shop-stewards who were 'no longer committed' to the union's collective values. Some of these dilemmas illustrate the tension that exists between the trade union's attempts at inclusion within South Africa's new, democratic – but still capitalist – state on the one hand, and its commitment to transforming that state on the other.

The trade union's own educational practices also reflected and reproduced some of the key lines of social inequality still prominent in post-apartheid South Africa. One area where this was visible was in the ambiguities and contradictions in workers' attitudes towards knowledge and learning. On the one hand, workers' knowledge was respected and union members were often viewed as 'the real experts'. This was evident in the statement of one shop-steward:

... people have the answer, if one can understand that, the people actually have the answer, and it's a matter of drawing out those answers from the people. And then adding your own to it, and then putting it into perspective and summarizing it to them – it makes magic ...

On the other hand, however, workers held in deep respect those with 'schooled knowledge', for example, labour law experts. In addition, 'ordinary' workers were sometimes portrayed as ignorant or stupid. There were times when union leaders accused shop-stewards of 'not learning properly' from their training, or 'not bothering' to understand complex documents. I discovered that in another branch of the union, members refused to elect a worker who had been nominated for the position of chairperson because he was 'illiterate'. The shop-steward who reported this to me was of the view that 'new shop-stewards don't want to be chaired by someone below them'.

Language and literacy acted both to include and exclude. In the shop-steward training workshops, written materials were only available in English and Afrikaans, despite the fact that it was acknowledged that translation was required for isiXhosa-speakers. It also struck me at the time that the shop-steward roles that were being so expertly modelled by the facilitator were also deeply embedded in a particular language, culture and sense of humour. The isiXhosa-speaking workers in these training sessions were not only relatively excluded from participation by language, but were also clearly distanced from the discourse – the roles, culture and humour – that dominated this branch of the union and which reflected the historic dominance of the 'coloured' working class in this region. Women workers in the union were also noticeable by their relative absence in union events and in leadership positions within the organization.

Engeström offers a theory of collective learning which sees tensions and contradictions as productive, potentially a source of new learning and knowledge. However, we also need to be able to explain why the tensions and contradictions

faced by participants within an activity system *do not always* translate into a 'breakthrough into learning'. It is unlikely that the answers to this question will be found within the activity system itself, but will need to be sought in broader social conditions, power relationships and ideological contests within which the activity system is embedded.

A theoretical framework for learning and knowledge in informal, collective contexts?

I have concluded that it is possible to make meaning of pedagogy, learning and knowledge in a collective, social action-oriented organization such as a trade union by using a conceptual framework that draws eclectically on elements of different bodies of theory in a complementary way. Bernstein's classificatory approach throws light on the distinctive mix of pedagogic forms in union education programmes – of competence and performance, and visible and invisible models of pedagogy – and helps to illuminate the juxtaposition of a democratic, humanistic, learner-centred education philosophy alongside a politically and ideologically directive set of education practices.

The situated learning theorists' notion of communities of practice captures the participatory and collective dimensions of education and learning which are central to union pedagogy, as well as the dispersed nature of the educator role in this context. Both of these act to bring 'grassroots content' to the ideologically-directive education practices of the union.

Vygotsky's understanding of learning as a dialectical interplay between everyday and scientific forms of knowledge helps to give meaning to the distinctive interweaving of different kinds of knowledge so evident in the trade union context. The post-Vygotskian focus on language as a tool of mediation, and Bakhtin's notion of carnival and the potential of 'the everyday', all help to make sense of the important role that oral performativity plays in learning in trade union workshops, in the day-to-day activities of organizing and meeting, and during the strike. The use of culturally embedded tools of mediation (such as oral performativity) also ensures a measure of dialogic in trade union education.

Engeström's concern with how the transformation of an activity system arises out of internal instability and struggles points to the potential significance of tensions and contradictions within the life of the union, as a possible source of 'breakthrough into learning'. However, we need to extend our analytic tools to account for the fact that such tensions and contradictions do not inevitably give rise to new knowledge or new forms of praxis.

My purpose in developing such a theoretical framework has not been mainly a philosophical one, but rather to illuminate the richness of the forms of pedagogy, learning and knowledge that have evolved in this context, so that they can contribute to our understanding of what knowledge and learning can be, and enrich our own practice as educators. Likewise, extending such a theoretical framework to account for why certain social action organizations or sites – at

certain moments in history – do not seem able to achieve a ‘breakthrough’ into new knowledge and praxis may enhance our ability as educators to contribute towards social transformation.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Garrick 1996, Boud and Garrick 1999, Marsick and Watkins 1999, Barnett 2000, Mulcahy 2000.
- 2 There are also many rich studies of labour education around the world. See, for example, London *et al.* (1990) on American trade union education, Phillips and Putnam (1980), MacIntyre (1980) and Simon (1990) on British worker education, and Welton (1987) on Canada.
- 3 Congress of South African Trade Unions – the biggest union federation in the country.
- 4 There is debate over the continued use of racial categories in the post-apartheid era, but it is difficult to avoid the fact that the historically-constructed racial categories continue to carry important social meanings and effects in contemporary South Africa.
- 5 A militant dance mimicking that performed by guerrilla soldiers during the struggle against apartheid, which in turn drew on older, pre-colonial forms of military ‘performance art’.
- 6 A Western Cape, working class dialect of Afrikaans.
- 7 The ‘key points’ related to the procedures and principles of collective bargaining, understanding what a strike is, and how to build a successful strike.
- 8 ‘Down with!’
- 9 The ANC government’s macro-economic policy introduced in 1996, which has led to substantial cuts in social spending, forcing local government to look to the private sector as a way to finance and expand service delivery (McDonald and Smith 2002).
- 10 Alec Erwin, first Cosatu Education Secretary, quoted in Friedman 1987: 499.
- 11 This is a reference to an assertion that some ‘white collar’ workers are unproductive and undeserving of their jobs.
- 12 Adult Basic Education and Training.
- 13 Reference to the fact that management’s offices were in a big, white house located on the high-ground of the depot, while workers were forced to share as their ‘mess-room’ a shabby building at the bottom-end of the depot.

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Inside out of experiential learning

Fluid bodies, co-emergent minds

Tara Fenwick

Experiential learning (EL) discourses in adult education have tended to presume the existence of an experiencing body inhabited by a reflecting mind, constructing meanings to bring some coherent order to a sensate chaos (e.g. see Malinen 2000). The role of the adult educator produced in these discourses is also variously presumptuous: examining, calculating and recording these meanings; educating and liberating them; granting them immanence in educative languages; or midwifing the very experiences, along with their meanings and the experiencer's identity. Descriptions of EL are inherently positive. Since the writing of progressive educators like John Dewey and Eduard Lindeman and throughout the twentieth century, EL in practice was intended to be triumphal, to challenge prevailing orthodoxy that worthwhile knowledge is canonical and to celebrate knowledge generated outside institutions. If learning can be defined as change or transformation, in the sense of expanding human possibilities and action (Davis and Sumara 1997), experiential learning is expansion that resists the hegemonic logic of expert knowledge, refuses knowledge claims of universal validity, and insists on the local, particular and embodied. This is why, despite conceptual problems that have arisen around EL, its continued development in adult education scholarship and practice remains important.

In this chapter I outline these problems as described by critics of EL (Edwards 1994, Fraser 1995, Griffin 1992, Harris 2000, Michelson 1996, 1998, Sawada 1991, Usher and Solomon 1999). Towards further development of EL, I then wonder, might it be turned inside out? Borrowing from post-foundational theories of experience emphasizing language/meaning, desire, ecology and complexity, I suggest we focus on the flows across bodies, rather than the boundaries between them. Through these flows emerge nested webs of interaction at many levels (molecular, emotional, libidinal, social, political). These webs dissolve mind-body, self-other, subject-object dualities and allow a conception of fluidity among bodies – of human beings, objects, knowledge and nature. In this fluidity, meaning and experience are contingent and undecidable, and cognition is co-emergent among persons, actions and environment. Such ideas are not particularly new in educational theory (e.g. Davis and Sumara 1997, Lather 1991, Michelson 1996, Usher *et al.* 1997, Varela *et al.* 1991). But perhaps they require a louder and more

explicit linkage with discourses of experiential learning to unseat the humanist assumptions that remain dominant in its renderings.

Critiques of experiential learning

Banished bodies in experiential learning

Feminists such as Michelson (1998) have long disparaged the Cartesian bifurcation of mind and body in an epistemological tradition that privileges mental detachment, observation and calculation of the world from a disembodied rationality. This is what Haraway (1991: 188) calls 'the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere'. Bai (2001: 86) argues that it is precisely this Western split of subject and object that produces 'the predominance of the conceptual mind sustained by preoccupations with symbolic manipulation and a corresponding eclipse of the nonconceptual, that is, unmediated sensory consciousness'. This split is clearly visible in experiential learning theories and programmes propagating conceptions of experience as 'concrete' experience split from 'reflection' (Kolb 1984). What becomes emphasized are the supposed conceptual lessons gained from experience, stripped of location and embeddedness in the material and social conditions that produced that knowledge. Michelson (1998) argues that, in the movement to rationalize experiential learning, the body is not so much transcended as rendered completely invisible.

This split between mind and body sustains other dualisms, such as the formal/informal binary that ties learning to schooling and the regulatory gaze of educators. Person is often split from environment in EL conceptualizations as well, with context or place portrayed as an inert container in which people perform their actions. The primary dualisms of body and mind, subject and object, underpinning such conceptions of learning are also at the root of capitalist logic according to Michelson (1996). Thus experience comes to be viewed as a (marketable) commodity and people as fragmented learning minds. Little wonder that educational discourses move easily to a place of control and measurement.

Disciplined minds

In the popularity of 'reflective practice' and 'reflective dialogue' in experiential education, mental activity becomes a conduit from event to knowledge, transforming 'raw' experience into worthwhile learning. In its first iterations, reflection was intended to enrich experience and connect mind and body (Boud *et al.* 1996). But critics such as Griffin (1992) and Lather (1991) claim that such reflective models centre learning in a knowledge-making mind, rising somehow above messy bodily dynamics to fix both experience and a singular experiencing self. Individuals find refuge in reflection, as Miller (2000) points out, to pattern the fragments and impose coherence on the uncertainty and undecidability of their

experiences. This biographical pattern-making may be key to psychic survival in an anxious world (West 1996).

However, such individual mental representations of events are static pictures, with little relation to the interdependent commotion of people together in action with objects and language. Michelson (1996: 449) asks, 'Where, precisely, are we standing when we "reflect", and what kind of self is constructed in the process?'. In fact, she argues, experience, reflection and knowledge are mutually determined and in continuous dynamic flux. What is imagined to be 'experience' is rooted in social discourses that determine which experiences become visible, how they are interpreted and what knowledge they yield. Many slippages occur between the named and the invisible in consciousness and meaning-making. Lather (2000) is among those interested in how language, audience, purpose and identity make the reflective act itself a *performance* of remembered experience. What we think we see, when we reflect, 'is always already distorted':

[Remembrance is] less a repository for what has happened than a production of it: language, writing, a spectacle of replication in an excess of intention. Remembrance is not about taking hold but a medium of experience, a theatre for gathering information.

(Lather 2000: 154)

Regulated experiences

In EL, the 'learning' harvested from bodies in action is measured according to normalizing categories, commodified, and credentialed: 'an object of institutional policy and professional good practice' (Griffin 1992: 31). Many have argued critically that the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) creates a disjuncture between private experience and public discourse, producing a fundamental paradox when the private journey of discovery and learning is brought under public scrutiny and adjudication (Fraser 1995, Harris 2000). Adults are compelled to construct an individualistic identity of achievement to fit the APEL dimensions: adults are what they have done, rendered visible and thus subject to institutional discipline.

Assessment processes employed in experiential learning reveal the contested terrain that is engaged when educators insert themselves, their pedagogical categories and ideologies into complex nets and structures of experience. Valuing experience may be a well-intentioned gesture to diminish the power of institutionalized knowledge, but renders local knowledge into institutional vocabulary. Worse, the exercise may be directed by an impulse to liberate people from 'false ideologies' that their own experiences are believed to have produced. When experiential learning is judged and managed, both 'experience' and human subjectivity are translated into calculable resources serving what are ultimately utilitarian notions of knowledge. This calculation of experience has become a central occupation in the workplace of the so-called knowledge economy.

Experiential learning in particular has become the new form of labour – learning new identities, knowledges, and textual practices. The experiential learning discourse, observe Usher and Solomon (1999: 8), ‘intersects happily with the managerial discourse of workplace reform . . . since both shape subjectivity in ways appropriate to the needs of the contemporary workplace’.

Excluded bodies

Ultimately, the educational disembodiment of experiential learning creates exclusions. Bodies of people, psyches, knowledges and cultures are excluded through normative approaches to experiential learning that determine which sorts of experiences are educative, developmental, knowledge-producing and worth enhancing. In the categories we typically use to study or accredit experiential learning, the strong influence of capitalist production is immediately apparent. Work experience is prominent, usually characterized as paid employment. Long-term unemployment, non-salaried or contingent work and low-income routinized jobs do not often produce the rich sorts of experiential work learning that excite researchers of informal learning. Experiences depend partly on inhabited environments and bodily capacity. Those who have been socially, physically, economically or politically excluded from particular experiences may be judged as lacking social capital, remedied through expanding their access to ‘rich’ experiences and networks. But this approach colonizes their own knowledge, reifies the normalizing categories of the middle class whose values control the dominant cultural meanings and perpetuates an acquisitive conception of experience as *capital* to be obtained and parlayed into credit, income or profit.

Excluded are realms of experiential learning that do not correspond to knowledge categories most recognized in adult education, such as those of the Habermasian tradition of technical knowledge (mastering procedures), communicative knowledge (understanding people and society), and moral-emancipatory knowledge (discerning systemic injustice, inequities, and one’s implication in these). Sexualities, desire and phantasy, for example, tend to be ignored in adult education discourses of experiential learning. Non-conscious and intuitive knowledge, knowledge of micro-negotiations within systems that struggles in bodies and discourses, and knowledge without voice or subject that lives in collective action tend to be bracketed out of these discourses.

Moving inside out: embodying minds and minding bodies

Given these problems of banished bodies and subject/object splits, mentalism, regulation and exclusion, why not simply jettison the experiential learning discourse altogether? The short answer is that its democratic intents remain important in an institutionalized world where the cult of credentialing challenges any knowledge generated outside market usefulness. Experience focuses on the messy practices of

everyday life which continue to run counter to the logic, language and disciplines of the academy. Experience exceeds language and rationality, because it reiterates the crucial locatedness of bodies in material reality. Indeed, this signifier of *experiential* learning could become a provocation to trouble facile assumptions about the nature of reality and of experience. When re-examined in terms of its textures and movements, a focus on experience has the potential to unlock a liberal humanist preoccupation with individual minds, knowledge canons and rational reflection and open a door on embodied, collective knowledge emerging in moments of everyday action.

The embodiment of experiential learning is an ancient concept. Indigenous ways of knowing, for example, have maintained that spirit, mind and body are not separated in experience, that learning is more focused on being than doing, and that experiential knowledge is produced within the collective, not the individual mind (McIsaac 2000). Cruikshank's (1998) research shows how the life stories and knowledge development of the Yukon First Nations people are completely entangled with the glaciers around which they live. The glaciers are not inert environment, but alive and moving, rumbling and responding to small human actions. In the collective ways of knowing of these Tlingit and Tagish peoples, the lines between human and non-human, social history and natural history, are fluid. Writers on Africentric knowledge, so named to distinguish it from Eurocentric perspectives that fragment and rationalize experience, have also shown how learning is embodied and rooted in collective historic experiences of oppression inseparable from the emotional, spiritual and natural.

The difference here from mentalist or reflection-dependent understandings is accepting the moment of experiential learning as occurring *within* action, within and among bodies. The crucial conceptual shift of an embodied experiential learning is from a *learning subject* to the larger collective, to the systems of culture, history, social relations and nature in which everyday bodies, subjectivities and lives are enacted. This shift is towards what Davis (2003) calls a 'complexified' view of cognition. Complexity science, examining webs of action linking humans and non-humans in complex adaptive systems, is one area of contemporary theory and research that informs a re-embodied view of experiential learning. A second area focuses on dynamics of desire and resistance evolving at subsystem levels, currently being explored in feminist and psychoanalytic learning theory. A third area studies learning as struggle evolving in the body politic, evident in social action movements. All three orientations reveal the fluidity between actions, bodies, identities, objects and environments.

Co-emerging minds

Discussions of embodied learning informed by complexity science (Davis and Sumara 1997, Varela *et al.* 1991) highlight the phenomenon of co-emergence in complex adaptive systems. The first premise is that the systems represented by person and context are inseparable. The second premise is that change occurs

from emerging systems affected by the intentional tinkering of one with the other. Humans are completely interconnected with the systems in which they act through a series of 'structural couplings' (Maturana and Varela 1987). That is, when two systems coincide, the 'perturbations' of one system excite responses in the structural dynamics of the other. The resultant 'coupling' creates a new transcendent unity of action and identities that could not have been achieved independently by either participant. Varela (1999: 17, italics added) explains that

Perception does not consist in the recovery of a pre-given world, but rather in the *perceptual guidance* of action in the world that is inseparable from our sensorimotor capacities ... cognition consists not of representations but of embodied action.

A workplace project, for example, is a collective activity in which interaction both enfold and renders visible the participants, the objects mediating their actions and dialogue, the problem space that they define together and the emerging plan or solution they devise. As each person contributes, she changes the interactions and the emerging object of focus. Other participants are changed, the relational space among them all changes and the looping-back changes the contributor's actions and subject position within the collective activity. This is 'mutual specification' (Varela *et al.* 1991), the fundamental dynamic of systems constantly engaging in joint action and interaction. The 'environment' and the 'learner' emerge together in the process of cognition, although this is a false dichotomy: *context* is not a separate background for any particular system such as an individual actor. Davis *et al.* (2000: 74) describe co-emergence as 'a new understanding of cognition':

Rather than being cast as a locatable process or phenomenon, cognition has been reinterpreted as a joint participation, a choreography. An agent's knowing, in this sense, are those patterns of acting that afford it a coherence – that is, that make it discernible as a unity, a wholeness, identity. The question, "Where does cognition happen?" is thus equivalent to, "Who or what is perceived to be acting?" In this way, a rainforest is cognitive – and humanity is necessarily participating in its cogitations/evolutions. That is, our habits of thought are entwined and implicated in unfolding global conditions.

Most of this complex joint action leaks out of individual attempts to control behaviour through critical reflection. And yet, individual reconstructions of events too often focus on the learning *figure* and ignore the complex interactions as 'background'. Complexity theory interrupts the natural tendency to seek clear lines between figures and grounds, and focuses on the *relationships* binding humans and non-humans (persons, material objects, mediating tools, environments, ideas) together in multiple fluctuations in complex systems.

All complex adaptive systems in which human beings are implicated learn, whether at micro-levels such as immune systems or at macro-levels such as weather patterns, a forest or the stock market. Human beings are part of these larger systems that are continuously learning and bear characteristics of the larger patterns, like the single fern leaf resembling the whole fern plant. But individuals also participate, contributing through multiple interactions at micro-levels. At the sub-system level, for example, the human immune system, like organs and other sub-human systems, functions as an autonomous learning system that remembers, forgets, hypothesizes, errs, recovers, and adapts (Davis *et al.* 2000). The outcome of all these dynamic interactions of a system's parts is unpredictable and inventive. The key to a healthy system – able to adapt creatively to changing conditions – is diversity among its parts, whose interactions form patterns of their own.

Learning is thus cast as continuous invention and exploration, produced through the relations among consciousness, identity, action and interaction, objects and structural dynamics of complex systems. New possibilities for action are constantly emerging among the interactions of complex systems and cognition occurs in the possibility for unpredictable shared action. Knowledge cannot be contained in any one element or dimension of a system, for it is constantly emerging and spilling into other systems. For example, studies of safety knowledge in the workplace (Gherardi and Nicolini 2000) show that experiential learning emerges and circulates through exchanges among both human and non-human elements in a net of action. The foreman negotiates the language of the assessment report with the industrial inspector, the equipment embeds a history of use possibilities and constraints, deadlines and weather conditions pressure a particular job, and workers adapt a tool or safety procedure for particular problems, depending on who is watching. No actor has an essential self outside a given network: nothing is given in the order of things, but performs itself into existence.

Such studies of objects, people and learning as co-emerging systems are helping to challenge our conceptual subject/object splits. They refuse the notion that learning is a product of experience and show ways to recognize how learning is woven into fully embodied nets of ongoing action, invention, social relations and history in complex systems.

Desiring bodies

Embodied systems of behaviour and knowledge also are influenced in part by dynamics of desire, love and hate, according to psychoanalytic theorists of learning. The focus is on what occurs behind the visible in daily encounters: things resisted and ignored, the nature of longings and lack, and the slippages among action, intention, perceptions of self and experience. While not easily aligned with the tenets of complexity theory, psychoanalytic learning theory shares its ontological propositions that relations and interconnections among items nested in systems are central acting phenomena in learning, that experience is not contained in the body and that individual minds cannot perceive the totality of micro-interactions

in which they participate. One particular contribution of psychoanalysis to learning theory is highlighting desire for and resistance to different objects (Todd 1997). Desire may be manifested in longings to possess or be possessed by another, creating urges to act towards such longings. The complex influence of these urges on consequent actions arguably affects the directions in which systems involving humans co-emerge.

For Britzman (1998), desire and learning are conflated in daily, disturbing experiential encounters carried on at psychic levels that individuals manage to ignore using various cognitive strategies. But while these levels cannot be known directly, their interactions interfere with intentions and conscious perception of direct experience. These workings constantly 'bother' the (individual and collective) mind, producing breaches between acts and wishes. Despite varied and creative defences against confronting these breaches, the conscious mind is forced to notice random paradoxes and contradictions of experience, and uncannily slips into sudden awareness of difficult truths about itself. These truths are what Britzman (1998) calls 'lost subjects', those inner and outer beings that people resist, then try to reclaim and want to explore, but are afraid to. Full knowledge of these lost and perhaps disturbing subjects jeopardizes the conscious sense of identity as self-determined, sensible and knowledgeable. Learning is coming to tolerate these conflicting desires, while recovering the subjects that are repressed from the terror of full self-knowledge. As Bion (1994) observes, the implicit difficulty in learning from experience – forcing people to tolerate frustration and uncertainty, to reconsider meanings of past experiences and change their relationship to their past knowledge – is the unconscious 'hatred of development' it produces. But desire points not only to knowing resisted ('active ignorance' in Britzman's terms), but also to pleasure-seeking, to sensing lack and pursuing objects: dynamics that influence the direction and shape of co-emergent communities and action. Experiential learning is thus posed as the opposite of acquiring transparent experience – it is entering and *working through* the profound conflicts of all the desiring events bubbling within experience that comprise what Britzman calls 'difficult knowledge'. Desire flows across bodies, propelling, joining and repelling to shape action and form knowledge.

Struggling in co-emergence

A common assumption in adult education is that experience must be educated, that individuals are overdetermined by received meanings reproducing existing oppressions and inequalities. Experiential or informal learning is thus considered unpoliticized and hence, dangerous. Certainly many systems, unless interrupted, continue to produce toxic or exploitive conditions that benefit a few members at the expense of many. However, the assumption that dynamics of struggle bubbling within systems are seduced into silence until released through (proper) education is self-serving and arrogant on the part of critical educators. Usher *et al.* (1997: 99) characterize the emancipatory position as

patronizing in so far as selves have to be seen as normally in a state of false consciousness. In stressing the negative and overwhelming effects of social relations and social structures, persons are made into social 'victims', dupes and puppets, manipulated by ideology and deprived of agency.

Furthermore, emancipatory learning models that depend upon critical rational detachment from one's sociocultural webs of experience appear to overlook the fact that detachment is never possible even if it were desirable. Rational critique of an individual's culturally located beliefs is itself inescapably embedded in their historical nets of discourse and action.

In fact, complexity science shows that complex adaptive systems generate the seeds of their own transformation. According to complexity theory, learning is the continuous improvisation of alternate actions and responses to new possibilities and changing circumstances that emerge, undertaken by the system's parts. More sudden transformation can occur in response to a major shock to the system, throwing it into disequilibrium. A shock might originate in abrasions with external systems or through amplification (through feedback loops) of disturbances occurring within a system. Computer-generated images of systems undergoing disequilibrium show that they exhibit a phase of swinging between extremes, before self-organizing gradually into a new pattern or identity that can continue co-habiting with and adapting to the other systems in their environments. Examples of social disequilibrium abound in social movements. The diverse patterns of growth and activity of such movements defy explanation limited to notions of educating consciousness (Holst 2002). People are not docile dupes of capitalism: they struggle against forces that threaten their freedom.

Social action demonstrates processes of collective experiential learning emerging through struggle. Foley (1999) presents case studies that refute notions of conscientization as rational deliberation that reframes 'distorted understandings' and 'false ideology'. Radical transformation in both social order and consciousness, as praxis or dialectic of thought and action, is embedded in complex systems interacting, adapting and influencing one another: the body politic, diverse collective bodies and persons as body biologic. As people enact solidarity, strategizing and learning together about unjust social arrangements in a choreography of action, they recognize new problems and possibilities for action. Each action opens alternative micro-worlds, while expanding people's confidence and recognition of the group's capacity to influence other systems. This experiential learning is continually inventive, but also filled with conflict and contradiction. Recent social movement research is examining these dynamics of experiential learning as struggle. Chovanec (2004), for example, studied a Chilean women's uprising in Pinochet's regime of the early 1980s. Through the women's collective stories of this revolution, she explored questions like: what micro-actions seeded and amplified the sense of oppression drawing a group together (into a self-organized system)? What different identities and knowledge co-emerge in active struggle? How does the group as a learning system expand its capacity and shift in

response to external systems over time? Such studies unpeel processes of learning emerging through struggle in complex adaptive systems.

These theoretical dimensions of emergence, desire and struggle open a view of EL beyond individual learning minds separated from bodies, objects of environment and thought, to understand knowledge as constantly enacted. The focus shifts to fluid *relations*, not components, of systems: learning co-emerges among particularities that are dynamic and unpredictable. Part and whole co-specify one another and participation in any shared action contributes to the very conditions that shape these identities. These dimensions offer a way out of the banished bodies and disciplined minds of experiential learning conceptions prevalent in classroom and workplace. They also suggest useful starting points for conceiving roles of educators in learning worlds of co-emergence and fluidity.

Outside in: a place for pedagogy

In writings about adult education pedagogy, there persists a hero-rescuer motif of designing grand utopias of social responsibility. These lead naturally back to management and control, and away from engagement in co-emerging improvisations among fluid bodies. Most adult educators are united in a wish to advance human capacity to participate fully, creatively, and compassionately in complex systems, while resisting complicit participation in toxic systems that perpetuate harmful, unfair or dehumanizing conditions, such as transnational capitalism that threatens consumption of other living systems. But, in co-emergent understandings of experiential learning, educators do not occupy central roles, mobilizing and measuring others' experiences. Nor are educators architects of a new social order, collapsing all systemic problems, from social exclusion and poverty to capitalism, into educational issues. So what *are* viable and generative pedagogies for such a vision?

Inducing co-emergence

In fact, the question of 'how to be' as educators is also asked by complexity science: How is change induced in complex systems? So, one role for educators may be to *induce co-emergence* by exercising influence on those conditions that are possible to influence. Elements that characterize co-emergence in complex systems include such things as internal diversity, redundancy among agents (sufficient commonality to ensure communication), interaction, decentralized control, liberating constraints and structured feedback (Johnson 2001). One important way that educators can promote emergent conditions is by initiating occasions that encourage interaction and that have liberating constraints, or some focus and simple governing rules that do not strangle emergent possibilities. An 'occasion' is a falling of things toward each other in surprising ways (Davis 2003). Not all events naturally offer occasions for co-emergence. Diversity may be a given but may not be recognized and diverse individuals may have too little in common to interact. Educators can help amplify

diversity, develop sufficient redundancy for diverse individuals to understand one another, and introduce guidelines and limitations for activity that promote organization while encouraging diverse expression and improvisation. In workplace learning, Billett (2001), for example, shows how to alter environments and encourage guided practice that 'affords' collaborative invention: through structured observations, minimal trials, improvisation, prototyping, collaboration, struggle and other forms of experiential participation that expand capacities. Educators also typically promote feedback within a system, feedback that amplifies activities which expands a group's possibilities in healthy directions and feedback that challenges negative loops which threaten to kill a system. Davis *et al.* (2000) describe educators as catalysts of 'playing' occasions, 'planning' occasions, 'adapting' and 'varying' occasions. The role involves open-ended design but not control: making spaces, removing barriers, introducing and amplifying disturbances.

Listening

In thinking about pedagogical practices that encourage co-emergence, what seems most important is listening to experience, not reshaping or emancipating it. As Michelson (1999: 151) has argued, 'experience exceeds rational attempts to bound it, control and rationalize it according to pre-existing social categories and sanctioned uses'. Too often, educators might be suspected of approaching others with an anthropologist's gaze – with external 'expert' knowledge attempting to penetrate and represent the internal knowledge of a community to which they do not belong. A wiser approach might be learning to listen to the poetics of experience, as Cruikshank (1998) has demonstrated. This is listening without constructing the other in ways the listener desires, but instead opening to what the other may be on its own terms, and *how it may construct the listener*.

As witnesses, educators also listen to interpret interdependencies. Within groups, educators commonly help interpret diverse individuals' experience to one another. Within organizations, story-making is one way that educators listen and interpret a system's relationships and activities, and mirror them back to itself. The interpreter helps trace the complex interactions of actors and objects in expanding spaces. Some educators listen to encourage groups of people to interpret their oppressive experiences through dialogue, creating the redundancy or shared understanding that can ensure interaction and mobilization, while promoting the diversity that enables a group to improvise actions through which can emerge alternative futures. In writing about complexity science in higher education, Karpiak (2000) describes this as 'attuning'. She suggests that educators can help most by attuning students to the patterns and conflicts emerging among the complex systems of their lives, and to their involvements in these patterns. Most of all, educators might listen to their own entanglements in learning systems. The language brought to groups, the gaze used and the interactions promoted all become incorporated into the system's changing texture. These countless consequences of educators' actions within a complex system cannot be predicted

or even observed, but at least awareness of one's footprints can be attempted to avoid stepping destructively.

Listening in psychoanalytic learning theory suggests that educators examine themselves as nested within larger systems of cultural desire, on levels inaccessible to everyday conscious awareness, asking: what desires configure our practice and our own experiential learning? What lines do we seek to draw around the world to feel secure and meaningful in our contribution? Britzman (1998) maintains that educators ought to listen to what they *actively ignore* in their own experiences. Rational mind cannot be relied upon to explore these, only attunement to subtle disturbances: listening to what bodies do or resist, or to uncanny slips in consciousness, or to emotional insights that lead into difficult knowledge that may be personally resisted.

Disturbing

At a time when experiential learning is becoming thoroughly commodified as human resource capital or social capital, educators can disturb this appropriation of experiential learning and the focus on the individual learning subject. In community action, classrooms and work organizations, educators can continue disturbing the categories used to recognize experience and judge learning: to interrupt the normative, decentre it and invert the terms of reference. As disturbers, some of whom may be committed to promoting systems that are more just and equitable, educators are well positioned to amplify transgressive and radical impulses in systems, those constructive deviances that generate disequilibrium. Educators can continue to draw attention to the historical and shared social nature of experiential learning, to its political and exclusionary dimensions, including the politics positioning those who seek to manage, enlighten or represent an other's experience (Taylor *et al.* 2002). Educational researchers like Cruikshank (1998), Bai (2001), Davis (2003) and Varela (1999) are interpreting to Western disciplines the ancient wisdom and ecological processes of communities that are already healthy systems of complex emergence. In these forms of disturbance, educators can help restore experiential learning, revive its poetry and its complex entanglement in expanding spaces of invention.

In considering and implementing these suggestions, let us be mindful of pedagogical tendencies to regulate and exclude experience. As orgasmic flux, experience refuses containment and schooling. The complexification called for here is not a reduction of experiential learning to skin, sex and organs, but an expansion from a mentalist world privileging reflection and representation, to materially and cognitively co-emergent worlds; from the purely intersubjective to what Davis (2003) portrays as interobjectivity. Amidst their continual (com)motion, boundaries creating bodies, objects, identities and knowledge are highly suspect. Pedagogy, too, becomes a flow across these fluid bodies.

Such thinking is directed neither towards anarchy nor abdication of educative responsibility. A shift to co-emergent, fluid conceptions of experiential learning,

such as those suggested by complex systems, desire and collective struggle, does not erase pedagogy or dissolve political commitments, nor does it denounce rationality. Educators are, partly at least, rational systems, inescapably nested within systems of the body politic, employing creative rationality as part of their capacity to act within these systems. Adult educators in particular are typically interdisciplinary, used to drawing flexibly from new insights presented by sociology, feminism, cultural studies and evolutionary science to name a few to make sense of their roles in serving communities and working towards a more just society. As active flexible agents, educators can make moral choices to be advocates and critics: critics of pedagogy that over-rationalizes experiential learning and advocates for occasioning social reconstruction through a fully embodied and collective experiential learning: as Davis and Sumara (1997) suggest, enlarging the space of the possible.

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European policies on 'non-formal' learning

A genealogical review

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Introduction

Never before has so much official attention been focused on the concept of 'non-formal learning' in the advanced capitalist nations of Europe. At the turn of the millennium, it has emerged suddenly from long confinement in the more marginal fields of international development and adult education to enjoy unprecedented status at the forefront of European lifelong learning policy. A White Paper on education and training (European Commission (EC) 1995) led to the declaration of the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996. In March 2000, the Lisbon meeting of European Councils established lifelong learning as a clear priority within Europe's strategy for employment. A *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (EC 2000) initiated a consultation leading to a further White Paper, the *Communication on Lifelong Learning* (EC 2001), issued the following year. Since then, a pivotal activity for the implementation of this policy has been the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning, presented under the banner of 'making learning visible' (Bjørnåvold 2000).

In this chapter, we report some of our work in a project to 'map the conceptual terrain of non-formal learning' (Colley *et al.* 2003). We begin by considering a series of ways in which the EC, other policy-makers, and academics have defined separate types of learning (formal, informal or non-formal), pointing to the problems such definitions raise. The rest of the chapter presents a genealogy we have constructed of the notion of non-formal learning. This traces its origins and evolution through five historical moments at which it has been the subject of contestation and redefinition – efforts which both reveal and constitute part of broader social struggles for power. This leads to an analysis of how such struggles may be understood in the context of Europe today, and to a radically alternative way of understanding learning – not through the categorization of separate types, but through recognition of the interfusion and inseparability of formal and informal attributes in any learning situation.

Defining formal, non-formal and informal learning

The EC *Communication* defines three types of learning – formal, informal and non-formal – thus:

- *formal learning* is usually located in institutions dedicated to education or training; structured via learning objectives or learning strategies; facilitated by a teacher or trainer; intentional on the part of the learner; and leads to certification
- *informal learning* is located in daily activities and intergenerational relationships in work, the home, the community, and youth organizations; is unstructured and rarely leads to certification; and in most cases is incidental rather than intentional
- *non-formal learning* is viewed as an intermediate category, located mainly in the workplace or community and voluntary settings; it is typically both structured by a trainer, coach or mentor and intentional on the part of the learner; but it is not usually certificated.

In practice, however, little distinction is made throughout the *Communication* between informal and non-formal learning and the terms seem to be used interchangeably. As one commentator notes:

The terms non-formal learning and informal learning are often used as synonyms ... What the present definition of [non-formal learning] really translates is the still limited knowledge and understanding of what exactly one is dealing with, how complex it is, how vast a territory one is moving in. For the time being, the concept is accepted as such and it can be considered that non-formal and informal are frequently interchangeable.

(Colardyn 2002: 5)

This was also the case in our wider literature review (Colley *et al.* 2003), where we found that no tenable distinction was made between the terms 'informal' and 'non-formal' learning. It reinforces a point we explain in greater detail later, that one key aspect of European policy is towards greater formalization of learning outside educational institutions under the rubric of 'non-formal' learning. For now, we continue by considering other approaches to understanding different types of learning.

If European policy constructs types of learning as if they were rigidly separate categories, it is just one of many such attempts. Predominantly political approaches to the problem include, for example, the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) conducted in the UK by the government's Department for Education and Skills. This has been used to research types of learning experience for almost ten years (see La Valle and Blake 2001), distinguishing between two

main categories of learning in both work-related and non-vocational contexts. That of 'taught' learning has remained constant, but the NALS has redefined the other category respectively as 'non-taught' (in the 1997 survey), 'self-taught' (in 2000), and 'self-directed' (in 2001). Counter-intuitively, it includes elements of all three EC types – formal, non-formal and informal – in its category of 'taught' learning, while its definition of 'self-directed' learning rules out much of the EC's definition of informal learning. One explanation can be found in the fact that the NALS appears to target only individual, intentional learning to the exclusion of more collective processes or tacit learning. As a result, it has been criticized for restricting its remit to the 'tip of the learning iceberg', seriously underestimating the amount and importance of informal learning that goes on (Livingstone 2001).

This critique points to a rather different strand of politically-oriented definitions, which adopt an emancipatory perspective best typified by the radical ethos of adult and community education. Long before the emergence of the term 'non-formal learning', Simkins (1977) offered a typology of formal and non-formal education in international development that has since been much cited in these fields. His definitions rest on key questions: what is learned, and who are the learners? Who controls the content of learning? What are the purposes of learning, and whose interests does it serve? These underpin a stance, which is fundamentally critical of neo-colonialism and, increasingly today, of the power of multinational corporations.

Other attempts to define types of learning are predominantly concerned with theories of learning. For example, Eraut (2000) has done much to raise current awareness of 'non-formal' learning, through his research into workplace learning and its potential generalization to other contexts. He dispenses with the category of informal learning altogether, arguing that it has confusing connotations that have little to do with learning as such. However, his definition of non-formal is constructed only by counter-posing it to the formal. For him, non-formal learning is distinguished primarily by its *lack* of the key characteristics that define formal learning, namely:

- a prescribed learning framework
- an organized learning event or package
- the presence of a designated teacher or trainer
- the award of a qualification or credit
- the external specification of outcomes.

In a philosophical analysis, Beckett and Hager (2002) challenge Cartesian dualisms that locate learning solely in the mind. They argue that learning is an organic or holistic process, engaging the intellect, emotions, values and practical activities of the whole person. They use this as the basis of a distinction between formal and informal learning, although their argument would suggest that learning in any situation – even in the most formalized educational institution – is always,

in part at least, informal. This view supports Davies' (2001: 113) critique of the taxonomy in EC policy:

... the notion of formal, non-formal and informal [learning] may become fixed as if these are three rooms with high walls around them so that the integrated holistic way in which real people learn is lost.

This theoretical axis of debate is a subject in its own right (see Colley *et al.* 2003, for a full discussion). However, Beckett and Hager's view points to a fundamental problem that emerges from any review of the many attempts to define separate categories of learning. First of all, there are at least 20 criteria which authors use to construct such taxonomies, including:

- institutional education or non-institutional learning experiences
- location (e.g. institution, community premises, workplaces)
- intentionality and voluntarism (of learner and, where relevant, teacher)
- degree of planning or structuring
- nature and extent of assessment and accreditation
- timeframes of learning
- tacit or explicit learning (or a combination)
- degree to which learning is context-specific or generalizable/transferable
- external determination or not
- whether learning is seen as embodied or a purely cognitive process
- part of a course or not
- whether outcomes can be measured
- whether learning is collective/collaborative or individual
- the status of the knowledge and learning
- the nature of knowledge
- teacher-learner relations
- pedagogical approaches
- the mediation of learning – by whom and how
- purposes and interests to meet needs of dominant or oppressed groups
- location of learning within wider power relations
- the locus of control within learning processes.

The difficulty is that all this offers little prospect of achieving consensus about a typology of actual learning experiences. On the basis of this lengthy list, it is impossible to draw up ideal types of formal and informal learning, with non-formal learning somewhere in between. Not only are many of the criteria imprecise and contested, but a number are read in contrary ways by different authors and some criteria which appear to be opposites might actually co-exist. In fact, it is extremely difficult even to imagine any actual learning experience which would look like an ideal type using these criteria. Furthermore, it is impossible to determine their respective significance: which might be essential and which might not? Finally,

classifications of learning according to such criteria often subsume an ideological value-judgement about particular types of learning. They tend to suggest implicitly that ‘informal learning = good’ and ‘formal learning = bad’, or vice versa.

Elsewhere (Colley *et al.* 2003, Hodgkinson and Colley 2005, Malcolm *et al.* 2003), we have developed this analysis to argue that it is profoundly problematic to construct discrete categories of formal, informal and non-formal learning. We agree with Billett (2002) that to reify discrete categories of formal and informal/non-formal learning is to misunderstand dangerously the nature of learning. In particular, it leads us to ignore the social structures and covert formalities of power relations that exist in community and workplace settings. Using practical case studies from a range of settings, we have argued it is more helpful to conceive of formal and informal *attributes* of different aspects of learning (which we made a tentative attempt to classify in terms of process, location/setting, purposes and content of learning). This acknowledges that both formal and informal attributes are always present and points to the need to analyse the balance of formality and informality in each aspect of any learning situation. Furthermore, we suggest that any change in the balance of informality and formality inevitably changes the nature of the learning and that this should be taken into account when considering interventions into learning situations. For the purposes of this chapter, however, we turn to a different set of questions, concerned with the political-theoretical rather than epistemological dimension of the literature. Why is there such attention today, in policy and practitioner circles alike, to the issue of non-formal learning? Where has it come from? And why now?

A genealogy of non-formal learning

As we have seen above, the prevailing assumption of European policy-makers (and many academics alike) is that it makes common sense to distinguish different types of learning in order to promote effective educational policy and practice. An important activity of critical research, however, is to employ a radical, reflexive doubt towards such official versions of common sense:

The construction of a scientific object requires first and foremost a break with common sense, that is, with the representations shared by all, whether they be the mere commonplaces of ordinary existence or official representations, often inscribed in institutions and thus present both in the objectivity of social organizations and in the minds of their participants. *The preconstructed is everywhere.* The sociologist is literally beleaguered by it, as everybody else is ... (This is particularly true of the classificatory notions he employs in order to know it ... scholarly notions such as those handed down by the tradition of the discipline.)

(Bourdieu 1992: 235)

This latter parenthetical point on the dangers of taxonomies is highly pertinent to our subject here. To translate Bourdieu's scepticism to this context is to engage in reflexive study of how the issue of non-formal learning has emerged, including the contribution that educationalists themselves have made to it.

- How has the task of defining and re-shaping non-formal learning come to be known and recognized as a *legitimate* problem, an object of European policies and decrees?
- What are the hidden orthodoxies and public 'sacred stories' about non-formal learning?
- How has non-formal learning been contested, and what struggles have taken place over it?
- What key developments in policy, pedagogical theory and educational practice have intervened into the problem of non-formal learning, to secure or shift its course?

One means of engaging in such a reflexive study is by constructing a genealogy (Foucault 1980, 1991): a history of non-formal learning, tracing not only its earliest origins, but also the association of its various meanings with specific groupings and interests at different times, and key moments at which its meanings and practices have changed significantly. In particular, such a genealogy can reveal the workings of power: the covert but material and disciplinary effects of these discourses.

'Non-formal learning' is a term of relatively recent origin, located in discourses in the advanced capitalist countries of the North. As we have already noted, it derives from a longer-term concern with 'non-formal education' in the underdeveloped countries of the South (and our genealogy will later highlight the significance of the shift from 'education' to 'learning' in official discourse). Strathern (1997) reminds us that genealogical analysis allows a mapping of the spatial as well as temporal shuttlings of a concept across geographical and ideological domains. The North-South polarization is manifest in many discussions of non-formal learning, but some authors have considered it more globally. We owe much here to Youngman's (2000) review of the political economy of adult education. We begin with an account of the 'prehistory' of non-formal learning in Britain – the first industrial empire to export not only its commercial products but also its language and education systems across the globe.

The prehistory of non-formal learning

Mass education was not a requirement for the pre-capitalist economies that existed in Britain before the Industrial Revolution. The roots of non-formal education lie in practices established long before the state provided elementary schooling, but our current understandings of it have been shaped by transformations of the social life of knowledge: 'The massive institutionalization of knowledge is one great discontinuity between the early nineteenth century and today. It is from this

period that we may date the great transformation in the conditions of learning' (Johnson 1988: 6). Until the eve of the nineteenth century, the craft guilds and formalized apprenticeship systems organized non-formal learning at family or community level in farm and cottage industries (Perry 1976). Other types of non-formal learning emerged in two discernible strands, which laid the basis for contemporary ideology and practice in adult and community education (ACE). The first is the autodidactic tradition which drove much scientific discovery in the nineteenth century, and which re-emerged in the late twentieth century around notions of self-help and the personal development of individuals, exemplified by voluntary adult education oriented to leisure. A second, more politicized tradition, which has informed ACE, is that of collective and often radical self-education. Radical dissent in the nineteenth century – political and religious – was constructed and broadcast through educational means, in meetings, discussion groups, and pamphlets. These reached the parts of social life and organization that schooling, at that time, was too marginal to influence (Johnson 1988). It was only with the development of mass education in Britain, following the 1944 Education Act, that a concept like 'non-formal' learning could emerge explicitly as a visible and meaningful category in opposition to formal learning.

1945–58: the first moment of non-formal education

The term 'non-formal education' first appeared in 1947 in a report by UNESCO on the underdeveloped world. Youngman (2000) argues that the different models, which have since been advanced, have to be understood in relation to the different theories of international development that informed them. These, in turn, are linked to particular aspects of dominant ideological and economic interests. In 1947, the post-war rise of anti-colonial struggles throughout Asia and Africa was creating concerns in Britain, the US and other global powers about the emergence of revolutionary movements. Education was viewed as one instrument for containing these threats.

'Modernization' theories of development underpinned the first wave of efforts to expand non-formal learning. This approach was based on Keynesian economic principles and informed by a social-democratic, reformist ideology. It aspired to two goals that supposedly complemented each other: economic growth, towards parity with the North, and enhanced social justice and democratic participation. The consequent interest in non-formal learning and restructured educational provision emerged not only in reaction to formal education systems and their perceived failures, but was also based on versions of human capital theory which interpreted the problems of the South in terms of the deficits of its populations. Both their lack of skills and knowledge, and the cultural attitudes and lifestyle of peasant communities, were viewed as hindrances to economic and social development (Fordham 1979).

Independence struggles in some of its colonies prompted the British government to fund adult education programmes, often managed by socialists who sought

to create a new cadre of politically-educated individuals for the government of new states (Titmus and Steele 1995). This radical reformist ambition, with its emancipatory potential, viewed non-formal learning as a way to 'bridge the gap' in preparing colonized peoples for participation in a world that was increasingly industrialized and complex. '[The concept of non-formal learning] was based on conscious anticipation and active, voluntary participation, as opposed to the unconscious social reproduction and adaptation characteristic of conservative types of learning offered in traditional schools' (Hamadache 1991: 112).

Non-formal learning not only promised learner relevance and flexibility to a degree that formal provision could not match, but it was also far less demanding of resources. It is this approach, that was summarized by Simkins (1977), which considers purpose, timing, content, delivery and control as key dimensions of contrast. For example, control in formal education is seen as external and hierarchical, while in informal education, it is seen as self-governing and democratic. This model comprises a clear political dimension, a focus on social justice and environment issues and an assumption that non-formal learning is superior to learning in formalized contexts.

Others, however, have criticized it for its separation of formal and non-formal education (e.g. Fordham 1979, King 1982). Their concern was twofold: first, that strategic approaches were needed to promote the *synthesis* rather than counter-position of formal and non-formal education; and second, that it represented a threat to professional educators. From this perspective, the issue was to transform educational provision as a whole:

If we succeed in building a separate non-formal system we shall have failed to exercise proper influence on the whole of education. If we succeed [in bringing formal and non-formal education together], the new-found emphasis on the non-formal label becomes unnecessary.

(Fordham 1979: 8)

However, this reformist experiment in the 'first moment' of non-formal education was relatively short-lived, lasting barely ten years before being discarded in favour of a renewed focus on formal schooling (Hamadache 1991). Its track record was disappointing. Not only did it fail to fulfil its promise of promoting economic growth, but also in many cases it reinforced social and economic inequalities between rich and poor, men and women, city and countryside. Youngman (2000) associates its weaknesses with a deep flaw in its apparently radical rationale. The 'modernization' theories associated with it assumed that the South simply had to 'catch up' with levels of economic development achieved by the North. They ignored the long-term and deliberate *underdevelopment* that the North has long imposed upon the South in its own interests and which continues to dominate their conditions of life.

The 1970s: from non-formal education to non-formal learning

A second moment of non-formal *learning* emerged from this failure, drawing on 'dependency theory' (Cardoso and Faletto 1979). This theory of development provided a very different ideological basis for educational movements, which arose in resistance to the neo-colonial, pro-capitalist regimes that had been established in many countries of the South. Such movements, exemplified in the work of Freire and Fanon, were emancipatory at individual and local levels and avowedly revolutionary at national and international levels. They sought not only to transform skills and knowledge, but also to replace the 'colonial mentality' with new forms of class-consciousness. Freire's literacy work in Brazil's slum areas is perhaps the best-known example, but in Tanzania, Cuba and India also, non-formal education programmes contained strong political and cultural elements that strove to engage learners' commitment to newly independent nation-states (Smith 2002). It is no surprise, then, that the countries of the North and the aid agencies they controlled made little funding available for such programmes.

Global economic conditions played their part in this process. 1973 saw the first worldwide recession since the 1930s, sparked by the crisis in oil production. One strategy for the North to shore up its economic and political interests was to encourage the South to take on massive (and, as we have come to see, unrepayable) debt. The US in particular used its own military might and counter-insurgency tactics to defeat revolutionary movements in Latin America. As a result, Freirean models of non-formal education were never able to extend beyond relatively small-scale local programmes. Despite the undoubted intellectual impact this movement has had, Youngman (2000) argues that it actually influenced practice very little. Furthermore, others claim that the very ideas on which it was based are being steadily eroded from the literature on adult education and international development (Ramdas 1999).

Nevertheless, three highly significant shifts occurred as part of this 'second moment'. The first is a geographical shift of terrain, whereby non-formal education began to receive greater attention in the North itself. Radical education projects emerging in the 'new social movements' (feminist, anti-racist, working-class, anti-war) looked to models of non-formal learning that had been popularized in the underdeveloped world (see, for example, Fordham *et al.* 1979, Foley 1999). At the same time, institutions were beginning to organize adult literacy and other community education projects in disadvantaged communities, with an emancipatory perspective.

The second is a significant shift in intellectual thinking about learning. Socio-cultural and situated theories of learning, advanced further through empirical research in the developing world, distinguished the concept of non-formal *learning* from that of non-formal education (e.g. Scribner and Cole 1973). Such approaches shift away from a focus on learners' assumed deficits and further reinforce the claim that non-formal (or informal) models are superior to formal ones, particularly

because of their congruity with learners' experience and culture. Scribner and Cole support the strategy of integrating informal and formal learning much more closely by giving schooling a far greater relevance to everyday life, although they note that this entails a risk of pathologizing disadvantaged learners.

This in turn indicates a third shift, concerning the ideological foundations of particular concepts of learning. In the first moment of non-formal education, learning is treated as a universal category, undifferentiated by temporal, spatial and social relations. It is seen as inherently liberating on the assumption that it can create a 'level playing field' that allows greater equalization of life-chances. In the second moment, learning itself is differentiated between the formal and non-formal/informal. The prevalent assumption is that only the latter can be genuinely emancipatory, since it allows learners to take control over their learning outside formal institutions – at home, at work, in the community group, or in the political movement.

However, a focus on the *interaction* of different forms of learning rather than the distinctions between them does not necessarily support the view that informal or non-formal learning offers superior models for working-class or peasant communities (King 1982). Access to resources for all types of learning depends upon economic, social and cultural capital. Privileged social groups enjoy a seamless integration of different types of learning that is denied to the less advantaged. Their schools offer a wide range of extra-curricular as well as specific education activities, their homes are rich sources of educational toys, books and television programmes, and they have access to organized classes and leisure activities – all of which poorer people cannot afford. But the shift of policy discourse from 'education' to 'learning', which marks this second moment, is one which implicitly individualizes and de-politicizes learning, while laying blame at the feet of those who are unable to access opportunities to learn (Ramdas 1999, Gorman 2002).

The 1980s and beyond: the formalization of non-formal learning

A continuing series of deep recessions led in the 1980s to the dominance of right-wing economic policies in the North which characterize the 'third moment'. With the intensification of global competition, neo-liberal theories of development took the ascendancy, along with the defeat of Keynesian policies by free-market economics, espoused most notably by the governments of Thatcher in the UK and Reagan in the US. The broader consequences for education of this process of globalization are far too complex to discuss here (see, for example, Edwards and Usher 2000), but we focus on one particular set of trends that has influenced interest in non-formal learning. Public spending on welfare and education was cut back across the globe and the rhetoric of learning as a neutral universe was re-invoked. The debt crisis of the South forced governments to service repayments to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other creditors rather

than invest in education (Smith 2002). There was widespread marketization of learning, with learners increasingly forced to pay for private provision. State-funded provision was generally limited to technical and vocational training, usually at low levels, and tailored to the needs of multi-national corporations seeking cheap labour in the underdeveloped world, rather than to the needs of local communities or to purposes of social equity.

Similar shifts to privatization of provision and economic instrumentalism of purpose could be detected in the North, driven by the rhetoric of post-Fordism and the 'changing world of work' in the 'knowledge society'. At the same time, mass unemployment and the loss of traditional forms of apprenticeship were destroying non-formal processes of storing and transmitting skills and knowledge – processes which had traditionally been controlled by working-class men (Smith 2001). Another key shift in this third moment, then, was that capital became able to break its former dependency on labour for the production and reproduction of craft skills. Education and employment policy focused on the formalization and codification of knowledge that had previously been highly non-formal, often through the introduction of competency-based assessment and qualifications. 'Within the workplace itself, the development of managerial technologies expropriate[d] workers' tacit skills and [sought] to gain exclusive control over the internal labour market of plant or corporation' (Smith 2001: 13).

Simultaneously, the radical education projects in the North increasingly turned their attention to access for marginalized groups to formalized further and higher education. Conceptualizations of the Access movement ranged from emancipatory projects aimed at an individual and/or local level, to an ideological challenge to dominant epistemologies and theories of learning (Malcolm 2000). New areas of study emerged within formal educational institutions, reflecting a radical content: Women's Studies, Black Studies and Peace Studies, for example. Here too, we see the relocation of the learning process to more formal settings and contexts.

The 1990s: a post-modern interlude of non-formal learning

Inevitably, attempts at resistance and subversion were provoked by this third moment. These were underpinned by populist theories of development, derived from feminist, environmentalist and ethno-cultural perspectives, and promoted in the main by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Youngman 2000). Their key interest was in supporting 'authentic' experiences of non-formal learning: grounded in communities' local knowledge; sustainable in practice, rather than driven by the desire for economic growth; and shaped by ecological rather than economic metaphors (see McGivney and Murray 1991 and Foley 1999 for case studies of such projects from both the developed and underdeveloped world). Unlike the Freirean movement before it, this populist movement had a significant influence on practice, particularly in the South. However, it was similarly short-lived, primarily because its underpinning theories were weakly developed and

articulated (Gorman 2001). It was also vulnerable to counter-resistance because of its dependence on NGOs and other non-core sources of funding. These have become increasingly tied to specified outcomes and models for non-formal learning, determined by the more powerful political and economic interests that dominated the previous 'moment' (Smith 2002). This poses a new kind of colonization of non-formal learning where the threat is not *to* professional educators but *from* them:

The conclusion must inevitably be that while some informal, non-formal and popular education programmes have had a concern to combat colonialism and 'colonial mentalities', others have effectively worked in the opposite direction. The particular power of non-formal education (and things like community schooling) in this respect isn't just the content of the programme, but also the extent to which it draws into state and non-governmental bodies various institutions and practices that were previously separate from them; and perhaps resistant to the state and schooling ... By wrapping up activities in the mantle of community there is a sleight of hand. By drawing more and more people into the professional educator's net there is the danger [of] a growing annexation of various areas of life ... Under this guise concerns such as skilling and the quietening of populations can take place.

(Smith 2002: 9)

There are notable exceptions that resist the disciplinary effects of dominant funding regimes. Educational movements associated with aboriginal peoples and other colonized groups in the Anglophone world have explicitly developed conceptualizations of knowledge and non-formal learning which challenge dominant models (e.g. Still Smoking 1997). However, these movements are tending more and more to move into formal educational institutions or establish their own institutional arrangements, echoing the formalizing tendency of the third moment. This brings us full circle to our starting point at the turn of the millennium and our questions about the 'fifth moment' of non-formal learning: why is there such great interest in non-formal learning in Europe's advanced capitalist heartlands? And why now?

European interest in non-formal learning: why now?

As we have seen in each of the previous 'moments', different interests turn their attention to non-formal learning for different reasons. It may be that one reason for the current interest lies in the theoretical dimension discussed earlier. Situated, participatory theories of learning have become more popular in both practitioner and academic circles. Thus, interest in the category of 'non-formal learning' may stem from growing dissatisfaction with over-rigid classifications of formal and informal types of learning, and a desire to engage intellectually and practically

with their actual interpenetration (e.g. Eraut 2000, Schugurensky 2000, Billett 2002).

But there is also a discernible change in the political dimension today with the intensification of economic instrumentalism in educational policy. In the context of ever-increasing global competition and the instability of early twenty-first-century capital (despite its vaunted triumphalism), this moment is deeply influenced by the growth of the 'audit society' (Power 1997) in Europe. In the name of 'accountability', the culture of education has become dominated by tracking and measurement, by the setting and achievement of ever more tightly specified targets and objectives. Funding for learning is linked directly to the audit of these targets. Current policies are less concerned with the settings or pedagogies of learning, than with the imperative that *all* learning should be 'better managed' (Colardyn 2002).

This connects with the fundamental goals of current European policy. Two major purposes underpin the EC *Communication's* focus on non-formal learning and its certification: the need for increased social cohesion and engagement; and the need to improve economic competitiveness, in part by increasing the skills and employability of workers. Both of these goals direct increased attention to learning outside formal educational institutions, although the document concentrates almost exclusively on learning in workplace settings, rather than in wider family, community and youth work contexts. The central drive to make non-formal learning visible – to find methods for assessing and accrediting it – is similarly concentrated upon its utilization in employment (CEDEFOP 2001). The *Communication* has little to say about pedagogy, lifewide benefits of learning, structural inequalities, 'hidden curricula', or issues such as institutional racism and similar barriers to learning. As such, it militates against the French republican ideal of 'insertion' which first introduced concerns about social exclusion into debates within EC policy:

One of the key elements of a widening participation policy is, however, absent from the EU discourse ... The communications and the action programmes that follow are couched in negative terms of avoiding social fracture and promoting social cohesion rather than of a more positive philosophical and active commitment to social justice.

(Davies 2003: 14)

These, however, are 'causal stories'. What is the key focus for future action to implement policy on non-formal learning?

As we noted in the introduction, attention has focused on 'making learning visible': identifying, assessing and accrediting non-formal learning. The priority area for this activity has been the workplace. Bjørnåvold (2000) argues that this co-ordinated effort throughout Europe has two main justifications in relation to the labour market: to meet individual and enterprise needs by linking formal and non-formal learning for more effective education and training; and to facilitate the

task that has proved difficult so far, of developing qualification in 'key skills' (e.g. basic skills, teamwork, problem-solving). A third rationale for making non-formal learning visible is not driven by demand from either employers or employees, but arises from the market in training itself. Many training providers have devoted themselves to promoting the issue as a means of chasing 'fresh money' from the EC. In this respect, it may be seen as a 'supply-driven development', 'a solution seeking a problem' (Bjørnåvold 2000: 22).

The desire to render the invisible visible is central to the audit culture, but it may have unpredictable results (Strathern 2000). On the one hand, it is supposed to promote trust, although its very existence suggests that trust is impossible. It lays claim to transparency, whilst also creating disciplinary surveillance. On the other hand, it encourages 'creative accounting' which clouds transparency and inspires forms of strategic compliance to meet official targets whilst safeguarding other interests. Such a perspective suggests that measures to make non-formal learning visible may distort both learning and outcomes, and/or drive them even further 'below the radar'.

All of this points to Foucault's (1980) notion of a 'regime of truth' – a way of talking about an issue that powerfully shapes the way people act in relation to it and brooks no opposition. Our analysis of European policy suggests that dominant discourses of non-formal learning constitute just such a regime of truth. As we summarized in our original report:

They [discourses of non-formal learning] encourage learners to make their private and leisure activities public, to reinterpret their learning in terms of its commodified exchange value in the labour market, and to re-present their own attitudes and identities as compliant with employers' perceived demands associated with employability.

(Colley *et al.* 2003: 17)

There is, however, resistance and contestation on this terrain. Trade unions have seized the chance to demand better pay for workers on the basis of their actual skills and knowledge, irrespective of where and how they have learned them (CEDEFOP 2002). Women have also responded to the opportunities such policies offer them to gain recognition and recompense for skills and knowledge learned within the home (Mojab 2003). It is evident that different groups are trying to advance their own demands for social justice on the new ground these policies have opened up.

Beyond the moment: power relations and non-formal learning

Each of the moments of non-formal learning that we have described can be viewed through two different perspectives on learning itself. The first, third and current moments – those driven by dominant groupings – assume unified theories

of knowing and learning in a supposedly neutral universe outwith space, time and social relations. Yet the outcomes of both earlier moments speak powerfully of the reinforcement rather than redress of social and economic inequalities. The outcomes of the current moment remain to be seen, and though the augurs may not bode well, we see that they are the subject of resistance and struggle.

The second and fourth moments, driven by more radical purposes, assume that a separate universe of non-formal learning can be constructed, where learners might control their own learning beyond the reach of powerful interests. The utopianism of these two moments is intimated by their relatively rapid demise, but can also be discerned in a fundamental flaw in their emancipatory models. They assume that non-formal learning can escape *overt* mechanisms of control embedded in formal educational institutions, although we live in a society where power predominantly functions through *covert* channels and is internalized by subordinate groupings within the framework of bourgeois democracy (Walkerline 1992). Settings such as the home have no inherent tendency to offer liberation from control and no guarantee of learning freely, especially for women for whom the home can be a key location for the enforcement of gendered inequalities (Gorman 2001). This is also true for many disabled people whose home may be a site of isolation, deprivation or even incarceration (Gorman 2002). However particular types of learning are defined and interpreted through specific initiatives, this genealogy suggests that we need to ask three key questions of any taxonomy of learning: 'Why?', 'Why now?', and 'In whose interests?'

We conclude, then, that political dimensions, including power relations, are at the heart of different meanings given to 'non-formal learning'. We also conclude that continuing attempts to classify learning as 'formal' or 'informal' (with or without the 'non-formal' category) are now much more of a hindrance than a help – not only in understanding learning, but in challenging the ways that dominant régimes of truth construct and constrain learning. These divisions – which appear, at first analysis, arbitrary and artificial – over-simplify learning in ways which are misleading and dangerous. Our genealogical analysis reveals that they serve to obscure how such classifications are inflected with power. For those with a radical emancipatory agenda, they divert attention from major issues of social and cultural inequality in access to learning in all settings. For those with a more instrumental 'learning effectiveness' approach, there is an additional problem, as the unmeasurable is overlooked in 'formal' settings or changed into something else that is measurable elsewhere. As we said in our original report, the informal or non-formal thus becomes more formalized, as contested questions of the value and purpose of learning and education are sidelined. Though the concept of informal learning has been valuable in the past, the main function of the current separation of informal, non-formal and formal is not to understand learning better, nor to improve it. Rather, the audit ideology is served and supported by what Bourdieu might have termed the misrecognition of learning in terms of these separate and distinct categories. We should beware an apparent acknowledgement of neglected areas of learning, when their very separation

opens up new possibilities of authoritarian control, but look also to the points of resistance that may emerge in response.

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Part II

Learning processes

Chapter 5

Combining work and learning

The disturbing challenge of practice

David Boud

After full-time education, most learning occurs at or in association with work activities. While this has always been the case, acknowledging it and considering its implications is relatively new. In the past, learning was associated almost exclusively with educational institutions. Combining work and learning once referred only to those who undertook part-time or evening courses. For those engaged in such courses, the world of work and the world of learning overlapped only to a minor extent. The two worlds were separated in time and place and in a separation of roles. However, changes in society and the economy have influenced the breaking down of this separation. It was only towards the latter part of the twentieth century that the tight association between learning and formal education became loosened. Now learning and work intersect in many ways in time and space, and the identities of learner and worker often coexist in the workplace. Learning takes place explicitly in workplaces, and educational institutions no longer distance themselves from a close engagement with work. This change has profound consequences for learners, for organizations and for public policy. The focus in this chapter is on the implications for those who have a role in assisting learning, whose role was previously identified as teacher and trainer, and for those who organize educational provision. It considers how new combinations of learning and working challenge educational practice.

Educational policy seems to be increasingly justified in terms of the ways in which educational institutions at all levels prepare learners for work. The relationship between learning and work assumed in such policies is one that is essentially unproblematic: a general or a vocational education prepares learners either indirectly or directly for the requirements of employment. What is learned can be utilized in work: it is separate and transferable. The changing nature of work may lead to new skills and knowledge being included in educational programmes, but it does not impact on the relationship between the two. In this chapter I want to question this assumption and suggest that changes in work and learning require us to look afresh at what is taken as commonplace. That is, whether the educational perspective regarded as normal in education and training is suited to prepare people for, and to learn in, the world of work. To do this I wish to examine

learning from the perspective of work and to look at learning in situations not prompted by educators and their discourse of learning, competency-standards and the like.

The chapter starts with two recent examples of combining work and learning. The first example is that of work-based learning partnerships in which universities have attempted to respond to the learning needs of organizations. A focus on this initiative points to challenges to the ways in which educators think about and engage with learning for those immersed in their own work. The second example is one of everyday learning in what might be regarded as 'normal' workplaces. That is, workplaces in which there is not a great emphasis on formal training activities. This allows a glimpse of how learning is viewed when not seen through the lenses of educators.

From discussion of these examples I wish to suggest that close engagement with learning in workplaces leads to quite profound implications for the practice of educators and for how learning can be regarded. In particular, the conventional notion of educational programmes is questioned and the role of educators in fostering learning in and for work reappraised. This involves a de-centring of teachers, trainers and their courses in a world in which their disciplinary and professional content knowledge may be less important than their pedagogical ability to foster learning in areas in which they are not experts.

Work-based learning partnerships

Work-based learning partnerships have emerged over the past ten years or so as new forms of relationships between organizations and universities (Boud and Solomon 2001). These have grown in the UK and Australia to become a part of higher education that most directly challenges what we mean by a university education. This kind of work-based learning programme involves study for formal qualifications alongside work, in workplaces, by existing employees. These are not conventional part-time study courses in which people leave work to study in their own time and pursue their own interests, nor are they conventional qualifications conducted within organizations, like the in-house MBA courses favoured by some multi-national companies. They are a new form of educational practice altogether. They are designed to meet the learning needs of organizations and employees not through study of a university designed curriculum, but through negotiated learning activities undertaken as part of work that aims to meet the needs of each of the parties.

In these programmes, existing employees are enrolled as students but remain based in their own workplace in their normal jobs. They study not the pre-determined curriculum devised by the university, but construct a programme of their own in which their work constitutes the curriculum. Students involved in work-based learning partnerships may take some units from standard course offerings, but they pursue learning plans that they devise for themselves, that are supported by their employer and enacted at work.

Learning in such cases is often transdisciplinary and focuses on equipping learners to contribute to the future development of the organization, not on acquisition of knowledge and skills required for their present position. It is not a new form of training, but an education located in work. Programmes commence with the identification of current competencies, what a learner wants to pursue and the development of a learning plan to get them there. At all stages support is provided from the employing organization as well as the educational institution. Work-based learning partnerships are not an alternative to other forms of higher education; they fill a significant gap in the existing repertoire. They are such a challenge to existing practice that it is taking some time to understand how they can be conducted well (Boud and Solomon 2001).

Many issues have arisen from the kinds of practice that work-based learning partnerships demand. Most significantly, experience of them highlights problematic features in the linking of learning and work, leading to a number of questions. For example, how can the tension of being both a worker and a learner be managed without the conventional forms of separation of identity? How can universities judge knowledge as legitimate when they are not involved in its codification – a key feature of transdisciplinary knowledge? In what ways can the different expectations of timescale be reconciled, for example the short-term work pressures from the employer and the longer term learning expectations of the educational institution? They also raise questions for educational practice, such as what is an appropriate relationship between adviser and learner when the ‘teacher’ is necessarily not a subject-matter expert? Indeed, what is the legitimate role of the educator in such circumstances?

Uncovering learning at work

While work-based learning provides an example in which educators are confronted with dealing with a new situation, the second illustration is one in which they are absent. In a research project, I studied four diverse work groups within one large organization to look at processes of everyday work (Boud and Middleton 2003) with the aim of uncovering learning that occurs there. The project examined learning activities in a range of intact work groups when there was no formal learning intervention being introduced from outside the group. The expectation at the start was that uncovering learning in workplaces, making it visible and rendering it accessible to organizational intervention was a desirable educational outcome. This was not a view which we held alone, but one shared in public policy initiatives in many Western societies as well as our own. *Making Learning Visible* was, for example, one of the policy emphases through the European Union (Bjørnåvold 2000). Our experience in these work groups made us question whether such visibility fitted well with the cultural practices of work.

The main finding, not surprisingly, is that learning is inextricably intertwined with work and can be separated from it only with great difficulty. What we identified was that in these work groups, learning is intrinsic to work. It takes

place continuously, at workstations, in tearooms, in conversations in transit, whether it is sanctioned as part of work or not. Working knowledge (Symes and McIntyre 2000) is highly valued. 'Spaces' for learning are informally created and re-created – meetings for coffee and places for breaks provide a separate space for engagement that is in between working and not working (Solomon *et al.* submitted for publication). However, what occurs in these spaces is seldom named or acknowledged as learning. A comment typical of what we found is 'learning is what happens on courses or in the classroom, not what we do here'. While there was no resistance in the groups studied to the researchers labelling some work activities as learning, this was not part of the discourse used by participants.

This different discourse was exemplified in the first set of interviews conducted with group members. These started by asking them to talk about things that would point to the learning happening in the groups, but without the researchers using the term 'learning' or 'learners'. This tactic elicited reports of a rich and extensive array of activities from all groups. These included learning to cope with changes in technology, with work processes, with restructuring and with new products. When 'learning' was introduced into the discussion, the range of examples dramatically decreased. Examples were given of staff development meetings or training courses, but little else. From the point of view of the educator-researchers, much learning was occurring, but it was not identified as such by members of the work groups. However, while learning was not actually rejected, identity as a learner was! The metaphor mentioned independently in two of the groups was that of the 'L' plate driver. They did not want to be seen as a learner in the workplace; it was not compatible with their view of themselves as competent workers (Boud and Solomon 2003).

What does this reveal about learning and work?

If we take these two examples together, what do they suggest? First, although educators are supposed to be the experts on learning, most learning at work is invisible to them. Not only is it not readily accessible, the discourse of learning renders much of it invisible. It is not separated from normal processes and it is not documented as such. The language used is that of the work being undertaken and it is highly contextualized in the particularities of that work. Second, not only is the language of everyday work not available to educators/researchers, but also the learning embedded in it is often not legitimized within the organization. One participant recounted the story of a regular staff development day. It was expressed initially as 'a complete waste of time'. However, a few minutes later the same person reported that the networking with colleagues in other parts of the organization at the same event was extremely valuable. This networking was intensely related to her current role, just not part of the formal organizationally sanctioned agenda of learning.

The conclusion we drew from this project was that we should be more modest when thinking about formal educational interventions. Part of the original plan

was to follow a round of analysis of work groups with formal interventions to enhance learning. It became apparent that most of the kinds of intervention educator-researchers were likely to make would have done more to disrupt and undermine knowledge development and informal learning networks than foster them. From our more detailed understanding of the experience of work in these settings, it was sobering to realize that what educators like ourselves would regard as everyday learning and development interventions would have little impact on participants, even though they may appear to foster specified learning outcomes.

Finally, we realized that much learning was driven by workplace performativity expectations. That is, what is needed to 'get the job done' and cope with the problems that arise in doing it. Learning linked to everyday work performance requirements had far greater legitimacy and was given higher priority than anything else. When we returned to the university and started to reflect on our own work as researchers we discovered that this was a finding that applied to our own work group and ourselves as much as it did to those we were studying (Solomon *et al.* 2001).

These experiences prompt questions about things that have been taken for granted over a long period of time. These include: what is the appropriate role of educator, teacher or facilitator and their relation to what is to be learned and how it is to be learned? In what circumstances can they assume that they know what is necessary, or know enough about the context to make their interventions meaningful? It also raises questions about the dominant discourse that renders all learning as visible, whether in the form of recognition of prior learning or competency demonstration. Clearly, many activities educators unproblematically regard as learning, others do not see as part of their view of learning. Present policy strategies have also been to relentlessly pursue all occupational activities with the tool of competency-specification and to make them more and more explicit and subject to performance assessment. However, this may lead to endless documentation with increasing attention given to measurement of skills rather than learning and development, with educators in the process becoming marginalized and unable to focus on matters other than the language of specification.

Separation and integration of work and learning

Looking back historically to the period prior to the spread of schools and vocational training organizations, learning and work were inseparable. It was not meaningful to distinguish between the two. Living, working and learning were all of one piece. People learned directly from others who had knowledge. As Lave and Wenger (1991) have it, 'legitimate peripheral participation' was all there was. As guilds and schools developed, there was progressive differentiation between work and learning. This continued until the late modern era, in which there are no occupations without extensive periods of non-vocational education and few that

do not involve pre-vocational learning before employment. A general education is the *sine qua non*; it is unquestionable today.

In late modernity we are seeing now a fragmentation of arrangements. While general education is a foundation for everything, learning and work after post-compulsory education takes many different forms. It is not just focused on the individual, but on building organizations, teams and work processes. There are many examples of separation, as in much training for the professions, but also increasing examples of integrating models from new kinds of apprenticeships to work-based learning, organizational development and so on.

If these changes are plotted over different stages of the relationship between work and learning, it is possible to see major transitions, from learning occurring through work before the rise of the school in the Middle Ages, to the tradition of classical education in which application of learning in work was regarded as not a concern. Learning then needed no practical justification; it was an intrinsic good. Some vocational preparation occurred in the early universities, but inevitably the vast majority of the population was excluded by virtue of religion, gender or breeding. This changed over the modern period to the position we have now with increasing rhetoric of governments that justifies education in terms of vocational relevance.

Setting aside this rhetoric, there is now a multiplicity of interactions between learning and work. Increasingly, full-time students in upper high school and in post-secondary education have paid work; most entry-level positions involve simultaneous study. Advancement is through work-related learning whether accredited or not. In the lean, de-layered organizations of today all work groups need to continually learn to get the job done. There are also times in which there is no paid work and the absence of work itself creates challenges for learning, both when work is desired and when it is not.

In the latter stages of these developments, there are some more recent trends. First, there is a move to locate what was previously undertaken within educational institutions in workplaces. The most obvious example of this at present is the major shift towards taking workplace assessment of competencies away from teachers and giving it to representatives of the employer. In Australia, for example, workplace assessment by trained employees is becoming the norm in vocational education and training qualifications. Assessment of competence is made by those fully immersed in the culture of the workplace. Second, and often quite separate from the formal assessment frameworks of occupational competency that drive vocational qualifications, is the great variety of internal learning activities undertaken under various guises, both individual and collective. Learning in work has been increasingly systematized. There are many examples of corporate competencies, performance management plans that include specific learning goals, the use of in-house programmes and organizational development. All these have utilized the discourse of learning. Some enterprises have gone so far as to aspire to the status of learning organizations based upon the rationale that the new competitive advantage is the ability to learn and respond more quickly than

other organizations. While such an emphasis on learning has not touched all parts of the workforce, and many workers continue to be employed in firms with unreformed work practices, there has nevertheless been a shift in the direction of acknowledging the importance of learning throughout the economy. There is a small amount of interaction between the two worlds, but not as much as might be expected from the vast magnitude of each. Organizations often avoid using educational institutions to assist them in their own learning in work and there has been an explosion of consultants, both individuals and large companies, which service this need.

A sign of the shift of interest from primarily an educational perspective on learning to a work-oriented one is indicated by many studies. Skule and Reichborn (2002), in their study of learning conditions in Norwegian workplaces examined conditions that promote learning-conducive work. They identified factors that promote learning through work. These included: exposure to demands from customers, management, colleagues and others; changes in technology, organization and work methods; external professional contact; opportunities for feedback from work; and support and encouragement for learning from management. In Australia, Billett (2001) introduced the notion of the workplace curriculum as a way of acknowledging and systematizing the learning demands of work. In the UK, Fuller and Unwin (2003) developed a model of learning in work that focuses on the expanding of learning opportunities. This contrasts conditions of work identified as restrictive with those identified as more expansive, in terms of the potential for learning they provide. They consider both work organization and mission, and the organizational culture as key features for fostering learning. Finally, Ellström (2001) identified a number of factors that foster or inhibit the integration of learning and work. These are: the learning potential of the task in terms of task complexity, variety and control; opportunities for feedback, evaluation and reflection on the outcomes of work actions; the type and degree of formalization of work processes; organizational arrangements for employee participation in handling problems; and developing work processes and learning resources in terms of time for analysis, interaction and reflection, for example.

The increasing body of work on the interrelationship between work and learning points to the need to re-examine some of the assumptions that we have taken for granted about the role of educators, and indeed, the dominance of an exclusively educational perspective. Changes that are taking place in educational practice can be illustrated by a focus on learning practitioners.

The new learning practitioner

It has been argued that we are now seeing the emergence of a variety of roles within organizations that might collectively be associated with what might be termed 'new learning practitioners' (Chappell 2001). These include not only those who might have a formally designated role with regard to fostering the learning of others, but all those who create or write agendas that directly influence learning

and how it is perceived. New forms of practice are not only being enacted by new learning practitioners, but the old learning practitioners like teachers need to look for new forms of practice which take account of the perspectives of workplaces. The new learning practitioners who may have little or no formal background in teaching and training are now using 'learning' in organizations. While all members of an organization might be learners, it is those designated as learning practitioners who now legitimize and give voice to what is defined as learning.

Learning practitioners have diverse identities and are found in a variety of locations. They typically include a variety of senior managers and those involved in any organizational change process (for example, quality management, process redesign, systems implementation, and so on), but almost any manager or team leader now has a role in fostering learning. However, some roles are combined only with difficulty with that of learning practitioner and this has created difficulties in pursuit of the goal of enterprises becoming 'learning organizations'. A particularly vexing combination is that of supervisor (or line-manager) and learning facilitator. This is troubling because workers are unlikely to reveal their real learning needs to their work supervisor or manager (Hughes 2004). Not surprisingly, they wish to portray themselves to their immediate superiors as competent workers, not as incompetent learners.

Given the varieties of learning practitioner, there is no single set of practices that apply across all types. At one level of analysis, all workers are responsible for promoting learning by their peers and by themselves. Informally, this is often well accepted. However, resistance can occur when attempts are made to formalize this. Workers readily accept responsibility for helping others learn, and have always done so. However, they may not want to be formally given such a responsibility, as this would be seen as taking on an additional burden for which they would be accountable. At another level of analysis, all managers, especially those involved with change are key practitioners in promoting (and inhibiting) learning. Again, they may resist formal responsibility, but they are often expected to take it. Finally, there are those whose position gives them explicit responsibility for 'learning'. These people may only rarely see themselves as trainers or facilitators as they may see this as a low-level function. They promote learning nonetheless.

Identifying emerging elements of practice

Where is it possible therefore to look for indications of new pedagogical practices? While there are new players in the territory of learning practitioner, some old ones are confronting the transition from one view of work-related educational practice to another. A study of these provides a source of ideas and can perhaps bridge the gap between the worlds of education and work. One distinct group in this arena are those educators who have become advisers in the work-based learning partnerships discussed earlier. They are required to span the interface between academia and workplaces to assist those enrolled in such programmes to

undertake learning that simultaneously meets the needs of the workplace and the educational institution.

To illustrate this emergence of new practices, I will draw on some unpublished data drawn from a series of workshops I undertook with work-based learning practitioners in the UK and Australia in 2002/3. The participants, who were mostly employed by universities, were asked to identify what they regarded as the conceptual knowledge and skills necessary to be effective as advisers to workplace learning projects, and, in particular, how they might differ from those required in supervising college-based students in placements or research-degree students. The outcomes of this are summarized in Table 5.1 and are contrasted with the typical knowledge and skill base of higher education staff.

While a few features are shared between work-based learning advising and student supervision, what is striking is the different orientation of the two lists. There is a focus on different kinds of knowledge in each. There are some categories where there is overlap, for example, with regard to pedagogical features such as learning consultancy and negotiating independent studies, and enquiry and research supervision, but most are distinct or at least have distinct emphases. For example, the clearest distinction is seen in appreciating the contextual nature of learning. In workplaces, knowledge is always contingent and it must relate to the specific culture and context in which it is deployed. The enduring disciplinary knowledge of the academy is replaced by a transdisciplinary understanding of

Table 5.1 Some constituents of the conceptual knowledge and skill base of work-based learning practitioners contrasted with that of higher education practitioners

<i>Advising in work-based learning projects</i>	<i>Supervision of typical higher education projects</i>
Educational consulting and supervision skills, including negotiating learning, fostering forms of support for worker-learners.	Skills in supervision of academic work, including choice of realistic/manageable tasks, managing student research projects, etc.
Understanding the culture and politics of workplaces and being able to locate learning in the environments faced by worker-learners.	Specific disciplinary and professional knowledge.
Understanding transdisciplinary knowledge environments. Includes helping learners with the identification of appropriate communities of practice and drawing knowledge from experience.	Understanding disciplinary and professional contexts.
Enquiry methodologies that can be used for learning projects in work.	Enquiry in disciplinary and/or professional contexts.
Reflexivity and reviewing, helping others identify what constitutes good practice and ways of judging their achievements.	Assessment and evaluation of academic and professional tasks.

knowledge in use. It is this discontinuity that creates tensions for educational practice.

It is interesting to note what was absent as much as what was present in what practitioners regarded as important. There was little emphasis on teaching or training, particular subject-matter knowledge and being an assessor, though for some the latter may be a separate role. There was a very strong emphasis on knowledge brokerage, on assisting others to plan and monitor, and generally on promoting learning how to learn.

This example points to a de-centring of the teacher and the traditional disciplinary expertise that such a person brings to the process of supervision. It is not that subject matter is not required for the learning process as much as ever, but that it is not located in or accessed from the same source. The paradox is that the new adviser is enabling the learner-worker to learn things that they themselves do not know (Boud 1996).

Disturbing educational practice

In reflecting on the examples of changing educational practice it is possible perhaps to discern wider trends. Consideration of a perspective that places the learning needs of work as central raises doubts about whether, in the early part of the twenty-first century, we are seeing not only the culmination of success of the centuries-old project of formalizing education but clear signs of awareness of its limitations. What is occurring now is a radically new agenda emerging from an old direction.

The way in which vocational learning is organized in qualifications for individual learners makes assumptions about the relationships between learning and work that are incorrect. Alongside this, the conventional separation of learning and work is also breaking down. Educational practice has been grounded at a very deep level in a set of assumptions about the separateness of learning and work. The practice of educators has been dependent upon this separation. Formally documented learning has been privileged over that which 'merely' influences the quality of work. It is becoming necessary to fundamentally examine what educators do and how they do it in order to identify what might be new practices. By directing one's gaze at the practices of work, and by not trying to force them into a conventional educational view of the world, this can prompt the process of disturbing and renewing educational practice.

Looking back we can see, from a Habermasian standpoint, the world of education progressively colonizing the worlds of work, life and the community. One of the current manifestations of this is through the discourse of lifelong learning. The idea of 'learning' as a conscious, systematic act has been taken and applied in a very wide range of situations (Edwards 1997, Chappell *et al.* 2003). The notion of experiential learning, for example, has moved from the arena of voluntary learning groups into the formalism of recognition of prior learning and mandatory staff development strategies in workplaces. This has been an important

and powerful trend that has provided many opportunities for individuals and groups to make sense of what they do and to operate more effectively. However, there has not been in this process an awareness of the implications of rendering all activities part of learning. Exploitation of the discourse of learning has been regarded as a 'good thing' that has only positive consequences. The assumption in this is that enlightenment of learning must be brought to all the dark places of organizations. The processes of formalizing the informal through, for example, the recognition of prior learning, or of turning companies into learning companies, or expecting all knowledge and skill acquisition to be accredited, are examples of the spread of learning throughout all social institutions.

If we look anew at the world of work we find that it is no longer what it was once thought to be. It is not just an activity to be engaged in to earn income to provide a fulfilling life outside work. Indeed, much work is not paid work. Work creates identity. A very large part of most people's waking lives is engaged in it. It is a key part of social activity. It is something not forgotten at the end of a working day. It has a permeating influence on most workers now and they identify strongly with it. While this always has been true for those who work in the professions, now this pervades all forms of work from the professions, through 'emotional labour', to all the jobs that are no longer closely supervised.

There is now, as has been discussed, an alternative world of learning occurring in workplaces and the community. This world does not use the word learning, and when it does it does not do so in the same ways as educators use it. It has always been there and it represents by far the largest part of the totality of 'learning' that is experienced. It is all the knowledge and skill acquisition in which it is necessary to engage in order to work effectively. It is not thought of as learning because it is an intrinsic part of work itself.

This is not an attempt to argue against the idea of learning per se, but to provide a caution – the formalization of all learning into forms that are accredited or require the intervention of educators is a trend that may not continue. It will become necessary at some stage to decide what its appropriate scope is and where the energies of educators are best deployed. There may be a role for them in workplace learning, but it is unlikely to be the one envisaged by current national vocational education and training agendas. Whatever the role is it will be necessary for them to have a thorough understanding of the language and culture of work and the ways in which learning is fundamentally embedded in everyday activities.

Looking back from the future we may see the end of the twentieth century as a time when the march of formalization of education and training reached a peak. The practices of educators had been extended into many new domains and a new world of lifelong learning characterized by systematic, interlocking, accredited programmes which were quality assured, delivered in conjunction with new technologies and linking to local support networks, was anticipated. There may still be momentum behind this march, but there is also a need to look for other directions.

The question has been asked: how do people actually learn in real settings? And, how can learning be promoted everywhere? The answer may not be the one expected – more recognition of prior learning, more courses and more web-based programmes. It may rather be a more reflexive development in which the major learning intervention involves noticing what is needed to engage in whatever is our practice, what gets in the way of doing it better and how it can be undertaken in congenial ways with those we interact with. This has been called informal learning, but that term undervalues the most important learning of all. The new challenge to practice is to find ways of acknowledging how we learn in our many locations and build on that without allowing the act of formalizing learning to distract from and destroy what it is that is being fostered.

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Pedagogic learning in the pedagogic workplace

Janice Malcolm and Miriam Zukas

Pedagogic learning

Whilst ‘pedagogy’ as a complex field of knowledge and practice has retained its status and significance in mainland Europe, in English-speaking countries ‘pedagogic’ has often been reduced to a derogatory term, as Leach and Moon (1999) point out. Although it is still often used in relation to, for example, ‘critical pedagogy’ (Freire 1972, Giroux 1983) and ‘feminist pedagogy’ (Ellsworth 1989, Gore 1990, hooks 1994, Lather 1991, Luke and Gore 1992), beyond these specialisms it has often been treated with some suspicion, as an attempt ‘to impress and to assign an air of apparent academic importance and scholarship because of the word’s Greek origins’, as Cannon (2001: 418) claims in his polemic against its use in higher education. Whilst this accusation raises interesting questions about a whole range of academic disciplines, of more concern to us is the recent evidence that ‘pedagogy’ is being revived simply as an umbrella term for teaching techniques (for example, Cullen *et al.* 2002). This appears to be part of the current tendency to treat teaching and learning as polarized and often decontextualized categories of activity – teachers teach and learners learn – rather than as elements of social practice. In common with others (Edwards 2001, Edwards *et al.* 2002, Leach and Moon 1999), we wish to reclaim the word ‘pedagogy’ from the narrow meaning to which it has been reduced in English, and instead conceive pedagogy as encompassing ‘a critical understanding of the social, policy and institutional context, as well as a critical approach to the content and process of the educational/training transaction’ (Zukas and Malcolm 2002a: 215).

Using this broad definition of pedagogy, we want to explore some aspects of pedagogic learning in what we are calling the ‘pedagogic workplace’. We have chosen to employ the idea of the pedagogic workplace to move beyond the classroom into a much wider understanding of the arena and settings in which pedagogical practices develop and take place. In this, like Leach and Moon (1999), we follow Lave (1988) who defines an arena as a physically, economically, politically and socially organized space in time, and a pedagogic setting as ‘a repeatedly experienced, personally ordered and edited version of the arena’ (Lave 1988: 150). Thus, we are interested in the ways in which pedagogic identity is

constructed – how teachers continue to learn what it means to ‘be a teacher’ – through ongoing social practice within the arena of the pedagogic workplace and community.

There is relatively little literature on post-compulsory teachers which recognizes that they are constantly engaged in workplace learning, be it in the corridors, the staff room or the classrooms of that workplace. There are, of course, honourable exceptions (such as Bloomer and James 2001 or Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003a and 2003b, where the focus is on secondary school teachers). However most work in this area has focused upon post-compulsory teachers’ learning at the start of their careers (Avis *et al.* 2002, Bathmaker *et al.* 2002, Harris and Jarvis 2000). For those concentrating on practising teachers, pedagogic learning has tended to be characterized in one of three ways: learning new ‘teaching and assessment methods’; developing psycho-diagnostic and facilitative skills and techniques; or learning through reflection (see, for example, Malcolm and Zukas 1999, Haggis 2003). Each of these characterizations masks a specific and narrow conception of pedagogy, although this is rarely explored in detail.

We have previously criticized these decontextualized, individualistic and reified approaches to pedagogy, and argued for situated understandings (Malcolm and Zukas 2000). Instead of seeing pedagogic learning as some kind of change within the individual teacher (the acquisition of a new skill, the further development of a teacher’s sensitivity to student needs, the development of particular forms of reflexivity required to write appropriate evaluations), learning is understood as participation in the pedagogic workplace. And since we already understand the pedagogic workplace to be an arena which is physically, economically, socially and politically organized, our analysis of pedagogic learning has to begin with the ‘repeatedly experienced, personally ordered and edited version of the arena’ which constitutes a teacher’s workplace.

It is challenging both theoretically and practically to take account of the complexity of learning in the pedagogic workplace, and we can learn much from the workplace literature. Stephen Billett, for example, suggests that we can formulate a pedagogy for workplaces based on the three main ways in which individuals learn their vocational practice: first, through engagement in everyday work tasks; second, through direct guidance of co-workers; and third, through indirect guidance provided by the workplace itself and others in the workplace (Billett 2001a). We can analyse pedagogic learning using these ideas: for example, it occurs through the involvement in teaching and all the associated tasks such as curriculum development, planning, marking, supporting learners and so on; teachers also learn through working with co-teachers, support assistants and others involved in the teaching transaction; they learn through the ‘indirect guidance’ of the institution in which they work, through the management and culture of the institution, through the cultural practices in their disciplinary area, through staff development and so on.

Billett’s analysis is helpful in identifying some of the main forms of learning in the pedagogic workplace. But, as Billett himself (among others) has suggested,

this learning is not simply situationally determined: 'It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that workplaces are highly contested terrains ... conflictual relations ... cannot be reduced to a mere footnote' (Billett 2001b: 24), and '... discord between the individual and the social practice can also lead to rich learning arising from dissonance rather than relatedness' (Billett 2002: 39). We thus have to take into account both the agency of teachers, and the interrelationship between them and the social practices in which they engage. We have to understand something of teachers' personal histories and the ways in which they elect or are required to engage in the workplace. Our chapter focuses on this interpenetration of persons and contexts, particularly in relation to issues of power and purpose, and the implications for pedagogic learning.

To help our analysis we have turned to Barbara Rogoff, who uses ethnography to examine the relationship between activities and their contexts in ways that emphasize the unity of persons and their sociocultural contexts (Valsiner and van der Veer 2000). Her refusal to separate persons and contexts is critical for our theorizing of pedagogic identity (Zukas and Malcolm 2002b), and her solution – to focus on sociocultural activity that involves people's active participation in socially constituted practices (Rogoff 1990: 14) – has been a fruitful way to analyse pedagogic learning in the broad sense we have been discussing (Malcolm and Zukas 2002). As Valsiner and van der Veer (2000: 394) put it, Rogoff is concerned with activity and problem-solving, rather than soul-searching. Her central insight that 'individuals' efforts and sociocultural practices are constituted by and constitute each other and thus cannot be defined independently of each other or studied in isolation' (Rogoff *et al.* 1995: 45) seems to us to be a theoretical antidote to the approaches to pedagogic learning we described above. Following on from her earlier work (1990), Rogoff's account of girl scout cookie sales (1995) distinguished between three sociocultural planes in which work-learning occurs: apprenticeship (which involves learning through engagement in community structures and activity), guided participation (the interpersonal process through which people are involved in sociocultural activity), and participatory appropriation (how individuals change through their involvement in one or another activity). Rogoff argues that it is impossible to separate these three planes from each other, except for the purpose of analysis, since one cannot exist without the others; however, as Daniels points out, this structure does not explain how transformation between the various levels occurs (Daniels 2001: 88). However, it does enable us to begin to examine pedagogic learning on the three planes, to explore the impact of disharmony between two or more of those planes, and to consider the strategies of resistance which teachers adopt.

This analysis also draws on a series of fifteen extended and semi-structured interviews with teachers in post-compulsory education, of whom nine worked in the UK and six in Australia. It is part of a larger project on pedagogic identity in post-compulsory education – in our usage, this is understood as the lived identity of teachers, rather than as the more student-focused 'positioning' favoured by Bernstein (2000: 66). This project, which later moved into a more ethnographic

approach, built on our earlier bibliographic study of the construction of teachers' pedagogic identities in higher education (Malcolm and Zukas 1999, Zukas and Malcolm 2002a). Here we concentrate on the ways in which pedagogic workplace learning occurs for our respondents on each of Rogoff's three planes.

Apprenticeship

In Rogoff's example, the community plane of apprenticeship includes the institutional structure of the Girl Scouts of America organization and its cultural technologies of intellectual activity (such as forms, pencils and mathematical skills). Whilst the metaphor of apprenticeship has been used extensively in the workplace literature, particularly with regard to the relationship between novices and experts, we suggest, like Rogoff, that the concept of apprenticeship also enables us to examine the institutional structures and cultural technologies of intellectual activity that shape our participation in pedagogy. The concept encourages us to focus on pedagogic learning as lifelong practice, rather than as something we do within the first few years of teaching. Furthermore, it encourages us to look at the ways in which we respond to emergent pedagogic practices. One of our research participants, Peter, has nearly thirty years' experience as an adult educator. Recently, he has started to use learning outcomes (required in the UK as a sign of 'good practice' by many quality regimes at national and institutional level). Here he talks about teaching a group of teachers:

I've talked about the learning outcomes for example – I've not always talked about learning outcomes. In the early days there didn't seem to be a major concern with these – writing courses seemed relatively straightforward. You just wrote what the course was about and how you meant to go about it and that was it – no-one really inspecting it. Clearly that's different but I think the bureaucracy can be well and truly overdone. You can spend so much time specifying everything that it becomes a constraint rather than freeing you up.

Peter's initial response is critical, but he accommodates and co-opts the practice in several ways:

The learning outcomes I feel quite comfortable with because, if you get those right and they're sufficiently flexible, then they kind of give shape to what you want to do without being a blueprint to how you go about doing it. What I do now is I've turned it into a source of humour because they [the students] will be expecting it. I go through the aims of the course, the objectives of the course and the learning outcomes for this particular session. I've always believed in context, putting things back in context and reminding people where we are – this is where we are, this is the distance we've travelled and this is where we've still got to go – whilst weekly that might be overdoing it,

for some people, particularly whilst not everyone is always there every week – it is helpful to remind people.

He uses the learning outcomes to give shape to his programmes but resists the attempt to be nailed down by them. He employs them ironically with students (for whom the concept of learning outcomes is part of their course content) and, simultaneously, applies them to create the context which he believes to be so important for students' learning. In other words, Peter's pedagogic learning involves creative and critical responses to the institutional practices of 'apprenticeship'.

Guided participation

Rogoff's plane of guided participation focuses on interpersonal engagements with peers as well as experts; it may include deliberate attempts to instruct as well as incidental events. Even working alone may involve engagement on the plane of guided participation, because one is participating in a cultural activity which is set with or by others who may determine the approach to be taken. But the degree of professional autonomy often exercised by teachers, and the collegiality of workplace relationships, mean that much pedagogic learning is incidental and reciprocal, rather than deliberate or 'taught'. In the example we have chosen here, Peter talks about learning through his work with a colleague:

It made a lot of difference when I started working with Helen. To begin with I didn't think we'd get on at all. I thought we were too different. But some of that difference worked really well with the classes – although we didn't plan it, sometimes the kind of arguments we got into, students really enjoyed it ... And occasionally Helen was quite good – much better than me – at how to control the students when they started getting to the point of being quite tense and almost conflict situation. And she was able to come in and resolve that and I learnt quite a lot from watching her handle that situation that in a sense wouldn't have happened if it had just been me in the first place. That's why I'm not sure how to handle it – and yet this is about taking risks I think – occasionally pushing a bit further I think.

Peter is learning much more than classroom management here; he is learning, from Helen, to extend or develop his pedagogic identity to enable him to challenge and take risks with students. This direct engagement with other teachers through co-teaching is only one form of guided participation; others may involve more personal interactions, and interaction with students. As Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003b) point out, local workplace cultures may mean that 'community' learning is neither restricted to novices or newcomers, nor centripetal in relation to what they term the field of practice; learning occurs through all workplace relations and practices, and can drive the movement of members within communities in a number of different directions.

Participatory appropriation

The plane of participatory appropriation focuses on the ways in which individuals change through activity. The constructive role of the person as an active agent is highlighted, without resort to the concept of ‘internalization’ as an explanation for learning. Rogoff uses the term participatory appropriation to question the idea that the social world is external to the person: ‘Rather, a person participating in an activity is involved in appropriation through his or her own participation’ (Rogoff 1995: 153). This is a creative process in which individuals transform culture even as they appropriate its practices: ‘This is a process of becoming, rather than acquisition’ (ibid: 142).

In the example we have chosen here, Diane confronts conflicting pressures (in this case between the desire to stop student plagiarism, and the institutional demand that students ‘achieve’ as much as possible) through the transformation of her assessment practices:

So I know they do this and as a result – and I know some of them haven’t got the aptitude so they’re going to get a lot of help from other students – and because I’m under pressure to let them pass, I let them do it. But I still make them do some work which other teachers may or may not. And the way I do that is that I interview them with their assessment so they come back – they give me their assessment – because it’s all project-based you see – and so they do a lot of it out of class, so there’s no way for me to police if they’ve done the work themselves. So I will interview them and say ‘you must show me some sort of understanding’ so at least then they’ll have understood what they’ve done.

Diane has not ‘internalized’ the practice of simply passing students, ignoring their malpractice, in order to satisfy institutional demands. Instead, through her active participation in pedagogic practice (assessment practices), she is creatively transforming that practice. As we shall see below, like many other teachers, she tries to deal with this through a ‘principled pragmatic’ response (Moore *et al.* 2002: 554). Formalized teaching standards of the kind currently promoted in Britain, by, for example, Standards Verification UK (which endorses and approves initial teacher training for the learning and skills sector) and the Higher Education Academy (which aims to develop and maintain standards of professional practice for practitioners in higher education in the UK), raise interesting new questions about how teachers engage with such frameworks at the level of participatory appropriation.

Compliance and resistance in pedagogic workplace learning

Whilst we have found these sociocultural approaches helpful, much of the literature treats learning as if it were straightforward, free of conflict and an unalloyed good.

Rogoff, for example, treats full 'community' membership of the girl scouts as something to which all girl scouts will aspire. Of course this may well be true, and anyone who found herself at variance with the customs and expectations of girl scout membership would presumably be free to withdraw. In the workplace the situation is different. As Billett points out, our access to workplace learning opportunities is not evenly distributed. He suggests that we have to take into account the 'affordances' offered by the workplace – that is, the ways in which the workplace provides opportunities for learning. These 'invitational qualities' are shaped by 'workplace hierarchies, group affiliations, personal relations, workplace cliques, and cultural practices' (Billett 2001a: 67). Invitations to participate in new activities and to receive guidance may depend on affiliations of class, race and gender, the status and conditions of employment (consider full- and part-time teachers), the extent to which an individual is deemed acceptable or not, and so on.

Billett recognizes that there are problems in the ways in which people do or do not gain access to workplace learning. However, this is often seen as a problem of unfair distribution of learning opportunities ('affordances'); Billett's principal concern in relation to conflict is that some workers are unfairly excluded from learning on the basis of, for example, race, gender, or union membership. For both Rogoff and Billett, learning is construed largely as something positive and progressive, to which all should have access. With few exceptions (for example, Hodges 1998), there is little recognition within such analyses that learning can be coercive, and can actually work against the interests of those who learn.

Our difficulty in applying these sociocultural frameworks to pedagogic workplace learning stems from the fact that they can lack an analysis of ways in which questions of power and purpose can fundamentally change the nature of workplace learning (rather than simply affecting its distribution), and thus of pedagogic identity. Workplaces, like other human arenas, are characterized by power relations, disharmony and conflict, and participants may be resistant to, as well as compliant with, organizational, social and occupational expectations; responses to conflict are thus as much a part of the pedagogy of the workplace as 'learning to belong'. It is thus inevitable that pedagogic identity – in this analysis, at the level of participatory appropriation – is constructed as much through conflict and resistance as through the nurturing of consensus and conformity.

Although sociocultural analyses of the workplace such as the ones we draw upon focus on individuals and have tended to underplay disharmony, activity theory as developed by Engeström (2001) prioritizes joint activity as the unit of analysis. This theory suggests that instability and contradiction within social practice have a central role as sources of change and development. This is an optimistic perspective because Engeström's view is that individuals' questioning of accepted practice may well expand to an institution or movement, acting as the 'engine' of transformation. However our analysis, which for the moment operates at the level of the individual teacher, suggests other outcomes for conflict and resistance.

We hold the view that pedagogic workplace learning may encourage the development of both *compliant* and *resistant* identities. The outcome of such learning is likely to be very much dependent upon the biography, values, political understandings and ideological stance which are an integral part of teachers' personal and pedagogic identities. On the apprenticeship plane, rules, systems and procedures which embody ideas about good teaching, correct treatment of students, appropriate curriculum and assessment procedures may be imposed upon teachers in such a way that they have little choice but to comply with them. Where these practices are congruent with the teacher's own concepts and values, including conceptions of what it means to be a 'good teacher' or a 'professional', this learning may well be a harmonious and largely positive process. On the guided participation plane, teachers may learn the customs and practices of an existing professional group or work team, in which they must participate fully if they wish to 'belong' to this community. Again, the lesson of compliance with community norms is more likely to be learned when the assumptions and purposes underlying practices are seen as congruent with the learner's personal and pedagogic identity; if, in short, they actually want to be members of this club. In these circumstances, opportunities to learn, and thus to participate more fully in the community, are likely to be seen as constructive 'affordances'. In their study on school teachers, Moore *et al.* (2002: 554) suggest that a discourse of pragmatism operates, with teachers moving backwards and forwards between what might be called 'contingent' and 'principled' pragmatism. Thus teachers are able to occupy a 'floating practical/ideological platform that shuttled back and forth between progressive and traditional orientations' (Moore 2004: 131). We detect elements of this pragmatism in our work; but what happens when it is no longer possible to occupy this discursive position?

Where the lessons of the pedagogic workplace are incongruent with the values and beliefs which inform teachers' personal and pedagogic identities, the teacher faces a conflicted situation in which learning may be experienced as coercive. Moreover, these experiences of learning as either a harmonious or a coercive activity may be occurring simultaneously, in different contexts within the workplace. On the plane of participatory appropriation this results in the construction of what we term a 'fractured' pedagogic identity that has both compliant and resistant elements. Our research with post-compulsory teachers suggests that the fracture between these elements generally reflects two things: first, incongruities in the ways in which the *purposes* of workplace activity are conceived by the individual teacher and by the system or organization to which they are 'apprenticed'; and second, the relationships of *power* within which teachers (as 'persons in the world') and their pedagogic workplaces exist. Power and purpose thus act as a kind of fault-line along which pedagogic identity can be split, with varying and unpredictable results.

Among the teachers we have interviewed we have been able to identify a range of responses along the continuum between compliance and resistance to the conflicts which they experience in the workplace; responses which often seem

very closely related to other aspects of their pedagogic identity. We explore here a selection of examples to demonstrate this range of responses.

None of our teachers could be described as entirely compliant. James, a relatively new teacher, is currently learning that being a teacher involves mastering a number of bureaucratic techniques:

I see myself at the moment as playing, playing the game, which involves delivering what I sort of have to get through, which is on the course, the unit outline, the outcomes etc., which I think is a key, because they, the students are there, mostly, they say, the first thing they'll say is to get the qualification.

Although James' position is clearly one of contingent pragmatism, he retains an element of resistance to what he sees as the broader impositions of education on human development:

What I'm trying to do is to get them to expand it so that they then add, but also 'I'm enjoying this and I'd like to do this and I'm getting a lot more out of it than just a piece of paper' ... My own view – and this is where my own personal view of learning and teaching comes in ... I don't define myself as a teacher in order to then impart knowledge and pass exams ... you know, I see the importance of them coming out with a piece of paper, as I did, but maybe I'm hanging on to, on to tutors and lecturers that I had, who I know made a difference to me, and really got ... and they were people who did a little bit more, and changed things, challenged things. And that struck a note with me, maybe it'll strike a note with one or two of the students, some of them'll be maybe turned off by it, I don't know, I try.

At this stage in his career he does not see any essential contradiction between these two positions. Michelle, another teacher who thinks of herself as a relative novice, similarly finds aspects of pedagogic bureaucracy unproblematic in themselves:

Well, competency-based training here means we work to an externally set syllabus – so you're given the syllabus and we work to that. The syllabus and the syllabus documents sometimes leaves a lot to be desired – not all of our syllabus documents are that clear for novice teachers in terms of ideas and exercises. ... Well the learning outcomes are specified – I personally think that they're not specified in such a tight way that there's no room to move ... I think it's actually good for learning outcomes to give teachers some room – the syllabus not to prescribe so tightly because it then allows you to go with the class.

When we look at a more experienced teacher such as Peter, whose approach to learning outcomes we discussed above, we find that he has adopted a semi-

resistant compliance. In effect, he has worked with the coercive 'affordances' of the workplace in ways which make him more comfortable with them. His own understanding of bureaucratic requirements, and his confidence in his own teaching mean that he is able to transform the situation through his own practice. This adaptation suggests that he is able to comply with workplace practices, whilst simultaneously resisting and reshaping those elements which are not wholly congruent with his own pedagogic identity. This demonstrates a significant point about the difference between internalization and participatory appropriation; Peter is not a blank canvas but an active agent in the ongoing creation of the pedagogic workplace. As an experienced adult educator he has developed his pedagogic identity over a number of years through engagement with different educational policy contexts; moreover he, unlike James and Michelle, is able to write his own learning outcomes.

In some cases, resistance may be such that it threatens to fracture pedagogic identity completely. Two of our respondents, Diane and Mary, have reached a point where each in her different way expresses an inability to cope with these conflicts. Diane, as discussed earlier, struggles with irrelevant learning outcomes, students who are quite unequipped for their courses, and the conflicting pressures of their needs and those of the institution for good achievement statistics. She compromises in a way which makes her feel both cynical and unhappy:

And as I say I've got this marking system down to a fine art. I don't know how I do it exactly but I can get these very, very weak ... students to pass by a mark ... I don't know how I do it [laughs]. And I could adjust that mark one way or the other – now that's not something I was taught to do – I learnt to do that.

Unsurprisingly, Diane is not committed to a career in teaching. Mary, on the other hand, has long been a committed teacher, but is reaching the point where she cannot reconcile her own idea of being a good teacher with the apprenticeship practices of her organization:

On Monday morning I come in and I get a whole sheaf of official documents from [academic administration] telling me this is the process that's going to take place, this is now yet another model that we're working with. It's just rules, procedures, more bits of paper ... I get two grades, one for teaching and one for how students learn. For a start, how can they do that in one half-hour class? ... I just think well, what the fuck ... in the end I won't be able to cope with it any more.... Management work from the premise that we're here to do as little as possible and to get away with it ... and what that does is it sets people up to behave in that way.

In other words, Mary believes that a contingent pragmatic response is no longer sustainable. She made a decision following this interview to leave her organization

because, in common with many other teachers, she no longer felt able to manage the fracture between her own pedagogic identity and the professional expectations of her organization. Hodges' total 'dis-identification' with the workplace apprenticeship (1998) is a more extreme illustration of the fracture between personal identity and public constructions of a specific type of pedagogic identity. In her case, workplace and professional norms and expectations were rejected as being incongruent with her identity as a 'person in the world'. This kind of response is not unusual: in a recent survey by the UK's Association of University Teachers, 47 per cent of respondents had considered leaving higher education (Kinman and Jones 2004); in 2003/4 38 per cent of teachers in the UK retiring did so before the age of sixty (National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education 2005). The implications of such estranged or alienated learning in the pedagogic workplace (Lave and McDermott 2002) clearly extend far beyond the personal unhappiness caused to the individuals concerned.

Conclusions

We began our discussion by arguing that most work on teachers' learning has been concerned with their initial training and development. However, teachers continue to learn throughout their pedagogic careers, and this deserves more attention than it has received hitherto. Pedagogic learning is a form of workplace learning. We therefore drew on some of the literature and conceptual themes of workplace learning to explore the role of pedagogic workplace learning in the construction of pedagogic identity. Our interviews with practising teachers confirmed our view that questions of power and purpose in the workplace are central to the ways in which teachers construct pedagogic identity. We have described some instances of the ways in which these issues are negotiated in teachers' practice. This analytical direction has strong implications for our own research on pedagogic identity because it unites a sociocultural perspective with Engeström's focus on contradictions or structural tensions within and between activity systems. It suggests that we have to focus on the dynamic of the pedagogic workplace and the ways in which compliance, resistance, conflict and dissatisfaction are played out; it also has implications for the ways in which research on workplace learning more generally engages with issues of power and purpose, compliance and resistance.

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Recognition of tacit skills and knowledge in work re-entry

Modelling of learning processes and outcomes

Natasha Kersh and Karen Evans

Introduction

The significance of the recognition of adults' prior experiences and tacit skills, as they move between various learning or workplace environments, was one of the central focuses of the project 'Recognition of tacit skills and knowledge in work re-entry', carried out as part of the Economic and Social Research Council-funded Research Network 'Improving Incentives to Learning in the Workplace'.¹ Research has shown that skills and knowledge acquired as a result of various configurations of non-formal learning experiences play an important part in facilitating or undermining adults' learning successes within learning or workplace environments. This chapter argues that it is important to understand better how individuals harness and use tacit forms of personal competences as they move between roles and settings and how these skills are transformed in new environments.

Within this study we investigated the contributions of non-formal prior learning experiences and the effects of moving between contexts over time. The project aimed to (1) identify tacit forms of personal competences gained through the different configurations of life and work experiences of 'adult returners' whose occupational biographies have been interrupted by family circumstances, unemployment or changes of direction; (2) examine under what circumstances recognition and deployment of 'hidden capabilities' in learning and teaching situations strengthen learning success; and (3) define interrelationships between the recognition of tacit skills and students'/employees' learning processes and outcomes, as adults move between college and different workplace environments.

Tacit skills are generally thought of as the 'hidden' dimensions of the skills and competences that people can learn from a variety of experiences, such as formal education, the workplace, family experience, informal learning, and so on. Tacit skills and personal competences have been identified as important components of adult learning (Eraut 2000, Green 1999, Leplat 1990). The role of these skills in the facilitation of students'/employees' learning successes and outcomes is discussed in our earlier paper (Evans *et al.* 2004a). Recognition and self-recognition of tacit

skills and personal competences could encourage learners to deploy and develop these skills further within a learning environment. In this respect the concept of skills recognition refers to the level of recognition of adult learners' skills by their tutors, fellow students, employers, colleagues, and so on. Self-recognition refers to adult learners' recognition of their own skills and personal competences.

The recognition of the role of tacit forms of personal competences and non-formal learning in the 'knowledge base' of the economy has become more prominent in recent years. The commitment to lifelong learning has become one of the priorities of the current government. The importance of the lifelong learning agenda has been highlighted in a series of government-commissioned policy papers² developed in response to the 'skills shortage' affecting the UK economy. Similarly, a recent report from the UK's Small Business Council underlined the growing role of non-formal learning, stressing that 'formal training in the main is not relevant to many small businesses' and that 'the ability of staff to do their job is more important than a piece of paper, because qualifications are neither a guarantee of quality nor a reflection of actual skills' (Bream 2003: 15). In workplaces, much of the required knowledge or relevant skills are hard or impossible to codify and therefore they cannot be taught within the setting of formal education (Green 1999). In response to the demands of the economy, various configurations of non-formal learning and tacit skills have taken an important place in the context of training, workplace learning and development (Avis 1996).

Non-formal learning is 'generally seen as a useful tool to assist lifelong learning' (Duvekot 2001: 30). Our data indicate a wide range of non-formal learning experiences outside the qualification framework, or other formal education and training settings (Evans *et al.* 2004a). Learning results from a range of life experiences, in home and family settings, engaging in volunteer activities, and overcoming various setbacks in life. Skills acquired from non-formal learning experiences are often tacit in nature. Our interview findings support the view that recognition of these skills by tutors, employers or other fellow-learners can contribute considerably to their utilization and self-recognition by learners.

Building on Molander (1992), Eraut (2000) and Evans' previous European Union-funded work (1998–2000),³ the project drew on the hypothesis that, for those with interrupted work histories, tacit forms of personal competences may be under-recognized and under-utilized in work re-entry. Learners have different life experiences, such as occupational, educational, family experiences, and so on. We argue that it is important to understand better how tacit forms of personal competences can contribute to sustaining learning outcomes in different types of learning environments. Evidence from our empirical work shows that retraining as a type of learning environment may play an important role in this context.

Data collection and methodology

The project's objectives were met by using structured elicitation techniques to identify tacit dimensions of personal competences of importance in the learning/

work transitions of adults. Sixty-one adult learners following work re-entry courses in social care, management and transport sector jobs in six London region further/adult education colleges were selected as research participants. Their learning experiences were longitudinally tracked through interview and observation, including tutor/trainer observations and recordings of learning processes and achievements.

The interviews attempted to elicit a wide range of tacit skills by asking adult learners about their life and work experiences and relating these to their learning outcomes and achievements. The research participants were selected from particular learning programmes. Self-completion questionnaires were completed by a sub-sample, giving responses against a set of fixed indicators of skill development and use.

The second stage of research involved, with the agreement of the students, tracking them into their workplaces, places of further study or other settings and reviewing with them what they had gained from their learning and how this was built upon after they moved into new learning or working environments.

Our respondents included males and females, aged twenty to fifty-five with most having interrupted career biographies largely due to their family circumstances. Responses from interviewees were analysed with the assistance of a qualitative analysis software program, called 'NVivo'. We also modelled our data through the Dynamic Concept Analysis (DCA)⁴ computer program originally developed by Kontiainen of Helsinki University (Kontiainen 2002). The DCA assists in the analysis of data using conceptual models based on information about concept relations in adult learning. Modelling of learning processes for adults with interrupted occupational and learning careers can identify ways in which recognition and deployment of tacit skills enhances learning experiences and outcomes as learners move between college and workplace settings. The DCA method has assisted in clarifying the interrelationships between learning and skill recognition in different environments and is being simplified for practitioner use. The chapter exemplifies the use of this method with three qualitatively modelled case studies.

The significance of tacit skills within workplace learning and retraining

Our research indicates that people may acquire a number of personal skills through various configurations of their prior life experiences. Our interview and fieldwork data enabled us to elicit a wide range of tacit skills that take, or may take, an important place in the context of learning to work transitions of adults.

Aspects of learners' individual biographies manifest themselves through different skills acquired from their previous experiences. Adult learners who undertake various courses in order to facilitate their 'job hunting' and work re-entry often start their training equipped with a number of skills they acquired during 'their career/learning interruptions', as a result of outside-of-work/learning

experiences. The interviews have shown that they often use and deploy such skills in their new learning environments, either with or without the support of their peers and tutors. Family contexts, including managing households and looking after children, have been identified as important in terms of acquiring a number of useful skills that can be transferred to, and/or successfully deployed within, both educational and workplace environments. Such skills have been classified in our earlier work (Evans *et al.* 2004a), as follows:

- 1 Competences related to values and attitudes include skills such as patience, sincerity, acceptance of self-responsibility, being able to foster confidence and trust, and so on.
- 2 Social and co-operative competences include a wide range of interpersonal abilities used in working with others, such as teamwork or skills in managing conflict.
- 3 Methodological competences include being able to handle multiple tasks and demands in complex and sometimes contradictory environments.
- 4 Practical and content-related competences refer to practical aspects of operating in (modern) work environments as well as subject matter relevant to work tasks.
- 5 Learning competences include perceptiveness, openness to new experiences and reflective abilities.
- 6 Strategic (or self-steering) competences include skills such as prioritizing and planning.

Such 'soft skills' often have strong tacit dimensions, and, in many cases, adults do not recognize them as valuable and 'presentable' in the job market. Our research draws on substantial gender differences in the context of self-recognition/non-recognition of tacit skills and competences by adults who experience career/learning interruptions at some point in their lives. Women tend, to a certain extent, to recognize/partially recognize skills they have developed as a result of outside-of-job experiences, such as managing their households or looking after children. However, they do not feel that, at the present time, these skills are fully appreciated or recognized in the job market. Conversely, our male respondents, in most cases, do not value such skills at all, unless some exceptional circumstances have an effect on their perception of these skills as being 'relatively useful'. In the case of Ali, for example, he had been looking after his son since the baby was born. Ali's wife had been carrying on with her job as an accountant working in a big superstore. Although Ali admitted that he had acquired a number of important skills while looking after his son and managing the household, he doubted if prospective employers would ever count such an experience as 'valuable'.

Because of their nature, it is proving to be very challenging to demonstrate and present tacit skills and competences to others. The degree to which adults are able and willing to use their tacit skills through learning or workplace environments varies from learner to learner. While some learners find it easy to deploy their personal skills, others need a lot of encouragement and support from

their tutors, employers or colleagues in order to start deploying their personal skills in a new environment. We found that lack of confidence leading to low levels of involvement and skills deployment had been experienced by adults with substantial career interruptions that occurred, for example, because of family circumstances or forced unemployment. The project's data suggest that retraining as a kind of learning environment may actually help the learners to recognize the importance of their prior experiences. This is achieved by making their tacit skills and personal competences visible through employing these skills in a wide range of educational and social activities. Tutors may employ a number of methods and approaches to help the learners to make their skills visible. Team work, one-to-one tutorial help and encouraging learners to help their fellow-learners have been identified as the methods that may help to uncover tacit skills.

The data indicate that adults who have learned a number of valuable skills from their prior experiences (either personal, professional or educational) are able to transfer them into learning or workplace environments, often without recognizing the importance or value of such skills for their learning outcomes, learning success and work re-entry.

The DCA modelling of individual cases: categories of adult learning

In our work, modelling of learning processes for learners with interrupted occupational and learning careers helped us to identify ways in which recognition and deployment of tacit skills enhances learning experiences and outcomes as learners move between college and workplace settings. We selected ten adult learning concepts and their attributes for Dynamic Concept Analysis (DCA) in this study and defined relationships among them. An information matrix stored these statements and provided a basis for further building of models to describe the learning processes in individual case studies.

We considered ten concepts which are thought to be important in the context of informal learning, recognition and deployment of tacit skills in a learning environment (Evans *et al.* 2004b). Each variable has three attributes: *a* (positive, high or strong), *n* (medium or neutral) and *b* (negative or low). The models show which of the attributes describe a single case study and specify relationships among the concepts. The concepts are divided among four areas or categories, namely 'learner', 'skills recognition and deployment', 'learning environment/workplace' and 'outcomes'. These four categories are discussed below.

Category 1: Learner

Involvement: high (a) – medium (n) – low (b)

This concept refers to a learner's degree of involvement within a learning environment or, in other words, 'the nature of involvement the learner has in a learning process' (Kontianen 2002). To what extent does a learner involve

herself/himself actively in everyday learning activities? Does the learner assume an active or passive role within a learning environment? Our interview data indicate that adult learners' active (or strong) involvement is associated with their active participation in various activities within a learning environment.

Confidence: strong (a) – medium (n) – low (b)

This concept refers to a learner's level of confidence. Our interview data show that adult learners consider developing confidence to be an important learning outcome or learning goal. There are visible interrelations between adults' levels of confidence and other concepts such as involvement, skills recognition and deployment. One interviewee, for example, stressed that deployment of her communication skills or 'getting on with people' in the college facilitated her informal learning outcomes such as self-assurance, capability and confidence.

Learning attitudes: positive (a) – neutral (n) –negative (b)

This concept refers to adult learners' perceptions of their studies. Positive learning attitudes are associated with students' motivation and willingness to acquire new skills and knowledge or to develop their existing skills. Our interview data suggest that for adult learners, positive learning attitudes mean working hard, not being lazy and having a willingness to learn.

Interaction: active (a) – medium (b) – passive (b)

This concept refers to learners' willingness to work together and co-operate with other members of a group for the benefit of learning. Teamwork has been identified as an important characteristic of social interaction. Other types of social interactions that were named by adult learners are tutorial help, learning from others, communicating with fellow students and teaching others.

Category 2: Skills recognition and deployment

Skills recognition: high (a) – medium (n) – low (b)

This concept refers to level of recognition of adult learners' skills by their tutors, fellow students, employers, colleagues, and so on. The important point that we would like to explore is the link between the recognition of tacit skills, learning processes and gains. How are these related? Do (and how do) the recognition of skills by students, tutors or employers impact on the learning process? Our data show that recognition, acquisition and deployment of tacit skills are all interrelated processes. Students stressed that recognition of their skills by others (e.g. tutors, employers, family) encouraged (or would encourage) them to further develop their skills.

Skills self-recognition: high (a) – medium (n) – low (b)

This concept explores to what extent adult learners recognize their own skills and personal competences. Self-awareness and self-recognition of an adult learner's own skills have been identified as an important component of adult learning.

Skills deployment: positive (a) – neutral (n) – negative (b)

This concept shows to what extent adult learners are able to deploy and develop their existing skills in a learning or workplace environment. On a practical level, the interviews with those who had recently returned to attend courses at college suggested the deployment of tacit skills such as time management, organization and meeting multiple demands.

Category 3: Learning environment/workplace**Learning environment: positive (a) – neutral (n) – negative (b)**

Our interview data indicate that a positive learning environment is associated with various features such as tutors' competence and support, well-developed curricula and training programmes, opportunities to deploy existing skills and to acquire new skills, and so on. The concept 'learning environment' is applicable to any place where learning (either formal or informal) is taking place, including both college and workplace settings.

Workplace: expansive (a) – neutral (n) – restrictive (b)

This concept refers to opportunities provided by college/workplace environments in terms of skills deployment and acquisition as well as further learning in general. In particular we identified the working/learning environments, which are *experienced* as *restrictive* (or negative, not facilitating further learning) or *expansive* (or positive, facilitating further development, deployment of skills) by adults re-entering the workplace after their college programmes. The way employees or learners experience expansive environments has to do with the feeling of 'being a part of a team' and opportunities for professional and personal development, whereas a restrictive environment is associated with 'being an outsider or mere observer' in the workplace. Evidence from interviews shows that employees experienced their workplaces as either expansive or restrictive depending on the following factors:

- Types of workplace environment: stimulating versus dull.
- Recognition of employees' skills and abilities.
- Opportunities for workplace training and career development.

Category 4: Outcomes***Learning outcomes: positive (a) – neutral (n) – negative (b)***

The important issue that came up in the course of the follow-up interviews was that of learning outcomes. Our primary evidence from the follow-up interviews supported the view that students' learning outcomes were not restricted to formal results such as a certificate of qualification or diploma. We argue that informal outcomes are those associated with self-assurance, increased capability, improved attainment, greater ability to exercise control over their situations and environments, and development of new attitudes towards learning/working. The interview data indicate that adults consider developing confidence to be an important learning outcome from their college and workplace training.

Models of the learning process of the cases considered within this study show that there are many links and interrelations among the concepts listed above. Owing to the limited space here we can not consider and elucidate all of the interrelationships among the concepts within single cases. We attempt to draw on those concepts and relationships which are considered to be of primary importance in a particular case study. Our findings suggest that the positive learning environment that encourages the learners to use their 'hidden skills' is associated with the 'culture of recognition of these skills' by tutors and learners themselves. The interviews with learners indicated that if the learners believed that their skills were recognized or valued by others, they felt stimulated to apply these skills in everyday learning activities.

The case studies below present results of both initial and follow-up interviews with adult learners as they moved from their college environments to other settings. Three examples are considered:

- moving from college environment into a workplace;
- moving from college environment into a 'forced situation' (such as unemployment);
- moving from college environment into a place of further study.

Case 1: Diana's case: moving from college environment into a workplace (see Figure 7.1)***Personal background***

Diana is a single mother with four children. Her previous work experience was mainly in administration including working for a mail order company, a trust company and the post office. Her family commitments made it difficult for her to obtain a formal qualification and to develop her career. She decided to return to studying when her youngest child entered full-time schooling. At college, she started by taking short courses and passing them, which generated a sense of

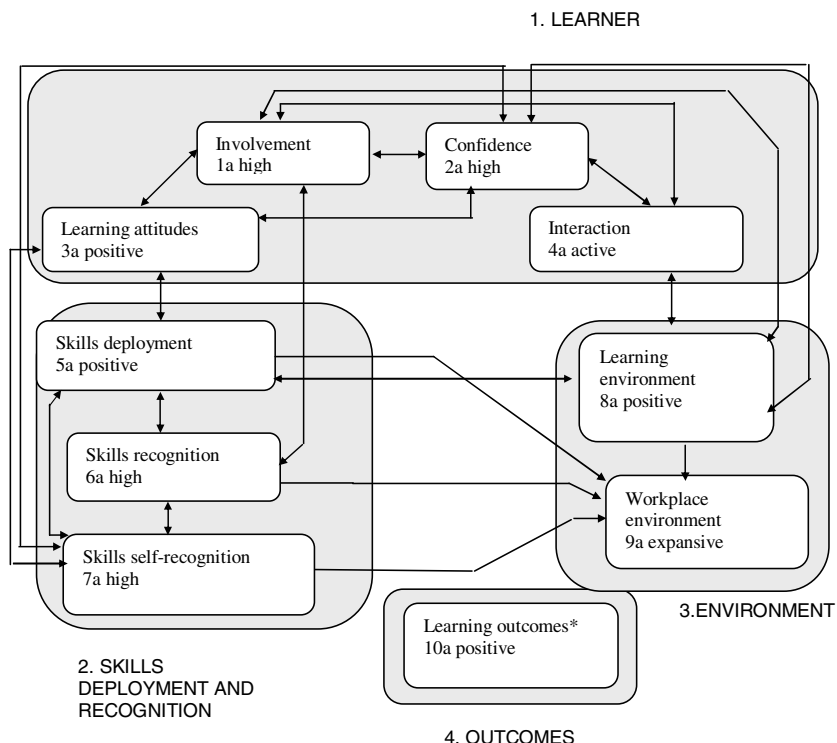


Figure 7.1 DCA modelling of Diana's case (* Learning outcomes (10a) is an end product of the process. To make the model simpler the arrows to 10a are not drawn here, but this information is given in the description of Diana's case)

confidence. As a result, Diana decided to undertake a full-time course 'Certificate for Women in Management'. She completed her certificate in management studies and obtained a position as Diversity Administrator in a trade union.

Learner/employee

Her involvement was high (1a) as she participated in many workplace activities. As the model indicates, her confidence (2a) was one of the central concepts, facilitating other concepts (e.g. 1a, 3a, 4a). She felt that her personal confidence and skills, acquired from previous experiences including her family experience, were being fully utilized in her work environment. She referred to skills such as patience, self-responsibility and time-management. She also referred to her college experience, stressing that tutors' support helped her to build up her confidence in the first place. Her interaction was active (4a), and she herself perceived it to

be one of the most valuable skills acquired in the college and transferred to the workplace:

Interaction with people, I think that's very important, when you're isolated, you tend to lean on your own misunderstanding, if that makes sense, but when you're out there, mixing with other people, I think it just sharpens you a little bit.

Her learning attitudes were positive (3a), and this was being stimulated by an expansive learning environment at her workplace, which allowed her to undertake further training.

Skills recognition and deployment

Diana felt that her personal skills were being fully recognized and deployed in her workplace environment (5a, 6a). Her employers recognized her skills and this led to her higher involvement (6a, 1a) as she was given more responsibilities:

QUESTION: So do you feel like what you have, personal confidence and skills, are being fully utilized in your work environment?

DIANA: Yes, I would say yes, definitely, I would say yes, there's quite a few times I get quite nervous actually. I think 'can I really do this? Can I really sign that requisition form or whatever?' But yes, you can, go for it.

QUESTION: And they are very happy to delegate responsibilities to you, obviously.

DIANA: Yes.

Workplace/learning environment

Diana was experiencing her workplace environment as expansive, which was especially stimulated by recognition of her skills by her employers (6a) and opportunities to deploy her skills (5a). She spoke enthusiastically about her work environment. She also stressed that her employers took on her initiatives, giving her a learning opportunity:

It's fantastic, I couldn't have asked for a better chance, do you know, to do something positive. Diversity is a bit of a buzz word at the moment, and I didn't want it just to be just a buzz thing, to be politically correct. I wanted to do something constructive, something lasting, really create something for the members so that they feel, yes, this is working for us, it's supporting us, it's reflecting our needs.

Learning outcomes

Her learning outcomes were positive (10a). Her high involvement (1a), high confidence (2a), positive skills deployment (5a) and recognition (6a) facilitated her positive learning outcomes. She also stressed that her active social interaction (4a) really facilitated her informal learning outcomes:

DIANA: [...] what are you actually receiving in terms of stretching your own mind? And the learning experience is more about that, I think it's a lot more, but that makes up a very huge percentage of the experience, what you gain from the social interaction of just being out there.

QUESTION: Bring out what you have.

DIANA: Exactly, you can read a book and everybody, all of us could read the book and we could all come up with different interpretations of what we've read. And therefore the quality of our qualifications are all going to be different, but what we gain from interacting between the three of us in that class, it goes a long way. You can't really measure it in terms of the impact it has on someone, but yes, I didn't go in there a wilting flower ... and I definitely came out of there feeling empowered.

Case 2: Ali's case: moving from college environment into a 'forced situation' (see Figure 7.2)

Personal background

At the time of interview, Ali had been a full-time father looking after his 2-year-old son for two years. He participated in the London Underground Training Programme offered by one of the colleges of further education. This programme involved an intensive training programme in maths, English and application form and interview techniques for adults wishing to apply for the position of station assistant with London Underground. Those who successfully passed a test at the end of the programme were offered a job interview with London Underground. Ali had passed the test and been invited for a job interview. However, he was not successful with the interview and did not get a job.

Learner/unemployed

His involvement was low (1b) as he maintained that, while staying at home with his son, he did not have any opportunities to get involved in any learning activities. His low self-recognition of his own skills (7b) also prevented him from taking part in any community or voluntary activities while he was looking for a job. He claimed that his domestic or household skills were not recognized (6b) by others (for example prospective employers), which also contributed to the process of low involvement (1b). His confidence was medium (2n) so far but he claimed that

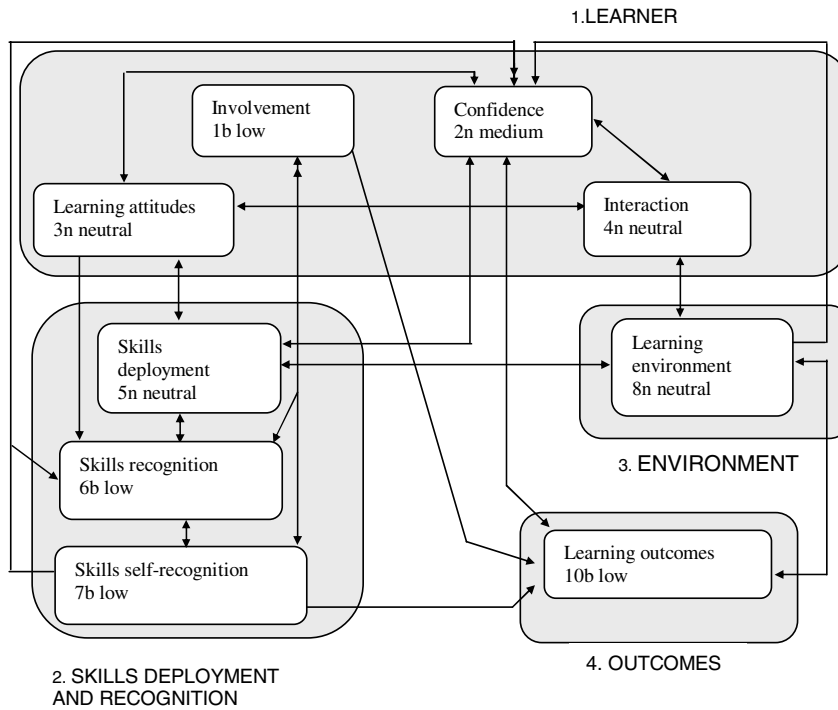


Figure 7.2 DCA modelling of Ali's case

his futile efforts to find a job may decrease his confidence to a very low level. He maintained that the fact that he was not able to get a job with London Underground after his course, which he considered to be a type of learning outcome (10b), also considerably reduced his level of confidence. His social interaction (4n) included going to parents' meeting groups with his son. However, he maintained that he was often excluded from conversations, activities, and so on, due to the fact that he was the only male in the group. He claimed that social stereotypes about male/female roles in society led to low recognition of his skills as a father and decreased his levels of confidence, involvement and interaction.

Skills recognition and deployment

Ali's self-recognition of his own skills was low (7b), mainly due to the problem of low recognition (6b) of his household skills by others, especially by prospective employers. Interview data also indicated that he did not utilize fully his existing skills (5n) because of low skills self-recognition. From what he said about his

everyday activities it seemed that he had acquired a number of valuable skills. However, most of the skills, such as *patience*, *time-management* or *juggling various activities simultaneously* are tacit in nature, and he was not aware that he had acquired these valuable competences, mainly because of the fact that Ali felt that he was forced to do 'women's work'.

Learning environment

In general, he thought that the learning environment in the college where he took his course was not very stimulating (8n). He claimed that due to the fact that the course was very short and specifically targeted for the London Underground application process, he was not able to fully utilize his skills (5n).

Learning outcomes

The fact that he failed his interview with London Underground at the end of his course had a considerable negative effect on his levels of confidence, self-assurance and self-esteem, which are considered to be informal outcomes within the context of our study (10b). The model indicates that among other things, his medium confidence (2n), low involvement (1b) and low skills self-recognition (7b) contributed to his low learning outcomes (10b).

Case 3: Sarah's case: moving from college environment into a place of further study (see Figure 7.3)

Personal background

At the time of the initial interviews Sarah was completing the NVQ (National Vocational Qualification, a UK qualification) in Business Administration, Level 2, in a college of further education. After completing the course she chose to continue her studies. She went on to attend classes in English and IT in a college of further education, and was planning to undertake a course the following year leading to NVQ Level 3 in Business Administration.

Learner

Sarah's involvement was high (1a) and this was stimulated by the fact that her skills and competences were recognized by her tutors (6a). She was not very confident (2n) in her skills and competences, but was trying to develop her confidence by taking part in many learning activities, and her learning attitudes were positive (3a). Her interaction (4a) was active and she stressed that teamwork, as a type of social interaction in her college, facilitated a positive learning environment (8a), and encouraged her involvement (1a).

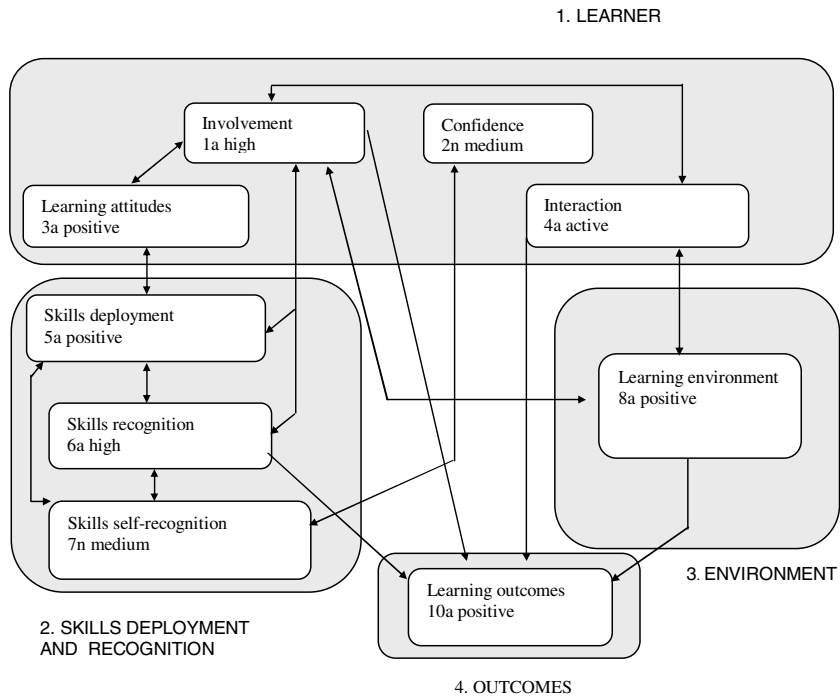


Figure 7.3 DCA modelling of Sarah's case

Skills recognition and deployment

Sarah's self-recognition of her own skills (7n) was not very high due to her medium level of confidence (2n). But in her case this did not discharge but stimulate her further learning. She stressed that she hoped that the course she was taking at the time would help her to develop her confidence. Sarah spoke enthusiastically about her tutors' support and recognition of her skills (6a). She said that she was advised to undertake a more advanced course of English than the one she initially enrolled on:

I explained for my teachers what I need to improve my writing and that's why they put this class. Before, when I was doing enrolment, they give to me a test because English classes are different, higher, and ... I did well on my test. And that's why they put me at a higher level, to improve my English and my writing.

Learning environment

Sarah claimed that her active involvement (1a) allowed her to experience her learning environment as stimulating. Active social interaction on the course

(4a), especially teamwork, also contributed to elements of a positive learning environment.

Learning outcomes

Her involvement (1a), recognition of her skills by her tutors (6a), positive learning environment (8a) and active social interaction (4a) facilitated her informal learning outcomes, especially those associated with increased capability, improved attainment and greater ability to exercise control over various situations and environments. She was very determined and motivated in terms of the acquisition of new skills, abilities and knowledge. Her plan was to complete the course she was taking at the time, then get a job to acquire some 'real life experience', and then to continue her education in a university.

The three examples demonstrate the potential of the DCA computer program as a research tool. The DCA case analysis enabled us to explore the links and interrelationships among various elements of learning/workplace environments. Within our research we modelled 32 cases of adult learners entering new workplace environments (or embarking on new training courses or continuing to look for a job) after participating in various courses in colleges of further education. The case analysis has shown that recognition and deployment of tacit skills are important elements of a learning/workplace environment that may play a significant part in the process of facilitating learners' involvement, social interaction and confidence.

Conclusions

Our research drew on the importance of non-formal learning and tacit skills in both workplace and learning environments. The increasing tendency towards recognition of the skills that people have learned from various past experiences underpins the significance of non-formal learning or 'learning outside the academy'. The research has shown that the skills people acquire from various configurations of non-formal learning may be as important in workplace settings as the competences learned as a result of formal education and training. Learners/employees often use the skills and knowledge acquired from their past experiences without even fully realizing the usefulness and value of such skills. Our research has indicated that there are factors that may facilitate the deployment and development of these skills. The DCA analysis assisted us in identifying links and relationships between skills and factors that may facilitate or undermine adults' confidence and learning success. Recognition or non-recognition of skills by others seems to be one of the central concepts in this context. Low involvement, low skills recognition and deployment, and passive social interaction lead to low levels of personal confidence and self-esteem. If the skills are not recognized by others, it seems that this contributes to the development of a number of negative factors

such as low confidence, low self-esteem or low motivation. For adults re-entering workplaces, skills recognition is usually associated with getting a job. Adults who have been trying to find a job without success for a long time feel that others do not value their skills and – consequently – they do not value their skills themselves. Prior learning experience acquired from various activities is not considered to be of any importance in such cases. This may lead to isolation and loneliness and may result in social exclusion. Conversely, if adults re-enter an environment, either learning or workplace, where their skills are recognized, they feel motivated to develop them further. It could also encourage adults to undertake further learning either within their workplace or in a college of further education. Taking on these learning opportunities helps them to realize themselves as members of a community, especially through social interaction. Thus, it could contribute to elements of social inclusion. By focusing on competence-building in interrupted occupational biographies and the implications of accrediting non-formal learning, the project has aimed to show how adults' occupational and learning biographies can be understood in ways which more systematically address the importance of tacit skills recognition and deployment, and the potential of dynamic concept analysis for modelling these processes as a basis for future interventions at the level of practice.

This project has significantly advanced our understanding of how environments can expand, consolidate or undermine the learning gains of adults entering new workplaces through retraining. DCA modelling of individual cases provided a better understanding of adult returners' experiences in re-entering work. In addition, the DCA version of conceptual model-building can be used with practitioners (programme designers, tutors, trainers, mentors, human resource developers and learners themselves) in ways that enable them to reflect upon and change their own concepts and approaches, including in the creation of learning environments. The modelling approach can be used as a method to facilitate adult learners' self-awareness and self-evaluation of their personal and tacit skills. The development of methods described in this chapter has also taken place through a European consortium of researchers and practitioners working to produce tools that can be used for the self-evaluation and development of personal competences in a wide range of continuing vocational training settings.

Notes

- 1 Economic and Social Research Council Award Number L139 225 1005 directed by Helen Rainbird, Karen Evans, Phil Hodgkinson and Lorna Unwin.
- 2 Department for Education and Employment (1998) *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain*, Norwich: HMSO. Department for Education and Employment (2000) *Skills for All*, London: DfEE. Department for Education and Skills (2001) *Education and Skills Delivering Results: A Strategy to 2006*, London: DfES.
- 3 Hendrich, W., Heidegger, G., Evans, K., Figueri, E. and Patiniotis, N. (2001) *Tacit – Key Project Final Report*, University of Flensburg/European Commission, Brussels.
- 4 The computer program is available HTTP: <http://www.edu.helsinki.fi/dca>.

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Learning in non-formal settings and the development of ‘really useful’ knowledge

Lyn Tett

Introduction

This chapter explores the value of learning in informal and community based settings, especially people’s own communities of place and interest, and draws on examples from the fields of literacy and health to examine the possibilities of developing knowledge that is useful to those who generate it. It will look at the role of educators in developing a curriculum that builds on what people already know and can do but also challenges them to take risks and develop further. It will ask how people can be helped to recognize that they have the capacity to learn and to generate new, ‘really useful’ knowledge (Johnson 1988). It will also show how the educational traditions we have always contain ideas about what constitutes real learning and guide people’s ideas about what can and should be done, however informal the setting. These traditions provide languages, vocabularies and political repertoires that both make possible new ways of thinking and act as boundaries beyond which people feel it is not possible to go.

Learning is part of human nature and we all do it all the time. The word learning, however, is used broadly and with somewhat different meanings and sometimes synonymously with education. I am going to use the concept of learning to mean all the processes that lead to relatively lasting changes of capacity whether it is of a cognitive, emotional, motivational, attitudinal or social character. Learning from this perspective simultaneously comprises a cognitive, an emotional and a societal dimension. Often it is the cognitive, content dimension that is emphasized but how the learning situation is experienced emotionally is of equal importance. Moreover, both the cognitive and emotional dimensions, and the interplay between them, are decisively dependent on the social dimension and the societal conditions influencing the learning situation and process (see Illeris 2004).

Many people engage in serious learning projects outside of ‘provided’ education as Alan Tough showed clearly in his research carried out in 1976 (Tough 1976). His Canadian study and others carried out subsequently (e.g. Aldridge and Tucket 2002) have showed that high proportions of adults are learning and that often the focus is on major personal change. If the society that people live in regards learning as a normal activity for people of all ages then everyone is likely to be

effectively engaged in some form of learning of their choice. However, there are wide variations in those who report that they have engaged in learning with the lowest participation figures 'found amongst those outside of the labour market: retired people (48%) and those unable to work due to a health problem or a disability (42%)' (Sargant and Aldridge 2003: 15). Overall, participation in post-school education and training in the UK is a highly classed activity with those from social classes IV and V unlikely to continue their education and those from social classes I and II over-represented, particularly in higher education (see Archer *et al.* 2003). One reason for this is that university has become almost a third stage in compulsory education for young middle and upper class people who regard it as a normal part of post-school experience. For this group the expectations of parents, friends and teachers mean that it is a natural progression from school once the necessary entry qualifications have been gained. In contrast, those who leave school with few or no qualifications are unlikely to engage in learning later, even informal learning, with less than a third reporting participating in some learning during the preceding three years (Sargant and Aldridge 2003). So, it appears that if you do not succeed in education in the first place then you will not want to engage in learning later either.

A wide variety of governments and educational bodies recognize that these inequities in access to learning in adulthood are a problem that should be tackled. For example, there is a widespread commitment to policies that promote 'lifelong learning' that aim to develop the individual's capacity for learning across the life span. There is also an encouragement to learning providers to widen opportunities in order to enable learning to take place in many different ways and contexts (e.g. Commission of the European Communities (CEC) 2000; Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) 1998; Scottish Executive 2000). In most of these supply and demand side policies, however, there is a strong emphasis on economic skills development and individual learning. For example, a European Union policy paper argued that the aims of lifelong learning 'are dependent on [citizens] having adequate and up-to-date knowledge and skills to take part in and make a contribution to economic and social life' (CEC 2000: 5). The British Prime Minister has similarly argued that 'Education is the best economic policy we have' (Blair 1998: 1) and the Scottish Executive (2001: 7) suggests 'in an increasingly globalized economy, Scotland's future prosperity depends on building up the skills of her existing workforce and improving the employability of those seeking work'. These policies also emphasize the association of lifelong learning with skills, individual motivation and economic survival. Permeating the lifelong learning discourse, then, is an emphasis on the individual, isolated learner and the main aim is to focus on increasing people's skills and employability. This emphasis can exclude the very people it is hoped will re-engage in learning as they see themselves condemned, as John Field (2000) has argued, to a life sentence of undesirable and unwanted education and training.

There is a range of research evidence that engaging in adult education and learning brings benefits including access to well paid employment and increased

social capital (e.g. Bynner and Parsons 2001; OECD 1999). It even contributes to a longer, healthier life according to studies of the wider benefits of learning from Tom Schuller and colleagues (2004). Learning can also help people be more open to new ideas through listening as well as expressing their thoughts, reflecting on and inquiring into solutions to new dilemmas, co-operating in the practice of change and critically reviewing it (Fryer 1997). However, it also carries a number of risks that constrain the capability of people to take control of their own learning. In modern times individuals are confronted not only by a variety of ways of doing things, but also by a host of uncertainties about what counts as the correct way of doing them. Uncertainty can lead to dependence on others to provide guidance about what is the best way of doing things. It leads to pessimism about people's power to act so they are increasingly seen as victims of fate who cannot help themselves or work out their own responses to problems. In turn this creates an insidious dependence on experts to 'help' people deal with experiences 'appropriately' and this dependence can fuel mistrust of other sources of support such as friends, family and local communities. As Usher and Edwards (1998: 217) point out, 'the most effective forms of power are those which are not recognized as powerful because they are cloaked in the esoteric "objective" knowledge of expertise and the humanistic discourse of helping and empowerment'. Belief in the power of fate, and doubts about people's ability to cope with life, undermine personal autonomy and responsibility whilst leading us to accept closer state regulation of behaviour because this is seen as another form of authoritative knowledge that is 'good for us' (see Furedi 1997: 150). Generally then risk is avoided and this in turn leads to people trying to remain in situations that are comfortable.

For these reasons formal education settings are often uncomfortable for those whose earlier experiences of school education were negative. This is why community based, informal settings can provide a more comfortable place for the 'learning poor' (see Coffield 2000). One aspect of this, as Jim Crowther (2000: 481) points out, is a need to rethink the relationship between skills development and an individual deficit and instead locate the learner in a social context where learning is embedded in social relationships. This is where education and learning that take place in community and informal settings have the potential to engage people in generating new knowledge and ideas that are built on their lived experience, that is grounded in real learning practices.

Literacy

Discussion around adult literacy illustrates the individualizing discourse of lifelong learning policies very clearly. If learning is seen as an individual choice, those adults who have failed to learn 'the basics' are viewed as deficit individuals (see Crowther *et al.* 2001). This means that they are castigated for not choosing to learn and viewed as not even vaguely motivated to do something about their own plight. This deficit form of literacy does not encourage deep learning, rather it leaves people feeling less confident and capable. Because the discourse

surrounding literacies tends to focus on what people lack, rather than what they have, and emphasizes their deficits, not their strengths, it is hardly surprising that 'admitting' to having literacy problems is difficult. Literacy in particular is seen as something that everyone should have and surveys, such as the International Adult Literacy Survey, that identify people as lacking these kinds of knowledge and skills emphasize deficits and the negative consequences of the lack of literacy (see Hamilton and Barton 2000). This type of discourse treats the findings that people have literacy and numeracy difficulties as shameful to the nation's educational system and it also positions individuals as people who have somehow failed to learn. The emphasis is on individual failure not on the circumstances and structures that might make learning difficult.

On the other hand community based programmes that are grounded in the life situations of adults and communities offer an approach that responds to issues derived from people's own interests and knowledge and are much more likely to encourage learning that has value (see Barton and Hamilton 1998). This means that rather than seeing literacy and numeracy as the decontextualized, mechanical, manipulation of letters, words and figures, instead literacies are located within the social, emotional and linguistic contexts that give them meaning. From this perspective reading and writing are complex cognitive activities that integrate feelings, values, routines, skills, understandings and activities and depend on a great deal of contextual (i.e. social) knowledge and intention (see Merrifield 1998). For example, someone reading the main news story in a newspaper is not just decoding words but also using knowledge of the conventions of newspaper writing, of the local/national focus, and the political and philosophical orientation of the newspaper. In fact they are 'reading between the lines'. In the same way, adults in a supermarket are not just using number skills when doing price comparisons but also taking into account their prior experience with the brands, family likes and dislikes, and perhaps ethical concerns (in relation to Fair Trade products, for example). In other words, learning is situated in concrete social practices and as a result it can only be understood by making reference to those knowledge structures, discourses and practices that reflect particular time- and space-bound concerns of individual communities (see Scott 2001).

Community based and informal learning approaches provide opportunities to develop an agenda that aims to extend the autonomy of individuals and communities that have been marginalized and ignored. In this case the emphasis is shifted from literacy as a deficit in people to an examination of the literacy practices that people engage in. This approach recognizes diversity and regards different ways of thinking and communicating as assets, not deficits. The deficit, if there is one to be located, is in a society that excludes, reduces and ridicules the rich means of communication that exists amongst its people. Individualistic curricula reinforce the view that failure to learn is the fault of the individual, so it is important to provide an alternative perspective based on a sense of social purpose that is grounded in real lives and real learning practices. This requires an

emphasis on how people *use* literacy rather than why other people think they *need* these skills (see Tett and Crowther 1998).

It is vital to remember that the setting, however informal, does not necessarily lead to different practices. The agenda for developing literacies has to be informed by issues of social justice, equality, and democracy in everyday life, if an alternative model of learning that places the emphasis on how adults can and want to use literacy is to be developed. This would mean that the focus moves to what people have, rather than what they lack, what motivates them rather than what is seen as something they need. Approaches are required that open up, expose and counteract the institutional processes and professional mystique whereby dominant forms of literacy are placed beyond question. They have to challenge the way 'literacy' is socially distributed to different groups. The learning and teaching process needs to be reconstructed so that students are seen as equal in social and political terms. This involves using the literacy practices of everyday life in the curriculum so that the home and community life of participants is positively valued (see Heywood 2000).

This is a difficult task as knowledge is stratified in various ways, as David Scott points out:

First, some individuals in society have a greater influence than others [do] in determining what counts as legitimate and illegitimate knowledge. Second, knowledge gathering takes place in settings and environments in which individuals have different access to resources. Third, there are power dimensions of the learning situation itself as the learner is situated within arrangements about knowledge, how it should be organized and how it should be learnt which act to restrict the capacity of the learner to progress their own knowledge. Finally, learning acts to fix reality in a particular way that is never entirely justified and cannot be legitimated by reference to a notion of what the world is really like. This act of closure itself is part of the reality within which the learner is embedded. By adopting a particular way of working, a particular understanding of knowledge, the learner is rejecting or turning aside from other frameworks and this itself is an act of power.

(Scott 2001: 39)

Learning to be literate therefore involves understanding the way in which power is distributed unequally within the social structure, so that the practices of some are marginalized whilst others are privileged. The adoption of the literacy practices of privileged groups in society reinforces the identity and confidence of such groups. The reverse also occurs: negative views about literacies are internalized and this has consequences for how people see themselves and thus functions to undermine their own self-esteem. An important issue here is a view that the language of people's homes and communities is only of value within a very limited range of social contexts. An investigation carried out by Alan Addison in relation to this issue asked adult literacy students 'Dae ye speak Scots or slang?' (Do you speak

Scots or do you use slang?) and nearly 70 per cent of the students responded 'I speak slang'. He points out, 'if a community's means of communication and self expression are perceived by themselves to be inferior how then does that reflect on their self-image and confidence?' (Addison 2001: 156). If the language and literacy of the home and community is unacknowledged or actively suppressed then it becomes difficult for people to say what is important to them in ways that are meaningful.

The social practices of the school and other institutions, and the language and literacies they reinforce, need to be made visible to show that they represent a selection from a wider range of possibilities, none of which is neutral. These practices then become a critical resource for learning and literacy. Moreover, if the wealth of people's knowledge from their own family and community contexts is emphasized and a curriculum is developed that reflects the issues and concerns of the participants then more democratic, powerful literacies emerge (see Tett 2002). Many voices are silenced in dominant definitions of literacy but a learner centred approach can enable people, as bell hooks (1989: 9) suggests, 'to move from silence into speech'. It involves people deciding for themselves what 'really useful literacy' is and using it to act, individually and collectively, in order to take greater control over the issues that are important to them. Literacy then becomes a resource for people acting back against the forces, such as poverty, that limit their lives. For example, one literacy learner suggested,

I speak up a lot more now. When they tried to change our schedules at work I said it wasn't right and we got together and they changed it back. Before I came to the programme I would never have done that because I didn't want to make trouble.

Another said: 'I basically know what I'm talking about now. I'm confident and capable and know I can achieve things' (quoted in Tett 2004: 190).

Learning and health

Another factor that limits the lives of people that live in poverty and in socially excluded communities is their poor health and premature death (Carlisle 2001; Scottish Executive Health Department 2001). People's life expectancy is affected by inequality, poverty and social class, so for example male labourers are three times more likely to die before retirement than professional men (Davey Smith *et al.* 1999; Wilkinson 1996). In addition the factors causing psycho-social stress are distributed in a similar way to society's structural inequalities, leading to chronic stress impacting most strongly on individuals who live in poverty (Wallerstein 1992; Whitehead 1995). As Graham (2000: 90) puts it, 'Social class is written on the body: it is inscribed in our experiences of health and our chances of premature death'. These major structural and individual inequalities in health are extremely difficult to address and require major changes in society before significant

differences can occur. However, it is possible for community based learning to make a small difference and these can add up to more significant changes for individuals and communities.

Community based learning can have an effect on health at the individual level by engaging people in learning programmes. Tom Schuller and colleagues have shown that learning has a direct effect on health by 'pre-empting decline into ill health, or by enabling or supporting recovery ... [and] has a vitally important effect socially and economically' (Schuller *et al.* 2002: 80). Learning also affects the quality of communication with health professionals because it enables people to articulate their needs and understand the services delivered to them. It also aids health and well-being by providing people with a sense of purpose, helping them to 'formulate goals and have a sense that they have a chance to control their own lives' (Schuller *et al.* 2002: 81).

At the community level too, learning can contribute to reducing some of the effects of a poor environment by enabling participants to be decision makers, 'developing mutual identification and transforming perceptions of self blame through an analysis of the social context of problems' (Wallerstein 1992: 204). Research also shows that when people join together to take action it 'can strengthen the whole community's defence against health hazards' (Whitehead 1995: 25). Learning that focuses on the health problems that communities identify for themselves represents a resource whereby people can identify inequalities, probe their origins and begin to challenge them, using skills, information and knowledge in order to achieve and stimulate change. If people can be helped to challenge deficit views of the health of their homes and communities then a small step has been taken in enabling their voices to be heard. Enabling communities to name and frame their health problems for themselves and build their own 'really useful knowledge' about 'what will make them free' (see Johnson 1988) thus becomes an important benefit of learning.

Shifting the emphasis away from disease and ill health and individuals' lifestyles, and towards the ways in which well-being can flourish in communities, is an important outcome of community based and informal learning and the impact of such work can be seen in three broad areas. First, an increase in agency and thus better health through increased self-esteem and confidence; second, more local control over decision-making thus improving the delivery of health services to meet locally identified needs; finally, a holistic approach to health can contribute towards the creation of an alternative framework through which to understand health issues from a broad-based, sustainable perspective. For example, participants in a community based health issues course rejected the view that it is a particular lifestyle that causes health problems. Instead they suggested: 'The way to tackle the problem of poor health is to take collective action to force the housing department to address the problem of poor housing and develop effective procedures in dealing with noisy neighbours instead of blaming ourselves' (quoted in Tett 2003: 90). Another group that was involved in the course eventually helped to set up a Stress Centre. One participant suggested,

we decided that what was needed was somewhere to go to get a bit of support and someone to talk to so we talked to a lot of different people and eventually the Centre was set up. Working there has done a lot for my self-confidence and I know that we can help people. It takes time but it can be done.

(quoted in Tett 2003: 93)

It is important, however, to remember that education cannot compensate for society since as long as people are struggling under adverse socio-economic conditions then we cannot forget the force of structural inequalities on their lives. Social justice requires not only the recognition of people as active agents working for change in their own communities but also the redistribution of power and material assets to those that have been excluded, if real change is to be achieved.

Valuing community and informal learning

The value of community and informal learning, where people attach meaning and significance to shared experiences and common understandings with others, is an important corrective to the assumption that learning is little other than a marketable commodity to be dispensed by others. Such learning provides a reminder that learners have social agency that enables them to engage in the dynamic process of making sense of complicated lives in a variety of contexts and circumstances. Recognizing such learning puts learners back at the heart of learning. They become the subjects of learning rather than the objects of educational interventions that are supposed to be good for them. If learners are positioned as experienced and knowledgeable social actors then they become active players rather than passive recipients of education. Learning then becomes a shared endeavour between tutors and students, a two-way, rather than a one-way, process (see Thompson 2001).

Locating learning in communities is an important contribution to social inclusion because it is here that people often get their first experience of democracy (see Martin 2001). Therefore, expanding opportunities for democratic life should start here where, for many people, they can engage directly in issues that affect their everyday lives. Education and learning that take place in community and informal settings can make important contributions to valuing local knowledge, as well as providing starting points on people's more formal learning journeys. If people are to gain a voice they will need the confidence and authority that comes out of experience tempered by study, which provides opportunities for people to read the meaning between the lines and the interests behind the meaning (see Crowther and Tett 2001). For example, tackling racism requires the expertise of those who have directly suffered its effects as well as the general knowledge of those who seek to understand and counteract it. Understanding disability includes an awareness of the meaning of dependency, which becomes an educational resource both for disabled experts and interested generalists, rather than simply a technical problem to be solved. To live full lives people need to engage in learning

that can equip them to develop their autonomy and control both at the individual and the communal level.

Lifelong learning and the opportunities it represents can be used as a unifying force, not only between providers but also between different interest groups, in ways that ensure that this process challenges oppression and exclusion. This will involve the nurturing of an education and training system whose function is not to reflect and reproduce existing inequalities in society but rather one that prioritizes provision for those whose earlier educational and socio-economic disadvantage would give them a first claim in a genuinely lifelong learning system. Educators can then act as an emancipatory force for change, especially if they start:

From the problems, experiences and social position of excluded majorities, from the position of the working people, women and black people. It means working up these lived experiences and insights until they fashion a real alternative.

(Johnson 1988: 813)

Within this paradigm people's classed and gendered experiences would be seen as a learning resource to be used, rather than a deficiency to be rectified.

Conclusion

The importance of community based and informal education is that knowledge is seen as something that is used, tested, questioned and produced rather than as something that has to be accumulated and assessed through qualifications that signify possession of it. Communities in civic society are often seen as needing knowledge that others possess. However if, rather than dichotomizing the act of acquiring already existing knowledge from the activity of producing new knowledge, it is seen that these two aspects of knowledge are dialectical, then these relations can be transformed (see Martin 2001). As Jackson (1995: 185) points out:

Adults bring something that derives both from their experience of adult life and from their status as citizens to the educational process. Education [in the social purpose tradition] is based on a dialogue rather than a mere transmission of knowledge and skill; education is not only for personal development and advancement but also for social advancement; adult education constructs knowledge and does not merely pass it on; adult education has a dialectical and organic relationship with social movements.

From this perspective learning is essentially about creating knowledge, skills and understanding that make sense of the world and help people to act upon it collectively, in order to change it for the better. The curriculum always represents

'selections from a culture' (Williams 1961: 35) so knowledge is never neutral or value-free, and what counts as worth knowing reflects those particular social and political interests that have the power to make it count. Power and politics operate out of the lived culture of individuals and groups who are situated in unequal social and political positions. Change in civil society towards greater equity will involve a radical rethinking of what counts as knowledge, skills and understanding. Knowledge from this position would be actively constructed in the creative encounter between the expertise of the tutor and the experience of the learners, with each role conferring a distinctive kind of authority (see Martin 2001).

Learners are embedded in different social realities, where power manifests itself concretely and specifically, and educational practices need to take these particularities and differences into account. Educators thus have an important role in making sure that the complexity of the intellectual, emotional, practical, pleasurable and political possibilities of learning is not reduced to the apparent simplicity of targets, standards and skills (see Thompson 2000). Finding a voice to do this can happen through being part of a social, mutually supportive group that is engaged in learning. Such learning is a political, as well as an educational, activity because spaces are opened up for the public discussion of the issues with which people are concerned. Active groups can force into the public domain aspects of social conduct such as violence against women in the home that previously were not discussed or were settled by traditional practices. This means that their voices 'help to contest the traditional, the official, the patriarchal, the privileged and the academic view of things' (Thompson 2000: 143).

An emphasis on whose experiences count, and how they are interpreted and understood, helps us to challenge the 'common sense' of everyday assumptions about experience and its relationship to knowledge production. This allows new claims to be made for the legitimacy of reflexive experience leading to 'really useful knowledge' for those who are involved in generating it. In questioning the discourses that frame the ways of thinking, problems, and practices that are regarded as legitimate, it begins to be possible for people to open up new ways of reflexively thinking about the social construction of their experiences. When people create their own knowledge and have their voices heard, narrow definitions of what is thought to be 'educated knowledge' and who it is that makes it, are thrown into question. In this way the experiences and stories that have been excluded, and the mystification caused by 'expert' knowledge, can be interrogated as a way of articulating views that come from below rather than above.

This is important because, in identifying and making spaces where alternative ways of thinking and being can be worked up, such practices increase the possibilities of knowledge – that is knowledge that is useful to those who generate it.

(Barr 1999: 82)

A popular curriculum that addresses the concerns of ordinary people and actively draws upon their experience as a resource for educational work in communities increases the possibilities of developing knowledge that is useful to those who generate it. People then act both as experts regarding their own lives and as generalists too, commenting on others' blind spots about the root issues and the causes of problems in communities. Approaching education, learning and democratic renewal in this way would not be new but would involve revisiting much earlier debates over the role of education, as Margaret Davies argued in 1913:

'Even a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. It causes a smouldering discontent, which may flame into active rebellion against a low level of life, and produces a demand, however stammering, for more interests and chances. Where we see ferment, there has been some of the yeast of education.'

(quoted in Scott 1998: 56)

This 'yeast of education' will need to be applied to work in community based and informal learning. Members of communities would then be perceived as active citizens making demands for change, with their different ways of knowing and understanding the world being valued as a resource for learning. People are then engaged in challenging the power of so-called expert knowledge to monopolize the definition of what is wrong in their communities and what is needed to right it, by devising their own solutions based on their knowledge and expertise.

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Knowledge and learning in social movements

Issues and opportunities for adult community education

Jim Crowther

The academy as the main site of learning is under criticism from a number of different sources today. The recognition in policy of the importance of informal learning in workplaces, families and communities – even if mainly rhetorical – is evidence of this (Coffield 2000). Intellectually the academy as the site of knowledge production is contested by postmodernist discourses that stress the de-centring of knowledge production in a multiplicity of sites outside of formal educational contexts (Edwards and Usher 2005). Learning in civil society has also been revived in various ‘radical pluralist’ and socialist perspectives on adult learning (Holst 2002). These challenges to the role of the academy in adult learning, however, are not necessarily new. They have been posed before in the radical tradition of British adult education. Informal learning, independent of the state and establishment was, in this tradition, necessary to control knowledge and the social interests it promoted (Johnson 1979). Popular movements adopted a social constructivist view of knowledge that challenged the basis on which knowledge was selected as ‘useful’. The response of popular movements to provided education (i.e. the academy) was characterized by suspicion and ambivalence because the important issue was *who* controlled knowledge for *whom*.

In examining the relationship between social movements and the academy today there are parallels to be drawn with the history of radical education in popular movements. Knowledge produced in the academy, and in social movements, could be mutually productive as well as a source of tension, rivalry and conflicting values. It is argued in this chapter that the agency of the adult community educator can embody these tensions. How the educator might foster the mutually productive side of the relationship between knowledge, learning and social action is the focus of this chapter.

In the literature on adult and lifelong learning, social movements as places for knowledge production and learning are neglected. On the other hand, the social movement literature is primarily concerned with their dynamics and role in political and democratic processes. Social movements are rarely examined through the lens of the educator although there are notable exceptions (see Foley 1999; Holst 2002; Johnston 2003). This chapter aims to clarify the distinctive educative space movements create. A complicating factor in making any generalization

about social movements however, is that they are far from uniform social forces. We therefore need to differentiate between different types of movements and their implications for what adults learn as well as how adults learn. Then there is the 'so what?' issue. What are the implications for adult and community education? Do social movements need adult educators and, if they do, what can they do to make a difference? What opportunities and issues arise for adult educators interested in learning in social movements?

Social movements as epistemological communities

In the radical tradition of British adult education there is an important distinction between 'useful knowledge' and 'really useful knowledge' as identified in Richard Johnson's seminal account of the independent working-class self-education movement in Britain in the early nineteenth century (Johnson 1979). 'Useful knowledge' consisted of what others considered it expedient, safe and profitable for the masses to know: essentially, the 'hard' skills and competencies required of an efficient and productive workforce and at the same time, the 'soft' attitudes of discipline and deference to keep the emergent industrial working class in its place. 'Really useful knowledge', on the other hand, was relevant in a much wider sense that was both personal and political. It encompassed all that was required to 'enlighten' learners, i.e. for them to understand the world in terms of their own experience and to recognize their potential to act effectively and collectively to change it.

In the radical tradition, the purpose knowledge served had to be determined by those who wanted to use it to make a difference. As Johnson (1979: 78) puts it, 'one person's useful knowledge was another's useless knowledge'. This practicality was tempered by a search for universal truths that were also valued – a somewhat unfashionable view today. Moreover, 'really useful knowledge' was critical and practical in helping groups 'get out of their present troubles' because it was a basis for social action. For example, the women's movement was instrumental in redefining what constituted really useful knowledge by relating it to 'personal troubles', often ignored by the traditional labour movement, and turning these into 'public issues' which could then be acted on to improve women's lives. In the process of creating their own version of really useful knowledge, they also expanded the agenda of politics as a whole.

The politics of knowledge emphasized in the radical tradition of adult education is echoed in today's social movements, in relation to where knowledge comes from, who controls it, who benefits from it and what it means for social action. Eyerman and Jamieson (1991), for instance, argue that the distinctive feature of social movements is their 'cognitive praxis'. Movements generate new knowledge, alternative world-views and technologies as well as new institutions and organizations. The environmental movement, for example, has stimulated the search for new knowledge about the effects of pollution on the environment. It has

fostered a more holistic world-view and the weighing up of values and priorities in living. It has generated alternative technologies to fit with the vision of a greener world and it has spawned new organizations to further its cause. This 'cognitive space' necessitates processes of social learning:

The collective articulation of movement identity can be likened to a process of social learning in which movement organizations act as structuring forces, opening a space in which creative interaction between individuals takes place. At a certain point in time, the interaction takes on a further dimension, as different organizations carve out an actual societal space, transforming what began as interpersonal interests into inter-organizational concerns, that is, from individual to wider social terms. This transition from a formative to an organizational phase, we contend, is what distinguishes social movements from action groups or single-issue protest organizations. A social movement ... is more like a cognitive territory, a new conceptual space that is filled by dynamic interaction between different groups and organizations.

(Eyerman and Jamieson 1991: 55)

In disseminating the movement's vision and maintaining its identity, education plays an important role through the activity of 'movement intellectuals' who have the task of articulating the principles, values and arguments of the movement. They recognize that their cognitive definition limits them to large-scale movements with an historic mission. For example, they draw on a case study of the civil rights movement. Not all movements necessarily fulfil the type of claim Eyerman and Jamieson make for them. There are a wide variety of movements with very different characteristics which are illustrated below:

- 'Old' social movements (OSM), for example, the labour movement or the early women's movement that originated in the nineteenth century. These movements are generally concerned with issues of exploitation and oppression and usually involve an organization and membership. They also advocate root and branch transformation of society.
- 'New' social movements (NSM), for example, environmental groups, consumer groups and groups mobilizing around issues of gender, race, sexuality, disability, and so on, that grew in the late 1960s. These movements are issue oriented rather than class based. They too aim for transformation of the social order but more in terms of the 'selective radicalization of values' (Welton 1993: 153) rather than structural transformation. Generally these movements embody loose organizational structures and internal democracy is prioritized (Wainwright 1994). Membership may not be important but some emphasize lifestyle commitments. Finger (1989) argues that what is central to the new age movement, for example, is that social change is linked with the educational experience of personal transformations. A number of

these movements are difficult to classify in any straightforward 'left-right' political dichotomy.

- Contemporary social movements (CSM) include a variety of 'anti-globalization', anti-war movements, and so on, with a commitment to informal political education and with aims to transform global structures and institutions of exploitation and oppression. Membership is not important but these movements seek to mobilize large groups of people. They build alliances on a global basis such as the World Social Forum and the European Social Forum, and popular education is an integral activity (Klein 2000). The use of information technologies and the Internet are key elements in the organization and dissemination of these movements' ideas and literature.
- Urban movements arise in relation to welfare needs and interests of groups in localities. Tenants' groups and various community-based organizations would fall into this category. The focus of attention is often limited to improvements in local facilities rather than wider social transformation (Castells 1983). Whilst such groups may not necessarily generate the 'cognitive praxis' as depicted by Eyerman and Jamieson they should not be dismissed in these terms. For example, the experience described by Martin and McCormack (1999), of a community campaign, is a good example of an urban movement generating new knowledge about the relationship between health, dampness and housing as a basis for opposing medicalized definitions of their health problems.

The above are different from the following:

- Action groups like Greenpeace and Amnesty International which are highly organized, have a corporate structure, tend to be professionally run and mount extensive publicity campaigns to achieve their objectives (see Dekeyser 1999). Their membership is largely passive and primarily relied on for financial resources, or asked to take specific initiatives such as writing letters to governments and so on.
- Reactionary movements are primarily authoritarian and aim to restore the privileges of social groups from a previous era that have seen their position undermined. Fundamentalist religious movements are also in this category. Whilst they may articulate a 'cognitive praxis', it is not created through an open and interactive process of social learning (Crowther 2005). These movements are directive rather than democratic.

The distinctions between different types of movements can be seen in Figure 9.1. The satellite circles around the outside depict action groups and reactionary movements.

Movements arise out of and generate a critique of current conditions. They may have a number of factors in common such as operating largely outside political channels of communication and decision-making, and seeking change, on different

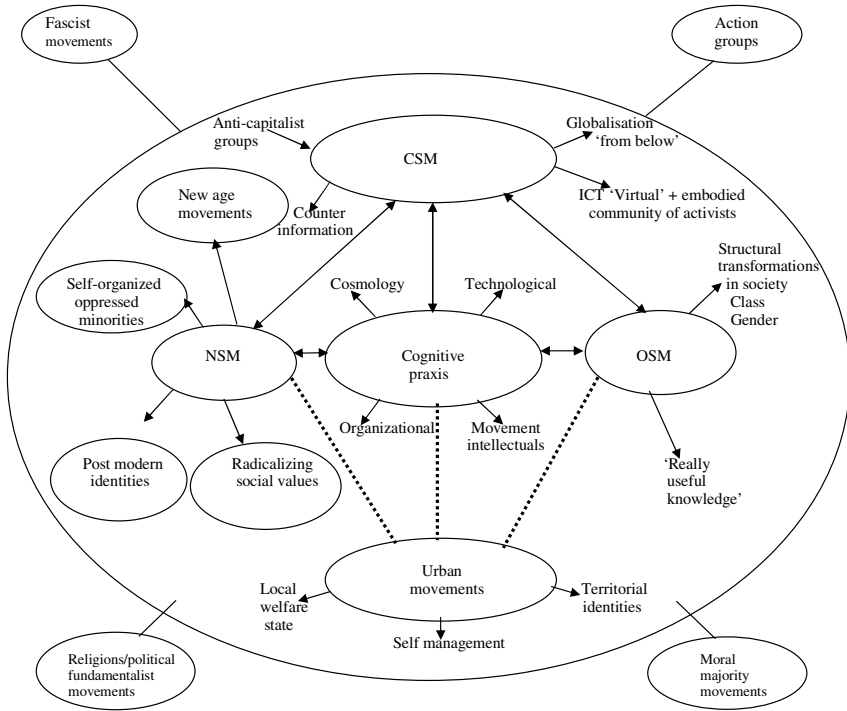


Figure 9.1 Different types of movement

levels, to existing social, cultural, political and economic practices. They offer new ways of thinking based on generating new knowledge and on transforming private troubles into public issues (for example the women’s movement and health provision) and by linking the local and the global (for example the environmental movement). They give voice to people’s values and experience outside of the formal political process.

Important differences between movements include vision and change objectives, degree of organization, membership basis if relevant, who they mobilize, patterns of internal organization, resources and so on. These factors complicate and qualify the educative nature of their change efforts. The dotted lines in Figure 9.1 between cognitive praxis and urban movements signify the weak links between the two. The potential exists but is not necessarily as strong as in other types of movement. What they aim to change has epistemological implications as well as implications for processes of social learning.

Social learning

The literature on adult learning is individualistic and primarily concerned with learning in formal educational contexts. The purpose of learning is usually measured by vocational or instrumental outcomes that are assessed and certificated. However, for a number of reasons it is doubtful whether these characteristics are very useful for understanding learning in social movements. First, learning in movements is for social, cultural and political objectives that seek to challenge the established order. Their activity may not be recognized as educational – although there are exceptions to this rule (see Wilkinson and Scandrett 2003 who document a unique example of a higher education course designed to build on and extend the knowledge and skills of environmental activists). Second, learning in movements involves a collective process embedded in pursuit of these objectives, rather than an individualized activity. Third, the outcomes of learning are related to social action rather than to gaining certificates and credentials. Fourth, whereas power is (present but) less visible in formal educational contexts, learning in social movements is more likely to make power relations explicit through processes of conflict, action and reaction.

Illeris's (2002) three dimensions of learning provides a useful point of connection between learning in social movements and the literature on adult learning. He argues there are three distinct points of analysis or approaches to learning: the cognitive which is heavily influenced by the discipline of psychology; the emotional that focuses on feelings, attitudes and identities; and social learning which takes place in interaction between people and which is ultimately influenced by the historical and social conditions of society. Whilst Illeris's three dimensions are interconnected we need to separate them analytically to build a clearer picture of the contribution they make.

According to Wenger (1998) social learning involves participation in 'communities of practice' through which people acquire identities and competence by interacting in a variety of enterprises sustained over a period of time. Kilgore (1999) argues that social movements are particular communities of practice in which individual and collective identities are dialectically related and shaped by a vision and struggle for social justice. However, there is no real justification for assuming that this is necessarily a progressive vision or progressive struggle. Wildemeersch and Jansen (1997: 465) argue that social learning is an integral component of effective collective agency. They suggest that:

Social learning is action-and-experience oriented, it is critically reflective; it is based on the questioning of assumptions and taken-for-granted problem definitions; it is interactive and communicative, which means that the dialogue between the people involved is of foremost importance; it is also characterized by multiactorship, as the solution of relatively complex issues presupposes the collaboration of a diversity of actors. Social learning also contributes to the exploration and redefinition of the social responsibility of the actors involved.

Social learning occurs in various locations and relationships outside of formal educational contexts. It involves understanding means and ends and the ethics of both. The group is in control of the learning, its purpose and processes and is potentially able to maximize this by collaborative and co-operative patterns of interaction and communication. Social learning involves internal processes of dialogue as well as public debate outside of the movement. In addition, Wildemeersch and Jansen (1997) identify 'aesthetic reflexivity' as a further integral dimension of it. By this they mean that social learning encompasses bonds of affiliation and identification – as distinct from merely cognitive and rational processes of learning. The ability of movements to take effective social action is enhanced therefore through social learning.

Three general points are needed to qualify the above accounts of social learning. First, participants in a movement may start from different points of preparedness to learn; however, they do not learn randomly or merely together. Illeris is critical of the loose way collective learning is used when he states that 'it is unclear whether the individuals in collective learning learn the same or just learn together, and neither is it clear whether collective learning has special qualities that differ from individual learning' (2002: 198). He suggests for it to be labelled a collective process three conditions should apply: the creation of a common situation; the existence of common presuppositions; and shared emotional commitment and energy for arriving at a new understanding. This may not apply to all social movement learning but it seems to be essential to sustained social action. Movements create spaces for systematic reflection on distinctive problems that require shared recognition and acceptance for members to act on; without this there is no movement in the sense of determined and conscious action of people to achieve specific objectives.

Second, social learning has to address the messy dimension of conflict, action and reaction amongst groups in struggle with differential resources of power. The unequal distribution of power and conflicting ideologies and discourses are realities movements have to address, challenge and negotiate. Also imbalances of power may precipitate different types of legal and illegal social action in response (Newman 2005). The issues of power, its use, and how to respond to it, are therefore highly significant for processes of social learning in the context of social movements.

Third, there are different levels of participation and therefore different levels of experience of social learning in movements. Many movements require some degree of organization and therefore activists who are committed and prepared for this work. Another level of active involvement in social learning refers to those who take part in a movement's ongoing debates, demonstrations, meetings and related activities. This may involve a 'street andragogy' (Rudnicki 2004) of self-directed learning through listening to speakers, street theatre, reading movement literature, discussion and other activities. Also it is important to recognize a diffused process of social learning that occurs by making connections with those who are not necessarily involved in the movement. The cultural receptiveness of

people to different movements will vary with the interests they claim to represent. For example, 'new' social movements typically find support among the well educated and middle class, whereas 'old' social movements mobilize the exploited and oppressed. However, the potential of movements to informally educate a broad constituency of diverse interests is substantial.

Informal learning

It is important to underline the informality of learning in and from social movements. That is, learning occurs in contexts which are not specifically educational although there may be very conscious decisions to learn. This has a number of advantages. It is close to people, embedded in what concerns and motivates them and is practical in the sense given to it by the radical tradition of adult education. It is a basis for informing action. It can be systematic, as evident by 'teach ins' staged by the World Social Forum (Lavander 2005). However, learning in social movements can also exhibit many of the weaknesses of informal learning. It may not be well organized, systematic or hardened by sustained study.

In addition, informality may mean that the acquisition of knowledge and learning in movements can be easily lost, unless it is recorded and made explicit (Dickie 1999). To avoid 'reinventing the wheel', movements need to document their knowledge and experience. Also, in the heat of movement activity, organizing space for reflection may not be prioritized unless someone has this specific concern in mind. In large movements with resources and experience this may be less of a pressing issue. However, the circumstances may be very different for movements which lack the knowledge, capacity, resources and experience for doing this successfully. In this context therefore, adult and community educators might play a useful role as a resource for movements to formalize social learning, in the sense of systematizing their educational activity and in turn helping them accomplish their aims.

Implications for adult and community educators

The potential for learning and education in social movements is substantial. The problem is how to maximize this whilst avoiding the danger of colonizing and subverting the movement from its collective aims. In this section the focus is on the 'so what?' question, of what this task means for adult and community educators. Is it realistic to expect them to work with social movements, even if they wanted to? Or is it 'too political' and therefore out of bounds? The following issues and opportunities are not intended to be definitive. The main areas for discussion are identified in the headings in Figure 9.2 which are then expanded on in the text.

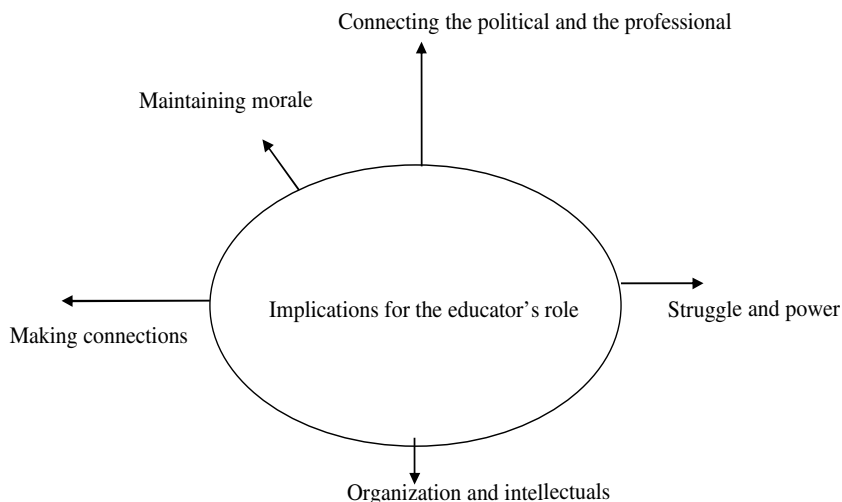


Figure 9.2 The worker's role and social movements

Connecting the political and the professional

Educational activity involves political and moral choices as well as strategic ones. In working with social movements the possibilities of overt conflict occurring can create difficult circumstances for educators to negotiate. The politics of the educational engagement are more transparent. It is important that educators remind themselves, however, that it is necessary to test out the feasibility of engagement before deciding if there is some potential to act. The real problem is that educators become agents of their own surveillance.

The intrinsically political nature of education raises the question of commitment and social alignment. It means, therefore, that educators have to recognize the political and the professional in a context where these are often claimed to be separate and distinct. One common criterion of professionalism is that of neutrality; however, claiming this, as Freire (1972) points out, simply means taking the side of the powerful. Instead of a spurious neutrality, educators need partisanship and solidarity with social movements.

Partisanship and solidarity do not mean education is merely propaganda. The distinction between the two is somewhat overstated in that propaganda, in the sense of the organized dissemination of ideas, is also educational. In some respects there is a role for the educator to play to support the propaganda of movements. Because popular struggles are generally in opposition to official wisdom there is an argument to be made that 'knowledge from below' acts as a counterweight to official knowledge disseminated by governments, authorities and the mainstream media. The educator can assist a movement achieve a degree of ballast against powerful interests, through the production and distribution of counter-information. Also

as Fieldhouse (2000: 6) points out, ‘propaganda is not all prejudice and lies: nor is education simply the presentation of “objective truth”’. What differentiates them is the degree of openness to questioning that they permit. An educational process is characterized by the setting of questions that have to be studied without preformed answers.

In social movements, learning is linked with action, and the primary objective of learning is to achieve movement objectives. However, if educators are not reflexive about their own role in this process they may well get in the way of social action. For example, the objective of educational engagement is not to turn participants in a movement into learners, but for education to ally itself with the change movements seek to initiate. Unless workers are aware that they can be ‘part of the problem’ they may find it difficult to make themselves ‘part of the solution’.

Struggle and power

An important aim of learning in struggle is to understand the exercise of power (Newman 2000). A useful start is the recognition of authority as legitimized power. When authority is unquestioned it is at its most powerful, in that the interests and values it represents are taken as given. Dominant social groups can use authority in order to take advantage of the legitimacy it bestows. Movements against authority, as a consequence, are positioned as challenging the legitimate exercise of power. Moreover, in the current context, the regulation of public spaces in democratic societies increasingly de-legitimizes challenges to state authority and therefore the scope for social action.

An important distinction in the literature on power is that between sovereign power and circulatory, or dispersed forms of, power. The former is often associated with the apparatus of the state, or wealthy corporations that can enforce their objectives through legal systems or, if necessary, by state sanctioned violence. Dispersed forms of power work through discourses, which occur in various locations and involve different and diverse groups of people. According to Foucault (1980), such forms of power can enable activity as well as repress it – the latter is a common feature of sovereign power. However powerful centralized power may be there is usually the potential in liberal democratic states to lobby, organize and ‘smoke out’ hidden agendas of powerful interests through exposing their contradictions and duplicity. The campaign in the UK against the legitimacy of the Iraqi war in 2003 is a case in point. Also the relative autonomy of the judiciary, which is often used to repress social action, means it too can be used as an instrument against powerful interests.

Mann (cited in Clegg 1989) draws attention to power in terms of organizational outflanking which is somewhere between sovereign and dispersed forms of power. The military metaphor refers to the capacity of powerful groups to out-manoeuvre the opposing group and therefore nullify their potential opposition. This process can involve analytical tools, strategic analysis and organizational capacity. For

example, analytically groups might be outflanked by a degree of naivety about how power works in practice, lack awareness of the options open to them or not even recognize its existence. Strategically, they can be outflanked by their inability to select appropriate sites of struggle and may merely react to events. Or they may assume meanings are given and unchallengeable, or they may not be able to identify and weigh-up the 'opportunity costs' involved in specific forms of social action. Finally, in terms of organizational capacity, groups can be outflanked because of their isolation by the structuring of time and space so that potential allies never meet. Or insufficient time is devoted to building alliances through exaggerating differences rather than commonalities. Organizational outflanking is successful therefore when it is able to neutralize the capacity for effective dissent.

Social action involves participants making political, strategic and moral decisions about particular courses of action. Newman (2005) distinguishes between three types of action: conventional, confrontational and unlawful. The first involves activity such as lobbying decision-makers, writing letters, holding public meetings and so on. In most cases, in liberal democratic societies, the reaction of authority to these activities will pose no great moral issue. The situation becomes more complicated as the line is crossed to confrontational action. This may involve occupying buildings or public spaces that may invoke more aggressive responses from authorities. Even if the action is informed by principles of peaceful demonstration, the reaction and subsequent actions of movement participants may involve complicated moral issues. Unlawful action crosses a further line because of the likelihood that participants will be arrested, or subject to state sanctioned violence, or even loss of life. There are no straightforward answers to the moral dilemmas different forms of social action pose. Adult education, however, can contribute to critical reflection on the choices participants make and what these entail.

Making power visible, as Melucci (1988) points out, is the first stage in making it negotiable. Therefore adult educators have a useful role in helping movements identify how power in their own organizations and activities might help or hinder their activities, as well as understand how power is used against them and what they might do to counter it.

Organization and intellectuals

'Movement intellectuals', to use Eyerman and Jamieson's (1991) term, are central to the organization of the type of movement they identify. They play a key role in articulating the identity of a movement and propagating the knowledge, arguments and values that underpin it. They disseminate the movement's aims to its supporters as well as to the wider public and therefore have to be skilled communicators. The problem for movement intellectuals, as Gramsci (1980) identified, is in their relationship with their social base. The traditional intellectual, in his view, claims to stand above social groups and is detached from their social activity. Therefore movements need to generate their own leaders

from out of their own social groups. For this to occur successfully there has to be a dialectical and complementary relationship between ‘organic intellectuals’ (in Gramsci’s term) and the masses, in order for ‘thought’ and ‘feelings’ to be mutually supportive and productive. Or to put it another way, as Marx (1845: 229) stressed, ‘the educator also has to be educated’ – sustained opportunity for this two-way process of learning and educating is therefore an important resource for ensuring the principles and values espoused by movement intellectuals closely reflect the aspirations and concerns of movement participants.

Making connections

There is an old adage in adult and community education of ‘starting where people are’. On one level, this means starting with the problems and issues that concern and motivate people and developing the curriculum from this point. On another level, it means starting where people are located physically by getting out of educational institutions and meeting people on the territory they inhabit. Developing an alternative system of educational provision was what made Tom Lovett’s (1975) work interesting and exciting. He demonstrated that working class people in Liverpool were interested in education when it occurred on their terms and in the locations and spaces familiar to them.

In problematizing and updating Lovett’s work, Johnston (1998) provides insights about the nature of the expertise adult and community educators might bring to educational engagement with social movements. The four categories of network agent, resources agent, educational guide and teacher are drawn from Lovett’s seminal work referenced above. What these might mean today has been revised by Johnston (1998).

- *Network agent*: Johnston identifies two key elements of this role. The first element involves the development of social capital amongst fragmented groups and communities where there is a need to build trust, co-operation, alliances and shared understandings. In a context where fragmented groups are often in competition for scarce resources, movements might be more effective by enhancing their resources, building strategic links and enhancing their social capital. The second element is to facilitate more inclusive and participatory approaches within groups and movements, by creating active and reflexive learning environments that facilitate shared experience and develop a sense of common identity and purpose.
- *Resources agent*: This can involve a number of components. For example, it might mean providing information to groups that would help them acquire new assets and resources. The educator may also have expertise in helping draft applications for funding, where relevant, whilst at the same time helping movements avoid making compromises that undermine their main purpose. It could also include making research information relevant to a group accessible or assisting them to develop their own research.

- *Educational guide*: This involves assisting movements to identify suitable educational resources which can further their cause, particularly by making links between formal and informal learning opportunities. Identifying educational resources in the academy is a case in point. Alternatively, opening up the space of the academy for movements to use might be another (see von Kotze 2005 for examples of what this might involve).
- *Teacher*: Again this has a number of components. In Freirian terms it would necessitate a problem-posing approach with a curriculum related to the practical interests of the movement and drawing on the experience and knowledge of movement participants. Johnston (1998) argues this needs to be tempered by a reflexive epistemology, sensitive to its own limitations, which reflects a social purpose that is both provisional and tentative. It would also seek to make explicit the tacit knowledge of participants in order to maximize and interrogate it. Finally, it involves teaching for social action and therefore necessitates establishing a popular education praxis that uses education to inform action and creates spaces for action to inform subsequent learning (for examples of this see Johnston 2005).

Maintaining morale

If movements are defined by their cognitive praxis it is not the only factor that holds them together. The morale of a movement depends on the emotional capacity of its members to keep going particularly in difficult circumstances. An important feature of movement life is the reliance on a small core of activists who do the 'behind the scenes' work that is necessary for the mobilization of a wider group of people at specific times. The outcome is often experienced as over-commitment, stress and 'burn-out' amongst those most heavily involved in the organization of the movement. In such contexts activists need opportunities to share their experiences and 'recharge their batteries'. Therefore reflective spaces for sharing knowledge and skills are important educational contributions to a movement's life which can re-energize activists (Whelan 2002).

Conviviality is an important part of sustaining a movement. The role of literature, film, music and poetry as a means of conveying the message of a movement as well as boosting morale at social events should not be underestimated. As Shaw and Martin (2003: 224) point out, 'songs help people to create and sustain the visions which they need to keep going against the odds'. Convivial activities help build identity, connections and solidarity and they can also be pedagogical tools for learning (Shaw 2003). The organization of these activities therefore furthers movement identity and objectives.

Maintaining morale may also mean 'managing' systems of welfare that can be deployed against movements in struggle. For instance, in the 1984–5 miners strike in the UK, welfare entitlement benefits were reduced to force families of strikers to capitulate. Understanding the system of welfare through building alliances with sympathetic welfare rights specialists, and sharing this information,

was an important activity of the women's support groups in this struggle (Lothian Women's Support Group 1986). Understanding legal rights and how the system might be deployed against movement participants is also important for maintaining morale. The account of eco-protestors at Clayoquot Sound in Canada emphasized the struggle to maintain a positive sense of identity despite being criminalized by the judiciary (Moore 2003). Arrested protestors were redefined from 'good' to 'bad' citizens because of their attempts to resist the activity of logging companies – despite their action being peaceful. Counteracting negative identities and building support for ones that define civil disobedience as 'good citizenship' are important personal and political educational activities.

Conclusion

Movements are potentially powerful 'schools' of learning that can reach, and communicate with, far more people than are normally in adult learning provision. However, what participants in movements learn and how they learn is not often recognized from the perspective of the academy. Historically, provided education was a hindrance to popular movements in that it reduced education to 'useful' and 'useless' knowledge instead of the 'really useful knowledge' they required. If the academy is to be a resource for social movements today the lessons of this historical experience need to be learned.

Although a number of movements are successful at systematizing their own learning efforts, few movements have the expertise and resources for organized and sustained collective self-education. The role of the adult educator can therefore be an important asset for social movements. In an era dominated by rather narrow and instrumental versions of lifelong learning, social movements provide adult educators with an opportunity to engage in learning for social and democratic change. Perhaps, therefore, adult educators need social movements as much as the latter need the expertise and skills adult educators can bring to their activity.

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Part III

Learning outcomes

Chapter 10

Learning in action

Lessons from poor women in the South

Salma Ismail

The university says 'lifelong learning' – we in the Federation say 'Ufundu Zufes!' – which means 'we learn until we die'.

(Patricia Matolengwe)

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with processes of learning within a low-cost community housing project called the Victoria Mxenge Housing Development Association (VM). The research sets out to describe, analyse and understand how women learn to save for and build their own homes in a community context. It also seeks to show how these processes of learning have contributed to the social construction of knowledge and to the achievements of VM.

The research intends to understand and inform the relative successes of the VM project from an educational perspective.

The learning processes described in this chapter are taken from data gathered from 1993 to 2002 and capture a period in their history.

The central question that this chapter discusses is: How does the social action of VM relate and contribute to different theories of adult education, feminist pedagogy and development, and learning in social movements? The chapter starts with the context which frames the question and then makes connections with learning in action on the ground and theories on learning in development and in social movements.

Theory and methodology

The theoretical framework grounding the research is that wherein education is seen as a transformative tool to combat poverty and unequal power relations. This framework has been pioneered by theorists such as Paolo Freer (1983) and within the feminist literature by Sen and Grown (1987), Naaila Kabeer (1994) and Caroline Moser (1993) among others. The work of more recent theorists writing on learning in social movements has also been considered such as Griff

Foley (1999), Wildemeersch and Jansen (1997) and Eyerman and Jamieson (1991). These theorists stress the interconnections between adult education and development and move away from the 'project approach' to an approach which emphasizes people centred and people controlled organizations, which mobilize the community to act. They also validate local knowledge and the learning process and challenge the view that education can only take place through the mainstream.

Theories concerned with adults learning in development and social movements in informal contexts are still marginal in institutions of higher education. One could argue that in a context like South Africa, in which prior learning is being formulated as policy for entry into higher education, it is essential for educators to explore knowledge and learning in all its different forms. Fenwick (2003: 18) and others (Cooper 2003; Michelson 1997) recognize this situation and argue that it may require that educators look beyond their understanding of learning and knowledge. Educators need to incorporate an understanding that knowledge and learning are constantly acted on and that learning can be a collective and shared activity as well as individual. Other radical educators (Taylor, Barr and Steele as quoted in Fenwick 2003: 18) argue that radical education within higher education institutions should build an alliance with social movements: 'just as institutions need the political energy and grounded struggle that social action engenders, social movements need the resources of the academy'.

VM illustrates the above and a detailed study of the learning processes within the VM community could potentially have many lessons for education in informal settlements and also contribute to many debates nationally and internationally re education in developing countries.

The research methodology draws on feminist perspectives and a constructivist view of knowledge, learning and research. The key points of departure are that people construct their own meanings and understandings of the world and this involves an interpretive process with surface and deep learning. These perspectives allow for searching for alternative ways of looking at knowledge and knowledge acquisition and share the view that knowledge requires the active participation of learners (Harris 2000: 12).

In seeking to answer this question and to match the data gathering methods with the theoretical approach outlined above, a case study approach was used and data was gathered by qualitative methods. The combination of qualitative methods used was observation and interviews. These were designed to gather 'inner knowledge about how women learn and construct their reality, to convey a deeper feeling for emotional closeness to the persons studied and to increase the validity of the research' (Westmarland 2001: 7).

The methods allow for rich descriptions and generate data, which gave insight into people's experiences (in words and action), and provided access to the meanings people attribute to their experience and their everyday lives. The approach is contextual and interpersonal and therefore more attention was paid to human agency. The narratives that emerged were situated in the participants'

social worlds and these methodologies captured elements of this social world (Silverman 1993: 93–100).

Since VM is a community in a continuous process of change and learning, living in a political context, which is always changing, the women learnt in crisis and also learnt from crises. In such a situation it did not seem appropriate to adopt a positivist paradigm, restricted to one interpretation of events, and seeking causal links, or to organize knowledge in hierarchical and not interconnected ways.

The research design made it possible to give excerpts from the actual data that let the participants speak for themselves, thereby giving the reader sufficient information for understanding the research outcomes. The rich descriptions may provide the reader with enough information to assess whether the findings of this research apply to other informal contexts (Maykut and Morehouse 1994: 47).

Background to the issue

South Africa faces a huge problem in redressing the backlog of housing, which is the legacy of the apartheid policies and is exacerbated by the problems in delivery on the part of the new government. This problem is further compounded by rapid urbanization evidenced in the growth of informal settlements, as well as the state's market solution to the problem, its neo-liberal economic strategy since 1996 with its focus on economic growth through foreign investment and privatization.

The latest estimation of the numbers nationally of homeless is 7 million. In Cape Town alone there is a backlog of 320,000 houses. A recent study has shown that each year 10,000 new individuals poured into the city from the Eastern Cape and moved into existing settlements (*Mail and Guardian*: 14 March 2003).

The provincial and local authorities have made very little inner-city land available for housing the poor. The visible implications of this are overcrowding in the townships and the very rapid growth of informal settlements on the outskirts of the city which in turn lead to conflict, land invasions, rampant child abuse, crime and unhealthy living conditions in which diseases can spread quickly with devastating impact. In Khayelitsha, the largest black township in Cape Town, 80 per cent of people live in shacks (*Cape Times*: 31 March 2003).

The national housing policy

The South African Housing Policy for the poor is based upon a system of once-off capital subsidies for lower income groups, i.e. households earning between R800 and R3,500 per month. The subsidy amount is provided on a sliding scale in relation to income, and ranges from R5,000 to R25,000. It will not cover the purchase of an entire house. The policy seeks to provide people with enough to make a start, with a view to ownership, through participating in a group savings scheme or acquiring a mortgage bank loan, eventually owning a completed house. The subsidy scheme is under continuous review and each year the subsidy amount and income range for qualifying has been increased.

Provincial and local government is responsible for housing delivery and could act as the developer. Through the Department of Land Affairs security of tenure would be provided as well as identification and rezoning of land for housing. The state's housing policy includes a commitment to address women's equality in society and it has through new legislation made it easier for women to own land and houses and to secure bank loans. This is in large part due to feminist activism, which inserted gender issues into discussions about how to construct new institutions during the transition process towards democracy (Seidman 1999: 287). This approach has meant that many single-headed women households have been able to access the subsidy and women were the recipients of 47 per cent of the state's total housing subsidies in 2002 (Intergovernmental Fiscal Review 2003: 160).

The standard model of delivery

Poor people have to demonstrate by submitting building plans and subsidy application forms for approval that they can build with the subsidy, and the normal procedure is to access the subsidy through a developer. This usually means that most of the subsidy is paid to the developer and the homeowner has to borrow more money to build their home. Houses built by private developers for poor people are planned and designed externally, and tend to be small and identical. There is very little involvement of the homeowner.

Alternative posed by the South African Homeless People's Federation (Federation)/People's Dialogue (PD) Alliance

The Federation was established in 1994 and has a membership of 1500 savings collectives (individual members equal 30,000) across all major cities and towns in the country. It grew out of a network of savings schemes with a focus on making credit available for development and involved mainly women (Federation Newsletter 1997).

The Federation is conceptualized as a social movement and has a majority membership of women, with women in key leadership positions. Their view of development is that it must result in relevant development praxis, which is concerned with an overall improvement in poor people's quality of life as well as with control of resources and sustainable forms of living that conserve land and energy, and progressive cultural systems that do not undermine and oppress either women or men.

People's Dialogue on Land and Shelter (PD) is a non-governmental organization which explores ways in which support can be given to homeless urban dwellers internationally so that they may address their own housing needs. The Federation and PD have formed an Alliance.

The Alliance works on the principle that the needs of the poor will not be a government priority and that poor people need to be mobilized to secure working relationships with financial institutions, developers and government. So instead of focusing their energies in protest action against the state, the communities reorganize themselves into collective units and identify their needs and priorities. The Alliance argues this provides a framework for more effective, long-term response to the unequal distribution of resources and power.

The idea for change

The main vehicle through which the model is publicized is through the formation of housing savings schemes (HSS/group savings schemes). Small groups of around 20 women form a savings scheme. The women in the group save any amount on a daily basis and each member of the group has a responsibility to save. Within the group someone will be nominated to keep a record of the savings of each member. The women come together on a weekly basis to check the records, to see who is contributing regularly, to learn who attends and participates in the meetings, and also to scrutinize the record keeping. The women's savings are then deposited with Federation bookkeepers.

Saving is one of the most important of all the practices in this social movement. These savings groups form the lifeblood of the Federation as it is in this way that the Federation grows and sustains itself. Some members describe their understanding of the practice of saving in the following ways:

Veliswa who in 1996 was the technical advisor says,

Savings schemes collect people they collect resources, so when we negotiate with government we come with resources in our hands. It's a 'breath of life', 'the pulse', 'the glue' that keeps people together; it's a strong idea and links with savings practices within African communities. People have been saving for funerals and weddings since they were unable to access credit from banks due to apartheid laws, and today, by being poor.

(Xoliswa 1996, savings co-coordinator)

Bank managers don't know us, the savings scheme do they are our people they know where I live and when my daughter is sick.

(Rose Maso 1996, building supervisor)

The daily collectors are like social workers, they see the situation of every house and then we hear who is sick and who is in need of work. It is in the groups where all the problems are heard and can be potentially solved.

(Xoliswa)

This central act sustains the organization. A lot of energy is devoted to the savings scheme to promote, revive and refine it.

Description of VM

VM is affiliated to the Federation and is being held up as a model social development project. It has taken a leadership position in Cape Town in advocating for its model of housing delivery. The organization is based in Philippi, Cape Town and it has a membership of 251 women and 5 men. The members have successfully pooled their resources and have realized their dreams of financing, building, and owning their own homes. The women have built more than 148 houses in their community and more than 800 houses for other Federation savings groups and a community centre, which includes a crèche, a shop and the offices of VM.

The VM organization poses significant challenges to the contractor-driven model for housing. In the VM model, the homeowners become the developers and are involved in all the decision-making processes from financing, to design, to building their own homes. Their participation continues beyond housing delivery and is characterized by participation in other activities, which will sustain the community. These activities include income generating projects, education on HIV/AIDS, youth projects and recently drawing up plans for other savings groups for a small fee.

VM's model of saving schemes, participatory decision-making and control from the bottom up has resulted in more than just building houses but has been the foundation on which a learning community has been built. Their slogan emphasizes this important foundation: 'We are not only building houses but people and communities'. Previous research (Ismail 1999) suggests that VM projects have some lessons for the state and community housing initiatives in South Africa. These include: how to secure subsidies given the tedious bureaucratic process, how to build within the state housing subsidy and construct a bigger and better-quality product than most private developers, and how to ensure that during this process each person has acquired some skills like bricklaying, finance and negotiation and has the potential to enter the formal/informal economy. The objective is not only building houses but also empowering the poor and building learning communities.

In a climate of rising costs, growing unemployment, an increase in rural poverty, and the inevitable growth of informal settlements, the sustainability of maintaining and building houses by community based projects is possibly under threat. But the women of VM continuously develop new strategies for survival and new relationships with NGOs and the state for support. Their optimism and vision of building houses and communities are directly linked to the successful integration of education and development.

VM as a learning and social action community organization

Definitions of community are many and varied; the common features given to communities are that they occupy the same geographical space, have a shared

identity, have a common purpose, work in the interests of the collective and have humanistic concerns. According to Stephen Brookfield, community has the power to suspend critical judgement and a discussion on community requires a new approach that captures 'the diversity, disjuncture and relations of power which communities represent' (Brookfield in Hugo 2002: 5). Brookfield argues that educators would understand learning better in communities if they looked at agency in individuals and in communities and also viewed community as a site of tension between structure and action (Brookfield in Hugo 2002: 6). Other theorists (Le Roux 1998; Lee and Weeks 1991) have pointed out that communities are not homogeneous and not without power elites and hierarchies, and they have conflicts over resources. Lee and Weeks go on to say that feminists should examine the assumptions that they make regarding social action in communities. These assumptions are: that there is a community to organize and that poor people are all poor at the same level, not taking degrees of economic disadvantage into account.

In South Africa under apartheid this term was a political term often used to mean race. Under the migrant labour system, Africans who had migrated from the rural areas and lived in informal settlements were regarded as illegal and therefore no basic services were provided for these communities. These communities therefore have a long history of challenging government for basic services, for land and housing. These struggles involved a rich culture of community participation and strong democratic mass movements were formed. During the 1980s, political divisions and struggles over land between the informal and urban settlements surfaced as well within these communities. These divisions within the informal settlements were vicious and in some ways mirrored power relations in the rural areas. For example the 'chief' in the settlement would allocate plots of land in exchange for rent or other favours. To a large extent these divisions were initiated and fostered by the apartheid government.

The challenge facing these communities as citizens in post-apartheid South Africa is to make an impact on government through formal channels. The Alliance has committed itself to fight for basic services through the formal route; this distinguishes this social movement from other more recent social movements such as the Landless Peoples Movement, Anti-privatization Forum and the Treatment Action campaign who march against evictions, privatization of water and electricity, and for the provision of anti-retroviral treatment for all. These movements have created a political scandal by deliberately engaging in actions that create instability and disorder and challenge the distribution of power. They do this in ways that do not follow gradualist, corporatist and nation building scripts (Desai 2003: 9–10).

The research into the VM community, reported in this chapter, suggests that the women feel a common identity; most of them came from the former Transkei and Ciskei. They have suffered constant forced removals both from the Apartheid State and vigilante groups and now criminal elements threaten their new homes. The VM women have formed a network of supportive relationships, which fill

in for those in the rural community where they have come from. They have a common purpose in that they want to secure land and houses and rebuild their families and communities. To ensure that these are secured they have formed a learning organization, mobilized other savings groups, and taken a leading role in the Federation's activities. Their activism has resulted in three of the founding members of VM occupying national positions and another two holding regional positions in the Federation. The eight founding members of the organization come from the (African National Congress) ANC's women's league and have experience in organizing in a women's movement and in agricultural projects in rural areas; they bring this experience to the organization and see the social action in the community organization as an attempt to alter formal policies.

They have had some impact on the state's formal policy as recently the state has shifted its own policies to include more enabling financial legislation, identifying more land for urban use and pledging its support for a People's Housing Process.

In VM, the women have set up 'spaces of safety and security' (Davies 2000: 70). They have a reality in which they use their energy and creativity and form a community. In a sense they use their labour in the form of building houses and organizing around land and housing to construct a community and in this process they keep alive their traditions as well as their dreams of living in a peaceful community and being fully-fledged citizens. Their agency and self-determination disrupts traditional notions of black rural women and of women who live on the margins of society. More significantly, Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis (1995: 31) argue that the new alliances, which are transnational, facilitate the creation of international solidarities and networks. These alliances link women. Through People's Dialogue, VM formed linkages with the slum dwellers association in India (Mahila Milan) and with the homeless organizations in Brazil (Cearah Periferia) and in the Philippines (The Lupang Pangako Urban Poor Association). PD facilitates exchanges between the different homeless savings groups nationally and internationally. In these new alliances knowledge is exchanged and growing. Women informally exchange knowledge on many issues such as: the best landfill to use, lobbying local government for more resources, how to do community surveys and how to work democratically. These alliances also support women's resistances and fight for basic rights against the destructive aspects of global restructuring, the debt and the environmental crises and violence against women and children.

The identity of rural and urban is more than a geographical space; it is the belief system that forges identities and communities. To a large extent the women of VM draw strongly on their rural identity and origins. They include many traditional customs and songs and dance in the way that they organize and celebrate their achievements. Initially the women had problems participating in community forums as most of the discussions were in English. To overcome this language barrier and their invisibility, they went to forum meetings with their children on their backs, spoke in Xhosa (an African language) and used role-play and singing to bring their message and demands across to officials and other participants. We have yet to see whether this identity as rural and roles as wives and mothers can

outlive the moment of crisis and advance women's lives in enduring ways. Here too we have to be cautious in romanticizing the rural as people can use tradition to legitimate their attempts to gain, maintain and exclude others from positions of power.

These identities are not static especially since VM has begun to organize in urbanized communities across colour/racial lines and their own community has become more stable. In these instances, their customs and traditions are always shifting and changing.

Feminists have argued that it is very difficult to build a community of women because the structure of women's lives more often than not militates against community (Lee and Weeks 1991). As adults, women's domestic labour and personal and family commitments militate against participating in many activities of the organization such as meetings and social action. A final barrier to creating unity amongst women, they argue, is their fragmentation. Women are either married, or they work in a paid labour force, or they listen to the demands of their husbands. They have also argued that community theorists have two major lessons to learn from the women's movement to advance their struggles. These are: that daily life is political, identification with the women's movement slogan that the personal is political; and that women must speak for themselves.

The VM women do not organize on the basis of gender or sisterhood like the women's movement but on the basis of poverty. Historically in South Africa, as is true today, race and class and gender intersect. Thus Black and African can be translated into meaning the poor; the most vulnerable of the poor are usually the women and children. Thirty-four per cent of the population in South Africa are unemployed, and this is most acute amongst the African population, particularly African women (South African Survey 1999). The VM women point out that poor people need to stick together as only they will support one another. They acknowledge that there are conflicts within the community but point out that they are committed to discussing conflicts and finding solutions to their problems.

Although they do not use the slogan the 'personal is political', personal and family life are targets for social action. VM hold weekly general meetings attended by about 150 women. These women have organized their households to expect them not to return home after work, so husbands or the eldest children take charge of cooking and childcare on this evening. Many of the women are the registered owners of their houses. At first men would not accept this and there was violence against women. The older women in the organization spoke to difficult husbands and tried to contain the conflict. In some cases this was resolved, in others the marriages broke down. More recently many households have opted for joint ownership. In this way too women meet practical and strategic needs as advocated in Moser's gender planning thesis (Moser 1993), as having more power in the household has meant that women have gained support for their activities and can speak more freely on issues of family planning. I need to say immediately that these gains are not constant and that there are continuous struggles to maintain the power balance within households and between households.

Through their activities everyone is learning continuously and the knowledge of the basic principles is widespread and has helped the creation of local leaders. Personal confidence has grown amongst the leadership and this has encouraged them to continue and not be discouraged by the slowness of the process. The VM women are strongly driven by the need to offer their children decent places to grow up and thrive, transforming the hostile urban environment in which they have found themselves.

Linking development and social action to theory

The central question to understanding learning in development and social movements in this context is: how does the social action of VM relate and contribute to different theories of adult education, feminist pedagogy and development, and learning in social movements? In these paradigms some theorists (Foley 1999; Esteva 1992; Freire 1983; Walters and Manicom 1996) argue that people learn from their own experience, from dialogue and critical reflection. This learning leads to social action and solving problems. In this body of literature learning is understood to mean the process of making changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, value systems and in behaviour. It includes goals, purposes, intentions, choices and making decisions. For those social action theorists who find roots in Freire's education for transformation school, adult learning is complex and value creating. It is shaped by social structure and culture and inevitably involves ethical judgements and choices. For them individuals and groups have different goals and interests in adult learning, which need to be understood as contested activities around which there is conflict.

The women of VM have some schooling and the levels vary from 2–8 and more years of schooling. As stated already they come from poor rural areas and live on the outskirts of the city in often-hostile environments. Their main form of income is domestic work, selling fruit and vegetables and providing childcare. But they have within the housing collective educated themselves to work in teams and learnt to save, to keep financial records, to survey a community's needs, to design their dream houses, to measure and cost a house, and to make bricks and build their own homes. Throughout the learning process the more experienced members lead the groups.

This organization consists mainly of women; 85 per cent of the membership is 'women who learn as they struggle, they live their experience and these are complex and contested, their struggles and solutions involve ethical judgments and choices around which there is often conflict' (Foley 1999: 7).

Through this project many discriminatory inequalities have been challenged as well as discriminatory customary laws. The following views expressed by the women reflect their increased self-confidence and status in the family:

Nokhangelani: 'Men must know that we are their left-hand partners because they stay in the house built by us'.

Veliswa: 'It is not easy for them to kick you out because you have built the house, so you are strong in the marriage'.

Mama Msiza: 'This project builds marriage life because the whole family gets involved in building the house and at the same time the marriage grows stronger because people are working with and not against each other'.

Strong connections can be made with VM's learning through a development paradigm based on a people's driven process and the theories of experiential learning, informal learning, and popular and feminist pedagogy (Esteva 1992; Clarke 1991; Freire 1983; Walters and Manicom 1996; Foley 1999; Rogers 1996). In this development paradigm the learning characteristics are that people learn from their own experience, from dialogue and critical reflection, which leads to social action and solving problems. Learning is in action in the activity of forming savings groups, learning to save, learning to dream about houses that women design and construct, and learning from national and international exchanges. All of this learning is individual and collective. The exchange visits are powerful learning moments. During these exchanges a critical mass of learners are brought together and in this collective they learn that poor women can learn knowledge exclusive to professionals and experts. This experience emphasizes that what poor women often do not have is the space and monetary resources to use, support and refine their skills. There is a shared experience of meaning in this action.

The initial lessons of surveying, design and planning were learnt from networks in India. These exchanges helped to demystify the enormous task ahead as well as emphasize that unschooled women can learn to build their own homes. A few recollections to describe this are given here.

Xoliswa recounts her experience:

We were six members from VM who went to India where we got more ideas about saving and saw it in practice. Yes, at home we were saving, sometimes monthly or weekly, but because we were starting we did not know if this was going to work or not. By going to India we got the idea of going door-to-door, everyday to collect money. It was like a film when we went to India. Women collectors would be standing by the door in every street with their money and small books in which they record their daily savings. Some women were getting small loans from collecting those daily savings.

Patricia:

We got to know the Indians and shared our problems and worked together in solving them. When we came back, we started to compare South Africa to India; it is not easy because they are quite different. We discovered that men in South Africa are very lazy.

Veliswa: 'We also learnt of some interesting ways of designing houses in India. There they used huge pieces of material to design a house'.

The Federation names this form of learning horizontal learning. They believe it is more equitable to learn for oneself in a collective in which the measurement is in the act of doing and of solving a problem. The Federation believes very strongly that learning needs to be supported; therefore, all exchange visits and training is done in a collective. Learning is a collective and social process, and knowledge is a collective asset (Asian Coalition for Housing Rights Newsletter 2000: 5–7). These social networks help to internationalize knowledge and it makes the knowledge less local and not restricted to a place.

For the women there is a qualitative difference between learning from peers and formal training. 'When you see ideas being put into practice by people as poor as you, it is powerful, you see possibilities that did not come from a textbook or an expert' (Asian Coalition for Housing Rights Newsletter 2000: 6). In this way poor women become committed to learning and how to build a house even if it takes a long time. In this process of learning everyone feels responsible for her own learning as it is through this process that she will secure land/ housing/finance. Learning is based on poor people's own learning systems, based on critical consciousness and learning what is relevant, useful and how you can improve a situation and solve problems (Asian Coalition for Housing Rights Newsletter 2000: 4–10).

There are direct links with this practice of learning and Wildemeersch and Jansen's (1997) characterization of social learning, as this project is action and experience directed, in solving problems critical reflection is involved, and it is dialogical as well as multi-actor oriented.

Mama Makasi from a sister savings scheme tells of her learning experience:

the meetings are helpful, we get to know one another, how to come together and to raise our own ideas. We discuss how to build our houses, what are the best available systems of building our savings schemes. All those discussions are built from people's ideas.

Connections can also be made to Lave and Wenger's (1991: 150) theory that takes 'learning to be participation in socially situated practices'. As VM illustrate, their pedagogy is about changing participation in 'changing communities of practice'.

Some of the learning occurs informally and is incidental, outside of institutions, and consists of a broad ensemble of activities as witnessed in their mass meeting. Before a mass meeting women from the different savings groups march through the settlement with banners, singing and shouting slogans. The singing continues throughout the mass meeting. They sing about the hardships of living in shacks, especially how they are prone to fires, rain and evictions. In their campaigns they use common symbols and rituals such as prayers, songs, and dress to create a shared meaning. This helps to 'shift learning to its transformative power by pointing to possibilities that point to social action' (Wildemeersch and Jansen 1997: 468).

The stories that they tell in the mass meetings reproduce familiar experiences, which enable people to critique and challenge the existing status quo. In these meetings, in the training and in the building of their homes, they unlearn dominant

paradigms about their self-worth. They gain a critical view of authority, and recognize their own ability to influence decision-making. There are direct links here between Freire's theories of reflection and action and the development of a critical consciousness and empowerment in these groups. 'Critical consciousness is brought about, not through an intellectual effort alone but through praxis – through the authentic union of action-reflection' (Freire 1983: 87).

The organizational structure and the shared philosophy that the women need each other supports democratic participation and considers everyone to be a leader and part of the decision-making process. This is seen as the central concept of a people-centred development and is demonstrated in VM's pedagogy where women insist on using dialogue to solve problems and to find solutions.

One new member said, 'We know that we are unable to answer all our questions overnight, therefore we rely on continuous discussions to come up with answers'.

There is a sense that empowerment occurs through discussion and involvement of members in all the activities of the organization, and they have a strategy of continuous training to prevent the consolidation of resources in the hands of a few (Ismail 1998: 57–9). In their struggle to gain resources they constantly have to reflect and critique strategies and in this way, too, they are empowered. This is illustrated as suggested earlier on in the VM women's acknowledgement of ownership of their homes, which has shifted the gender balance in their homes. It has given them more freedom of speech and movement, and the ability to participate in the organization's activities without their husbands' permission (Ismail 1999: 99–100).

This community is cautious of academics and experts, coming from their experiences with builders, developers and technical support from local and provincial government. In their interaction with these typically male dominated organizations, the women usually negotiate their plans in a group. In these negotiations they stress the necessity to work from their own knowledge, seeing this as the discourse of the poor that presents a challenge to the mainstream. This strategy echoes Freire's (1983) and feminists' work on affirming women's knowledge (Barr 1999) by them having an active voice and presence in the solutions to their problems.

The pedagogy of VM and their emphasis on knowledge production as is evidenced in their slogan 'We want Power, Knowledge and Money', reflect Eyerman and Jamieson's (1991) account of cognitive praxis in social movements, i.e. that knowledge is central, its creation is a collective process and that activists learn by doing and that learning cannot be measured by what is in people's heads.

The pedagogy of VM can be called feminist although they would not call themselves feminists (they see themselves as protectors of the family and community), as

it is participatory, democratic, non-hierarchical, encourages creative thinking that breaks through embedded formats of learning. It valorizes local knowledge working collectively to producing knowledge, the principle of starting from

where people are situated and working to develop a broader understanding of structures and how these can be transformed. It strives to foster both personal and social empowerment.

(Walters and Manicom 1996: 7)

This is evidenced when VM builds a model house in a new community where a new savings group is being established. The construction of this model house involves women from many savings groups including the new one. When the model house is completed it is displayed to the entire community, local councillors, government officials from the housing board, civic leaders and community leaders. This display is a powerful demonstration of women's planning and mobilizing tools, and it makes effective evidence for bargaining in negotiating to secure land tenure, and for approval of development plans.

There is some systematic education and transfer of cognitive skills and knowledge in the organization in learning to build a house. The teaching is based on sound adult education principles starting from the knowledge of the participant. This lengthy process must be accurate. The trainer starts off with the person's knowledge and slowly new strategies for teaching more complex measurement and procedures are included. The trainer uses visual and physical measurements within the new homeowner's understanding and costs it according to these understandable measurements (People's Dialogue 1994: 6).

Sean Cuff the technical advisor shared some insights into the teaching methods used and how individuals in the group transferred their knowledge:

With Victoria Mxenge we had a lot of time. The process went on for a very long time. Pencil and paper draw a house, just plan and dream the house and see what it is that you want to do, forget about metres and square metres. Basically they get the chance to design their house and present their houses at a group meeting where everybody is allowed to comment and criticize. And, then what we do is one of the houses is chosen by the people sitting in that meeting as what satisfies best their needs. We go outside and build the life-size model of that and again forgetting about tape measures and only looking at the space that we've got. We look at the space in terms of being enough for the double bed, the wardrobe, look at your bathroom etcetera.

Here the women describe this process: 'In terms of designing the house, it was collective thinking; everybody had to say where we should have a kitchen, bedrooms and the lounge. People built according to the size of the family and the amount of money they have'. (This seems obvious but most houses built by developers only have a single bedroom.)

How do the VM women determine what is learnt, how it is learnt, and how to assess the role of learning in reaching developmental goals? There are no easy answers to these questions as their learning is difficult to measure, and a range of issues affects the learning process both positively and negatively. Assessment

occurs through both qualitative and quantitative measurements such as the quality and number of houses built, amount of land secured, the savings collected, the stability and security of the community, their impact on the state's housing policy, their control over resources and the personal development of their membership (Ismail 1999: 98–9).

When asked whether the project had changed their quality of life, there was a resounding yes. Nokhangelani proudly explained,

When you live in a shack and then move into a house which you can call home, something happens to you. You change in every respect. The physical appearance changes you and you suddenly see your direction. Our lives have changed since we started living in houses.

Mama Lizzie said she left Transkei in 1966 and since then she has never had a proper home; now reaching 60 she has her own house. She exclaims,

For years I have waited for a house, I am now almost a pensioner, I moved around from shack to shack. However, if I had found a house sooner I would not have learnt as much. I now have *knowledge and a house*.

Sean Cuff the technical advisor who provided technical support concluded that,

the VM women have changed. They have developed phenomenally, they have developed a huge amount of self-confidence and they have developed skills in language, in self-expression, in communication and in so many ways. Their growth has been phenomenal. They are powerful in their community and powerful in dealing with outside people. They certainly don't hold back, now they are dealing with building material suppliers, maybe White, Coloured, Indian or Black, whatever, they know exactly what they want. They have a lot more confidence, someone like Nokhangelani who could not speak a single word of English now is fluent, virtually. There's a bunch of women who would never put up a hand or say a word in a meeting. They are now quite happy to chair a meeting. They kind of have this intelligence that they naturally grew into in a number of years. Now, I don't spend much time like day-to-day with them as I used to before. I occasionally come and I'm just bowled over by how they have grown. It really is quite phenomenal.

To sum up, generally in the literature on adult education, women in development and social movements, women belong to a community and learn in struggle for the collective good and for the future of their children. In the development literature there is a strong emphasis on women's empowerment to challenge gender relations, women's access to resources, and women as the central agent in development as the women are the care-givers, toil the soil and generally keep the family intact. There is a strong emphasis on ownership of the process, to learn

in a collective, for the learning to be people driven and for the knowledge to be owned by the participants.

In social movements theory, Foley (1999) is careful to point out that the gains made can be reversed and learning in social action is not inevitably always triumphant. In the action learning approach the participants learn mainly informally, developing an understanding that guides practice. In this pedagogy the experiences of the learner occupy central place in all considerations of teaching and learning. They analyse this experience by reflecting, evaluating and reconstructing that experience in order to make meaning; a review of this experience can lead to further action. There is a strong organic connection between education and personal experience. There is dialectic between action and reflection and as Freire (1973: 66) so aptly says, 'men are not built in silence, but in words, in work, in action and reflection'. In this process of action and reflection people's attitudes and values change and their experiences are used to raise awareness and this leads to a change in consciousness. The nature of these movements is that they are collective, mobilized and could become a countervailing power.

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Re-reading the texts of RPL

What recontextualizing principles are coded into the selection of curriculum resources?

Judy Harris

Introduction

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is one of a range of responses to the needs of adult learners in education and training.¹ The key assumption is that adults have 'prior learning' which, subject to reflection, articulation and assessment, may be worthy of recognition and accreditation within formal education and training systems or workplace contexts. Prior learning may have been acquired formally, non-formally and/or informally: the determining factor is that it has not been accredited. Outcomes of recognition can involve non-traditional access, the award of advanced standing (or credit) within formal education and training or they can serve as a basis for an individually negotiated learning programme.

This chapter develops one of the ideas presented in the roundtable discussion on RPL which took place at the 2003 Centre for Research in lifelong Learning (CRL) conference. The other areas of research that were proposed are attached as Appendix 1. They consider RPL from the point of view of knowledge and power, arguing that these issues were removed from view (but not displaced) in RPL and experiential learning theory more broadly. These issues are also considered more fully in Harris (2004).

The question: 'what presuppositions about knowledge are hidden in RPL practices?' is explored in relation to a pilot RPL process that took place during 1997–8, in a South African university, in relation to a post-graduate professionalizing diploma for educators of adults. The pilot took the form of a discrete pre-entry programme for experienced educators of adults who did not meet the formal entry requirements. The years in question were characterized by rapid change in all spheres of life, following the first democratic election in 1994. A fuller investigation is to be found in Harris (2004).

The particular focus of the enquiry in this chapter is 'curriculum-making'² in RPL, and what presuppositions are coded into the selection of curriculum resources by the designers and facilitators concerned. In common with much international practice, the pilot used some formal texts during the RPL process. It did not rely solely on candidates' prior learning to provide the 'curriculum'. It is these texts and their *recontextualization* in an RPL curriculum that are examined

in this chapter. It is argued that the texts were used to signal desirable *academic* knowledge, practices and standpoints – which were at odds with the stated goals of RPL (which were to value and recognize prior *practitioner* learning). Moreover, the selection process was a largely unconscious one. Some of the social consequences of this are discussed.

Conceptual resources from critical curriculum theory

The concept of *recontextualization* forms part of Basil Bernstein's cluster of concepts within *pedagogic discourse*. Bernstein was a critical curriculum theorist within the sociology of education and knowledge with a conventional sociological project which followed a cumulative path over four decades. He built a single, increasingly elaborated conceptual framework offering resources with which to address his fundamental problematic which was the internal workings of education practices in relation to the production, reproduction and transformation of culture through consciousness.

Of particular relevance to the enquiry in this chapter are the ways in which his framework enables conceptual links to be made between micro pedagogic moments and broader societal power structures – between 'processes of transmission and acquisition and their social achievements' (Bernstein 1996: 5), with a focus on how power and control enter into agencies, contexts and practices to exclude or include.

The group of concepts comprising *pedagogic discourse* are concerned with 'the production, distribution, and reproduction of official knowledge and how this knowledge is related to structurally determined power relations' (Sadovnik 1995: 10). This happens through the *pedagogic device* which lies at the conjunction of power, knowledge and consciousness (Bernstein 1990) and is the place where subtle changes in knowledge, conduct or practice can occur, often unnoticed. The social import of the pedagogic device is underscored by Bernstein (in Bernstein and Solomon 1999: 269) as, 'the group who appropriates the device has access to a ruler and distributor of consciousness, identity and desire'. The device consists of three sets of rules, *the distributive rules*, *recontextualizing rules*, and *evaluative or criterial rules*.³ Davies captures the rules very clearly:

Distributive rules regulate the distribution of access to public sites where the unthinkable may be thought and where the thinkable can only be thought. Recontextualizing rules regulate the ideological movement from fields of discursive production (intellectual, craft, expressive) into specialized creations with their own internal ordering principles as pedagogic discourses. Criterial rules regulate specific pedagogic practices in specific pedagogic contexts.

(Davies 1995: 49)

Taken together these three rules provide the intrinsic language or 'grammar' of any pedagogic discourse. They can reflect reproduction and/or illuminate instability and potential nodes of intervention in education practice.

In more detail, the *distributive rules*, largely lying 'in the upper reaches of the educational system' (Bernstein 1996: 43), are the power-laden means to specialize, distribute and regulate forms of knowledge, meanings, consciousness and practice to social groups. Any meaning can be context-subsumed, that is, in direct relation to its material base. If the relation is *indirect*, there is a gap – 'the site of the impossible' – and it is this gap that is controlled and managed by distributive rules, '[a]ny distribution of power will regulate the potential of this gap in its own interest, because the gap itself has the possibility of an alternative order, an alternative society, and an alternative power relation' (Bernstein 1996: 45). Whoever or whatever is in the gap has the legitimate right to produce discourse. According to Bernstein (1990: 182), '[t]his potential "gap", "space", the site of the "unthinkable", the "impossible", can be beneficial and dangerous at one and the same time'. It is the meeting point of order and disorder, of coherence and incoherence; it is the crucial site of the 'yet to be thought' (Bernstein 1990: 182).

Recontextualization involves discourse being dislocated from its location in fields of knowledge/discourse production or 'primary recontextualizing fields' (university departments), and relocated in a new context or contexts for the purposes of transmission and acquisition. When a discourse moves through recontextualizing 'the original discourse is abstracted from its social base, position and power relations' (Bernstein 1996: 53, footnote 1). So, although the process takes place broadly within the 'discursive limits of what is and what is not legitimate knowledge' (Atkinson 1995: 93), there is a further gap and space for 'ideology' to play – that is, a space for the reformulation of power and control. The right to select from resources in the field of production places recontextualizing 'agents' in a powerful position.

The *evaluative rules* flow from the above. Their use 'condense[s] the meaning of the whole device' (Bernstein 1996: 50) by signifying what counts as counting. If education practices are about the production, reproduction and transformation of culture through consciousness, then the evaluative rules are the *continuous* regulators of legitimate and illegitimate progress in that regard. The question for Bernstein (1990: 8) is always 'whose regulator, what consciousness and for whom?'

It is possible to see both constraints and opportunities (gaps) through the pedagogic device. The process between discourse in a field of production and its subsequent effect on the consciousness of learners is a long and complex one, with scope for interventions and disturbances along the way. The question is: what happened in this case?

The context and RPL process

As mentioned, the RPL pilot under examination was developed in relation to a post-graduate professionalizing diploma for educators of adults in a university department of adult education. The department concerned operated within a framework of left-liberalism underpinned by critical social theory, history and philosophy and the diploma programme was aimed to

build a cadre of critically transformative intellectuals [adult educators] drawn mainly from the NGO [Non-Governmental Organization] tradition, who could understand the complex terms and conditions of constraint and agency in particular situations and act accordingly: a clearly sociological task and a different form of activism.

(Harris 2004: 181).⁴

Discourses of experiential learning were seen as an inadequate basis for social reconstruction, yet experience itself was retained as bedrock upon which to contextualize and (re)direct educator practice. Canonical knowledge was highly valued, with the acquisition of formal knowledge seen as a route to social change. Critical rationality and social responsibility were foregrounded: there was a social and sociological project at work, concerned with the national reconstructive project and, through that, the creation of a 'better' society. However, there was scepticism about 'empowerment' and 'transformation'. The social goals of the diploma were not about these terms as 'big' terms, but as more modest goals achievable through engagement with multiple forms of constraint.

The RPL pilot consisted of a one-day orientation workshop, individual consultations and a four-day programme. This amounted to about thirty hours of contact time and candidates were expected to spend the same amount of time in private study. The four-day programme took place over two weekends. The pilot was designed and facilitated by the author and a colleague from the department. As RPL curriculum designers, they had the authority to select particular texts for recontextualization. In Bernstein's terms they were recontextualization agents operating within realms of possibility and constraint. How was this power exercised; according to what principles; to what end?

Analysis of RPL curriculum texts

The following texts were the most significant RPL curriculum resources:

- A 'Quality Framework' from a national standards-setting project in South Africa (NTB 1997).
- An extract from a book by Boud *et al.* (1993) 'Using Experience for Learning'.
- A conference paper by Fotheringham *et al.* (1995) 'Adult Educators as Change Agents: Contributions to Social Transformation'.

- An academic paper by Usher (1986) 'Adult Students and their Experience: Developing a Resource for Learning'.

The Quality Framework

The Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) project from which this resource was recontextualized was one of the first South African standards-setting research and development projects undertaken within the framework of the post-1994 political dispensation. The Quality Framework is holistic. For example, knowledge is included as 'underpinning' various forms of practice roles and 'expertises'.⁵ All of the knowledges, in turn, are explicitly underpinned by the values and vision enshrined in the South African Constitution.

The Quality Framework was originally designed to inform national standards-setting. In recontextualizing it for the purposes of RPL, its function was being changed. To what? It was being used to 'celebrate' prior learning. The Quality Framework offered not only a useful heuristic map of the breadth of educator, trainer and development practitioner expertise, but also raised some cautions. For example, that expertise was not 'complete' unless underpinned by knowledge and a particular set of constitutional social democratic values. Basically, practice alone was not going to be enough. There were therefore tacit and hidden perspectives or principles at work here – namely, the importance of knowledge and an endorsement of the new national value system. It is suggested that these principles contributed to the RPL pedagogic discourse.

The extract from Boud et al.

This text contains five 'propositions' about learning from experience:

- Experience is the foundation of, and stimulus for, learning ...
 - Learners actively construct their experience ...
 - Learning is a holistic process ...
 - Learning is socially and culturally constructed ...
 - Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs....
- (Boud et al. 1993: 8–16)

Boud et al. substantiate each proposition in turn. For example, proposition one is substantiated by the following notions (amongst others): the centrality of experience in learning; all learning is experiential; new meanings can always be found in old experiences, and reflection is central to extracting meaning from experience; '... through entering into a dialogue with our experience...we can turn experiential knowledge, which may not be readily accessible to us, into propositional knowledge which can be shared and interrogated' (Boud et al. 1993: 10). There is a very Kolbian and mentalist assumption in this quotation – that

reflection and dialoguing with experience *can* unproblematically translate it into formal knowledge.

Proposition two is substantiated by the view that meaning is person-dependent, which suggests agency in individual meaning-making: 'Teachers and facilitators need to acknowledge the agency of the learner and the importance of the learner's construction of the learning activities which they make available for them' (Boud *et al.* 1993: 11). Proposition three is substantiated in the following way, '... all learning involves the feelings and emotions (affective), the intellectual and cerebral (cognitive) and action (conative)' (Boud *et al.* 1993: 13). Proposition four, and the substantiations of it, add a social and cultural dimension to learning from experience, but one curiously linked to a psychotherapeutic element in 'moving beyond the mental bonds': 'Critical reflection is required to examine the influences of our values and culture ... The making problematic of the familiar is an important strategy in moving beyond the mental bonds which constrain us' (Boud *et al.* 1993: 14). Proposition five is substantiated by psychotherapeutic notions in 'engaging fully the affective elements [of learning] can lead to anxiety, pain and discomfort' and in 'we need, as learners, appropriate support, trust and challenge from others' (Postle, in Boud *et al.* 1993: 15).

The Boud *et al.* text is extremely generic. There is something for everyone in the propositions: agency, holism, social context, emotionality. Likewise in the substantiations: individual constructivism, situated learning, anti-canonism, some criticality, social constructivism, psychological development, cultural specificity and potential emotional freedom. In their original context – a book about experience, experiential learning and learning – these ideas form part of a structured argument that contributes to thinking in the field (and an authoritative contribution, given the positioning and popularity of the authors). These writers were anchoring their ideas about experiential learning in learning theory, phenomenology and social psychology so as to broaden traditional definitions of experiential learning and learning from experience. However, as RPL recontextualizing agents, we recontextualized the material for our own purposes. But what purposes and why?

In the same way as with the Quality Framework, Boud *et al.* valorize learning from experience (prior learning from experience in our case). They also elaborate and extend it – and begin to theorize it. These propositions, with something for everyone, offered a broad and inclusive canvas for RPL and its pedagogy, arguably broader than approaches with unexplicated theoretical bases *only* in Kolb's experiential learning cycle. It can also be argued that the Boud *et al.* substantiations brought RPL slightly closer to the pedagogic discourse of the department within which the RPL pilot was located, particularly in the references to social context (in proposition four). However, there remained a gap between this text and those discourses. There is little if any critical social theory in the Boud *et al.* propositions. Again, two important and implicit perspectives or principles seem to have been coded into our use of this text: the importance of theorizing learning from experience and the corollary view that prior learning is in need of work before it

can be recognized. It can be hypothesized that these principles became part of the RPL pedagogic discourse.

The conference paper by Fotheringham et al.

The title, 'Adult Educators as Change Agents: Contributions to Social Transformation', suggests a radical stance which is not particularly evident in the content of the paper. What is clear, though, is that it is a quasi-academic paper, written by practitioners for practitioners:

This is the story of a literacy project that went wrong. The setting is an informal settlement ... the story of perhaps too many development workers and educationists becoming involved in a literacy project: people who should have known better making a number of mistakes. It is also the story of people in the community where there are elements of selflessness and dedication on the one hand, and greed, jealousy and survival on the other. The real name of the community is, ironically enough for the purposes of our account, Happy Valley ... in retrospect, many of our mistakes seemed very simple and obvious to ourselves ... what is interesting is how we found ourselves in this situation, how we knew the theory of so-called progressive development work and believed that we could apply it but were somehow caught in a trap between theory and praxis. We have also needed to ask ourselves whether the mistakes were simply mistakes of implementation, of praxis, or whether what we call progressive literacy and development work was appropriate for the needs and context of the Happy Valley community.

(Fotheringham *et al.* 1995: 142)

A textual analysis of the above quotation is revealing in terms of the implicit and complex set of qualities and attributes that are coded into it. The opening line refers to 'the story of a literacy project that went wrong', suggesting that the writers are engaged in critical reflexive enquiry, prepared to analyse their mistakes and learn 'lessons'. The notion of 'story' suggests not wanting to generalize universal truths from their account. The authors are clearly grappling with the complexity of a particular social context and the role of power in educational interventions. The extract has a questioning, deconstructive and problematizing style. The authors are prepared to be critical of progressive orthodoxies in literacy practices as indicated by references to the appropriateness or otherwise of 'so-called progressive development work'. In fact, the paper ends on a critical note regarding the power-effects of discourses of 'empowerment' and 'transformation'. The writers claim that the experience of the literacy project undermined teachers' and community confidence and that 'transformation did not happen despite our good intentions' (Fotheringham *et al.* 1995: 150).

In its style and stance the paper was close to the departmental discourse, especially in expressing the need to deconstruct 'progressive' educational orthodoxies and

their associated practices – to go beyond surface codings. In recontextualizing this paper the RPL programme coordinators were unconsciously signalling a wide, complex and quite subtle range of desirable (in our view) academic practices and standpoints which subsequently also became part of the RPL pedagogic discourse and gaze.

The academic paper by Usher

This paper is about adult educators/lecturers in higher education who recognize adult educators/students' experience as a resource for productive learning. This process involves students learning to value their experience and to deploy active learning strategies (involving group discussion of diverse conceptions of 'learning'). It involves educators helping students to see the perspective-dependence of knowledge and supporting them in developing theories about their own learning as meta-theory (knowledge about knowledge).

Why did we recontextualize this paper as an RPL resource? Its positioning as the final text in the RPL programme suggests that it represented the culmination of a 'progression' principle within RPL, with Fotheringham *et al.* as a sort of half-way house. It is a fully fledged academic text which turns attention away from educator practice towards theorizing oneself as a higher education learner. Yet it is still loosely concerned with 'experience'. The paper's job seemed to be to act as a bridge (a one-way bridge?) between RPL and the receiving diploma course.

Recontextualizing principles at work

In a more interpretive vein, what was the significance of all of the above recontextualizing decisions? Each text carried messages, and modelled or brokered implicit and 'ideal type' candidate positions. The Quality Framework signalled the importance of knowledge over and above practice, and the significance of a particular socio-political value system. The Boud *et al.* text signalled the desirability of theorizing prior learning in ways that went beyond Kolb and conventional experiential learning theory. The Fotheringham *et al.* text was more complex, with its storied, contextually aware, deconstructive, problematizing approach (perhaps closest to the departmental discourse). The Usher text embodied the authority of an academic text and the need to be able to engage with such, as well as the desirability of a particular theoretical understanding of learning from experience and the ability to apply that to oneself as a higher education learner. It provided a learner identity for the RPL candidates.

Bernstein's concepts lead to the claim that two recontextualizing principles were unconsciously at work during the design of the RPL curriculum. These became part of the RPL pedagogic discourse:

- Practitioner knowledge was to be delimited and distanced – valued, but only up to a point.⁶

- A range of academic practices and standpoints were important: it was these that would count.

It was the second principle that became the most important. Re-reading the texts suggests that the facilitators wanted RPL candidates who could reflect critically (and in a particular way) on themselves and their practice. This included:

- a commitment to the current constitutional value system;
- seeing things (self and educational interventions) in an historical and social context;
- seeing how context shapes choices and assumptions;
- seeing the relationships between ideal and reality – being self-critical;
- operating with a spirit of critical enquiry, deconstruction, questioning, problematization and a lack of closure;
- having a suspicion of orthodoxies – old or new;
- having an ability to be provisional rather than universal – to take a storied approach to self and work, seeing self as text;
- appreciating the value of theory, especially critical social theory.

Materials were recontextualized for their potential to speak, in some way, to the diploma discourse. They signalled the deeper knowledge principles at work in the diploma. Prior learning that fell outside of these areas tended not to count.

The extent of the closeness between the principles of the diploma and of RPL can be seen in the following extract from Harris (2004), where a piece of research undertaken by the convenor of the diploma course is discussed. We were not aware of this piece of research when planning and undertaking the RPL pilot. He analysed lecturers' comments on diploma student assignments to reveal tacit criteria that were shaping an 'ideal' adult educator-student role.

... [he] found work criticized for 'over-simple theory', being too empirical, not problematizing important concepts in a study, not revealing a grasp of debates, staying within common-sense views, not having a sociological grasp, not explaining anything, not making location visible, not offering social explanations of action. Where 'positive' assessment comments were made, they seemed frequently to damn with faint praise, as in: 'succeeds as a personal report', 'small scale investigation', 'gives insights into ...', 'gives evidence of having been a vehicle for personal learning', 'clear sense of an insider's common sense perceptions'. Particular qualities seemed to have been singled out for strongest praise – for example, 'it is unpretentious and honest'.

(Harris 2004: 90)

In interpreting his analytical exercise, the diploma convenor concluded (wryly) that the diploma valued students who were 'sociologists', 'philosophers' and who were 'virtuous'.

... there is much coherence in our evaluative messages and it is not difficult to construct from them qualities and capacities we value. These include, first, the capacity for understanding social location. We seem to emphasize 'explanation' a great deal, grasp of structures and processes that contain, limit or run through social action. We want our students to be sociologists. They include, too, asking questions that expand and problematize meanings of personal action, including questions about language. We want our students to be philosophers. And they include acting in ways that are honest, self-aware and disciplined by commitment. We want our students to be virtuous.

(Harris 2004: 90)

So what?

The concept of recontextualization underscores the potential for agency in curriculum design. As mentioned, Bernstein places 'recontextualizing agents' in positions of power, as these agents exercise authority (within realms of possibility and constraint) over the selection of resources from fields of production. The above analysis throws light on the notion of challenge (or lack of it) in this case. There were several potential interventional 'gaps' in the RPL curriculum design and implementation process which were not taken up. The RPL curriculum designers 'chose' to use academic texts, rather than to draw solely on the raw material of candidates' experience. The analysis suggests that as facilitators we were inducting the RPL candidates into the discourse of the university department concerned. Therefore, our 'choice' of particular texts aligned the RPL curriculum with the diploma.

The terms 'chose' and 'choice' are placed in inverted commas because the process was largely unconscious. Like many RPL practitioners, they were not in a central position in their academic context. In many ways, we could be seen as apprentices in a 'community of practice', involved in various kinds of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991). They were not fully functioning members of the discursive community concerned. They were operating at the boundaries of our knowledge at the time. As a result, their recontextualizing principles were hidden or invisible, and largely reproductive.

RPL is aligned to a range of (often competing) social projects. It is seen as contributing to widening participation in higher education; it is seen as a way to influence traditional curricular practices in favour of greater flexibility and learner-centredness; it is seen as a strategy in closer linkage between the worlds of work and higher education so as to increase individuals' employability and the nation's skills profile and economic competitiveness. Each of these involves aspirations to change existing distributive rules, that is, the means by which people (students, learners, workers) get access to public sites where the 'unthinkable may be thought and where the thinkable can only be thought'. This could be seen as increasing physical access. This particular RPL process intervened in the distributive rules of the diploma by making it slightly more demographically available. Normal

admission requirements would have required all the candidates to have studied at certificate level before progressing to the diploma. However, it did not change the pedagogic discourse of the diploma. So, the overall process of reproduction was not affected. In terms of the criterial rules, these mirrored those of the diploma, so no new knowledge passed over the existing curricular boundary. Overall, then, this RPL process did not exploit any 'gap' that might have existed for something new to happen; why not?

There are those that argue that 'transformative' RPL should involve changing established mainstream pedagogic discourses and practices, particularly curricular structure and content (Harris 1999, 2000). However, to effect curricular changes, designers of RPL need conceptual resources and agency within the communities of practice concerned. They need to be theoretically aware of the discourses of the mainstream curricular contexts to which RPL candidates require access. In this case, the facilitators did not have enough theory or status to conceptualize an approach to RPL that challenged the existing diploma curriculum.

Nor, perhaps, would this have been wanted. Curricular change invariably involves weakening the classification of knowledge and blurring the boundaries between disciplinary knowledge bases (Bernstein 1996). This is taken to be 'progressive'. However, widening participation in formal education by weakening the classification of knowledge in the curriculum is not necessarily progressive, unless the process is undertaken very judiciously. Bernstein argues that such curricula often fail because they cannot ultimately provide the means for success for disadvantaged learners. Thus it can be argued that the social project of the existing diploma was in many ways more progressive than the social project of RPL. It may be the case that other RPL designers and facilitators find themselves in a situation of competing 'progressive' projects. In many cases, RPL may tacitly embody a more conservative social project than the mainstream formal education it sets out to critique.

In conclusion, the foregoing discussion suggests that the idea of using RPL as a lever for change in higher education needs to be revisited. First, there may be a lot of unconscious reproductive work going on despite rhetoric to the contrary. Second, if RPL practitioners are in a marginal position they are unlikely to be able to effect change or to have the conceptual resources to do so. Third, the changes that are envisaged may have unintended consequences which run counter to the espoused social project of RPL. Finally, in terms of knowledge and power, there is a very real need to move beyond the confines of experiential learning theory in order to re-theorize RPL (see Andersson and Harris forthcoming).

Appendix I

Knowledge

- What happens to knowledge in and around RPL, and how?
- In RPL practices, (how) are distinctions made between types of knowledge, especially between formal knowledge and informal/local knowledge?
- What forms of knowledge are most highly valued in RPL processes? What are silenced?
- Do adults acquire formal knowledge informally? To what extent and under what conditions?
- What knowledge structures constitute RPL candidates' prior learning?
- Under what mainstream curricula conditions can RPL be most effective?

Pedagogy

- What do RPL facilitators and candidates do in the act of 'recognition'?
- What pedagogic styles are at work?
- What happens during reflection?
- What are the most appropriate pedagogic processes to assist RPL candidates to identify and articulate their prior learning?
- Does putting together an individual portfolio prepare a candidate for a future academic learning programme?
- Can reflection and experiential learning cycle methodologies replace formal learning via acquisition?

Learning

- Is RPL about prior learning or new learning, or both?
- Is RPL an assessment process or a learning process?
- Is there some translation of knowledge going on in RPL? If there is, what learning issues are involved?
- What theories of learning underpin RPL, e.g. in portfolio development and portfolio assessment?
- What other theories of learning could be brought to bear on RPL?
- Individual candidates' learning styles, how do they differ?

Identity

- What effect does RPL have on candidates' identities and self-perception?
- What happens to candidates and the way they come to know their experience?
- Individual candidates' journeys through the process, how do they differ?

- What understandings of 'self' are at work in and around RPL? What understandings of self are required when candidates put together a portfolio?
- What learner identities are constructed within an RPL practice? Do different aspects of an RPL process require different identity positionings?
- How do RPL practitioners see themselves? In relation to candidates, in relation to RPL and in relation to their institutional or organizational context?

Power

- Does RPL shift traditional patterns of inclusion and exclusion in education, vocational training and working life?
- Does RPL challenge assumptions about what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge has value?
- Is RPL reproductive of existing power relations?
- Is RPL a good way to increase social inclusion?
- What is the relationship between epistemological inclusion and social inclusion?
- What discourses characterize RPL? With what power-effects?

Notes

- 1 RPL is the concept used in South Africa and Australia. In the UK, the main concept is the Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (APL or APEL). Practices in the USA are referred to as Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), and in Canada as Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). In this chapter I use the term RPL, except where the use of other acronyms is important for a particular discussion.
- 2 Using the term curriculum to refer to any planned learning event.
- 3 '... the nature of the distributive rules regulates the recontextualizing rules, which in turn regulate the rules of evaluation' (Bernstein 1990: 180).
- 4 It has to be borne in mind that the RPL process took place at a time of major social and political change in South Africa. There was a powerful emphasis on re-orienting political activism to social reconstruction goals.
- 5 It is often not included in performance-based vocational standards.
- 6 This does not necessarily encompass *all* prior experiential learning, only practitioner prior experiential learning.

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Learning in the new work order

Jean Searle

Introduction

The last two decades have seen the emergence of a new body of literature, which Gee and Lankshear (1997) termed 'fast capitalist' texts, produced by business managers and consultants (for example Peters 1994; Drucker 1985; Hammer and Champy 1993). This literature introduced some of the discourses surrounding the new world of work, variously termed post-fordism, flexible production, lean production or the new work order (Adler 1992; Womack *et al.* 1990; Gee and Lankshear 1997). Similarly, recent Australian government policy and strategy documents have adopted a technicist or scientific management form of rhetoric to explain the need for industry restructure and the implementation of a training reform agenda. As few studies had focused on what this 'new capitalism' (Gee 2000) looked like in practice, this became the focus for two research projects conducted by the Queensland Centre of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC)¹ within the Civil Construction industry in Queensland, Australia. This industry was identified as being among the first to adopt the government policy of implementing training using the new training packages² to upskill the workforce. It will be argued in this chapter that while some workers viewed the training and workplace meetings as enabling, at the same time the language of social justice and democracy was co-opted by companies to achieve worker compliance and commitment. For example, workers were encouraged to 'own' training and to become 'empowered' to make decisions as members of self-monitoring workteams. As a result, there were tensions between how knowledge or learning was being constructed, by whom and for what purpose.

The initial ALNARC research project (Kelly and Searle 2000) involved on-site observations and interviews with key personnel across four companies involved in motorway construction. This research focused on the effects on learning and work outcomes, of the inclusion of literacy and numeracy competencies within workplace training. During this study, it was found that one civil construction company (to be known as Constructco) had taken the lead in implementing the civil construction training package through first, drawing up a set of training

matrices detailing the individual competencies of each company worker³ and second, developing a range of training and assessment programmes, and training products. In addition, the company appeared to be developing as a learning organization in which individual employees were allocated to project teams and encouraged to access training. Finally, in interviews with employees, there appeared to be a commitment to an increased level of training. Taken as a whole, these conditions suggested that not only did this company exhibit the characteristics of a 'high performance' workplace, it did so while adopting the technologies of training packages and frontline management programmes. For these reasons, and to maintain a measure of continuity in the research, Constructco company staff and workers were invited to collaborate further in the second research project.

A case study approach was used for the second study in order to analyse one model of what might be considered 'best practice' in the new workplace. According to Delbridge (2000: 6) best practice means working towards '... the integration of low buffered and tightly controlled technical systems with flexible, high commitment, team-based social systems that incorporate increased worker skills and involvement'. The aim was to analyse the discourses relating to learning through examining how staff employed at different levels within this company viewed the new training programme, and, in addition, to elicit understandings or assumptions about the role of literacy and numeracy within training and the organization. In order to provide a background for the ensuing discussion of these issues, concepts of Discourse/discourse (Gee 1996) and two models of literacy (Street 1996) will be introduced in the next section of this chapter. This will be followed by a description of the methodology used, while the subsequent discussion section will examine how knowledge is being constructed within this company. Further, it will be argued more broadly that the discourses of new capitalism construct literacy as being fundamental to new work practices, to the construction of knowledge and to worker identities.

The discursive context of workplace learning

In order to describe and make sense of Constructco's meaning systems and social practices with respect to training and requisite literacy and numeracy skills, company policies and industry standards were examined and interviews with company staff conducted. In addition it was necessary to analyse how these meaning systems were generated and sustained through identifying the underpinning values, as it is through values that people have the capacity to adapt to, react to, or shape an environment. A starting point for this analysis was Gee's (1996: 127) definition of Discourses as 'ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities', all of which are socially and historically constructed. Such Discourses involve many sub-Discourses made up of concrete objects (literally and metaphorically in the construction industry), for example, heavy machinery, scaffolding, site plans and signage, as well as abstract concepts such as norms, values and beliefs. Another way of looking at the company,

or the workplace Discourse, is as if it were a club, with its own set of rules about who can or cannot be a member, and how members ought to behave. These rules may or may not involve a range of 'rites of passage' or tests which serve to preserve the culture of the club while at the same time ensuring membership. Further, Gee (1996: 139) argues that these 'Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction ... but by enculturation or "apprenticeship" into social practices'. So, as we shall see, for Constructco employees this involved being inducted into the company and the company philosophy, as well as complying with company expectations, attitudes and ideologies, or risk being 'let go'.

Within the larger Discourse of the workplace there was also a range of discursive practices relating to the use of spoken and written language as texts, or 'discourses', that is, 'connected stretches of language that make sense, like conversations, stories, reports, arguments, essays ...' (Gee 1996: 127). In Constructco these discourses included pre-start check-lists and work activity briefings which, it will be argued, allowed both for the efficient work of the company and individual accountability as well as a degree of surveillance. As a result, workplace literacy has become more than an enabling skill or social practice, it also takes on a moral dimension and is intimately bound up in power relations.

One of the problems when investigating 'literacy' or 'numeracy' is that there are no universal definitions of the terms to which everyone subscribes. For politicians and many industry trainers it is useful to conceive of literacy and numeracy as sets of discrete skills which can be readily quantified, and which, when mastered would transfer to different contexts. This 'autonomous' model of literacy (Street 1996) and numeracy privileges a view of literacy and numeracy as decontextualized basic skills or 'generic competencies'. As a result, 'literacy' and 'numeracy' are seen to be technical methods of achieving practical purposes. This is the view which underpins the government's introduction of training packages. Subsequently, literacy and numeracy assessments can be undertaken to determine who needs what literacy and numeracy training either within, 'built in', or 'bolted on' to on-the-job training. However, this narrow view is contested by researchers (de Castell *et al.* 1986; Street 1996; Hull 1997; Heath 1999) who argue that literacy and numeracy are more than the sum of individual skills, they are also social practices. This 'ideological' model (Street 1996) offers a socio-cultural view of literacy and numeracy as activities which have meaning to the people who use them within the contexts in which they occur. Further, it is maintained that notions of literacy are tied up with questions of power and interest (Fairclough 2001) so certain forms of literate or numerate practice are deemed to be desirable as they maintain the social order of the workplace, for example, compliance in filling in forms, completing checklists and following instructions. But there are also certain practices which maintain the social organization of the workplace, that is, they enable employees to work collaboratively, for example at work activity briefings. Other practices, such as inductions, assist in the 'socialization' of new employees into the workplace (Gee 1996). Often the socializing nature of such discursive practices is not recognized

by supervisors and management, who tend to focus more strongly on assessable skills. It is this tension between workplace skills and workplace practices which formed the core of the research.

Case study research

The research which is reported here was based on a single case study which Feagin *et al.* (1991) argue is an appropriate methodology when a detailed, in-depth investigation is required. In this case, data were derived from an analysis of relevant company documents (with permission) and industry standards, a mapping of the company structure, and audio-taped open-ended interviews with key personnel across a range of positions within Constructco,⁴ as well as an ongoing examination of the literature relating to the changing nature of work, workplace learning, and the discursive context of workplace learning. Case study is also consistent with the ethno-methodological approach (Baker 1983, 1997; Silverman 1994, 1997) which was used to analyse interviews, and which is based on a process of induction. That is, the data were the initial focus of the study and interpretations were derived from these data (Funnell 1996). As with other qualitative methods, there was a concern to minimize subjectivity and ensure a measure of validity through triangulation with a range of data sources.

A social constructivist approach was taken to interviewing, that is, while a list of topics were offered as possibilities for discussion, the parties to the interaction were understood to *actively* (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) and cooperatively constitute the meaning that ensued. So attention was paid to both the content of the interview and the ways in which both parties interactively constructed that content.

Construed as active, the subject behind the respondent not only holds facts and details of experience but, in the very process of offering them up for response, constructively adds to, takes away from, and transforms them.
(Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 8)

Decisions regarding these additions, subtractions and transformations, and also *omissions* (Agger 1991), were based on the meaning that was both brought to the interview situation and developed as the interview evolved.

The viability of the project was initially discussed with the key informant, the Manager of Training and Development, who was responsible not only for the initiation and implementation of training within the company but also within the civil construction industry at state and national level. Subsequent interviews were then conducted by taking a vertical slice through the company, starting with company staff, for example the Systems Manager and Community Liaison Officer, the Workplace Health and Safety Officer and Trainer, the Training Coordinator for the region, then the Project Training Officers and Leading Hands who were employed as project workers and finally back to the Manager of Training and

Development. All of the tape-recordings of interviews were transcribed and copies of the transcripts were made available to the interviewees for comment, confirmation or amendment. Using a version of 'grounded theory', the transcripts were read and a number of themes that were recurrent and which reflected the research interests were identified. The transcripts were then combed to find text that focused on these themes and the text fragments were collated into separate tables which were subsequently annotated. An initial content analysis of the discourses associated with the themes, suggested that the company was developing as a learning organization, therefore the literature relating to organizational change and the characteristics of a learning organization was consulted. A second analysis of the data resulted from this step.

One of the critical tools employed in data analysis was that of membership categorization (Sacks 1967, 1972; Baker 1997).

The constitutive trait [of categorization] carries with it a cluster of related possible actions, traits, preferences, haunts, appearances, places, times, etc. It is the nucleus of other categorization-tied or relevant features which all together provide procedures for situated inferences to a host of other issues regarding category incumbents in their settinged availability.

(Jayyusi 1984: 26)

The ways that membership categories were used depended on the particular contexts of that usage. For example, in the interviews at Constructco, there was an understanding that the term 'training' had replaced the broader one of 'education' and that there was a normative dimension to this replacement. This normativity could reflect the national focus on training as presented in Industry Training Advisory Board documents such as training packages and in staff development presentations such as those based on Workplace Trainer and Assessor and Frontline Management courses. More recently, however, the concept of 'learning' had been promoted in Constructco as a preferred alternative to that of 'training' and with this promotion came a rationale based on a number of principles such as the move to becoming a 'learning organization' and the need to ensure flexibility of course components and assessment forms.

In order to conceptualize this new workplace and analyse the discourses of training and development, and worker identity within it, the following issues will be addressed: changing work conditions; characteristics of a learning organization; new types of workers; and implications for workplace learning.

Changing work conditions

The move to globalization and increased competitiveness among companies has resulted in greater demands being placed on enterprises to increase production with greater efficiency and reduced costs in terms of time, safety and potential litigation. One response has been the introduction of Japanese management systems which

include the following features: 'just-in-time (JIT) inventory, production levelling, mixed-model production, continuous improvement, visual control, errorproofing, production teams, and standardized work' (Liker *et al.* 1999). In short, these add up to 'lean production'.

Lean production is a superior way for humans to make things. It provides better products in wider variety at lower cost. Equally important, it provides more challenging and fulfilling work for employees at every level, from the factory to headquarters. It follows that the whole world should adopt lean production, and as quickly as possible.

(Womack *et al.* 1990: 225)

In the 'lean production' model control resides in three layers of management: the corporate structure and systems layer; factory organization and management (in our case the management of the construction arm of the company) and shop-floor production systems (construction teams). In addition, it is recognized that the organization exists within certain social and institutional contexts. In the case of Constructco, these institutions are politico-economic (government regulations and standards, and the broader economic climate) and the social context is that of national industry standards and the introduction of training packages. Data from the case study will be used to exemplify each of these management systems in turn.

Corporate layer

The company at the centre of this case study, Constructco, is the civil construction arm of a larger mining and construction enterprise. It was one of five companies, employing 1,760 workers overall, which were involved in the construction of a 100 kilometre motorway (and subsequent motorways). According to the company mission and policy statements, Constructco has been responsible for a range of projects that 'sustain our way of life'. The company offers a 'single-source solution' – it can design, construct, build, own, operate and maintain as well as transfer options. It also has 'single-point accountability' which is of benefit to clients. The company code of ethics includes a statement regarding the provision of opportunities for the inclusive 'our' people to develop and enhance their skills and knowledge. This is expanded upon in the corporate objectives as a principle: 'to enable our employees to develop their potential by providing appropriate training and career path development'. Meanwhile the corporate quality policy is built on maintaining and enhancing a reputation for efficiency, cost effectiveness and timeliness in the completion of contracts. A feature of the contract provisions with the state government, agreed upon by the signatory parties, was a commitment to the training of workers using the Civil Construction Training Package. We found that Constructco had taken the lead in implementing this form of training and assessment.

Organizational layer

Constructco takes a strategic approach to employee relations and targets the development and maintenance of the highest level of workforce and subcontractor performance. As a result, training assumes an extremely high profile within the company. The training and development goals of the company are to ensure that employees are 'the best they can be in their role'; to 'facilitate the rapid transfer and development of knowledge'; and 'to become a learning organization'. As a result, every employee can access formal and informal learning and skills development programmes to assist in personal and organizational development. The company itself is a Registered Training Organization and is capable of delivering nationally accredited programmes itself or in conjunction with other providers. Skills development is available in a diversity of delivery modes both on and off site.

Production systems layer (project construction teams)

This layer of the organization encompasses the on-site tools and technologies for plant operators, who typically operate a range of machines including backhoes, graders, scrapers, front-end loaders, tractors and excavators, and non-plant operators and engineers, who engage in road making and maintenance, tunnel construction, bridge building and pipe-laying. In addition, and consistent with Japanese management systems, there are well defined organizational technologies such as the rules and procedures in relation to work practices, quality standards and procedures, safety audits, check-lists and continuous improvement systems. For example, the Constructco version of continuous improvement used a cycle of 'planning, executing, checking and refining operations to improve efficiencies' (Jackson 2000: 265) all of which required an audit trail of extensive record-keeping and check-lists as part of the daily tasks of employees. Quality assurance measures included documenting compliance to standard operating procedures, documenting compliance with government and industry regulations, as well as monitoring performance and costs. The implications for workers, of the introduction of these compliance and accountability measures, will be discussed in a later section.

While it will be argued later that the company was moving towards being a learning organization, the very presence of these management layers appeared to promote top-down control within the company. Together with a number of organizational technologies, they constituted a form of imposed bureaucratic control (Edwards 1981). Other forms of control both external and internal were demonstrated through the implementation of codified systems of knowledge, with the expectation that workers will 'continuously gain and apply new knowledge to the whole work process in which they are involved' (Gee 2000: 185). This was formalized through the introduction of a training programme in which relevant competencies from the Civil Construction training package were implemented and documented using a skills matrix. But, as Darrah (1997) points out, the analysis of tasks into a set of competencies or skill requirements is problematic.

First, this is a reductionist approach which isolates those discrete skills, close to the performance of a task, which are deemed to be essential but little attention is paid to how these skills are seamlessly articulated into the actual work of a skilled worker. Second, there is an assumption that all workers require the same skill-set – in this case, Certificate Level II. Thus, although the talk is of workteams being a collective of individual team members' skills and experiences, the reality is that all are measured against each other and the matrix. Third, predetermined skill-sets may not allow for the site or context specific demands of the job, nor for seamless transfer to another project. Fourth, a focus on individual performative skills and abilities often overlooks the importance of social or 'soft' skills and literacies required in team work and engaging in people-focused activities. Often 'the person as an active, co-producer of the workplace is missing' (Darrah 1997: 252), an issue which is taken up in the following and subsequent sections.

Characteristics of a learning organization

The 'lean production' organizational model promotes workers as economic units working efficiently and productively. However, if organizations are considered as 'social constructs' then the focus shifts to exploring the social capital of individuals as meaning-makers, drawing on shared understandings of the world, in this case, the workplace. This involves both the tacit knowledge and the mental schema to make sense of that world and problem-solve. For example, workers bring sets of individual and shared values and experiences all of which might be capitalized upon when a company develops as a learning organization. According to Senge, learning organizations are,

... organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

(Senge 1990: 1)

In the new workplace, managers are required to develop collaborative workplace cultures and to take increased responsibility for the development of the individual employee as well as the organization as a whole. However, as the nature of work moves to being project based, increasingly organizational decisions are being made by project teams, and therefore the role of the manager has become one of a team 'coach' or 'champion' providing leadership, and encouraging or empowering workers in order to develop or harness their knowledge, skills and creativity (Dew 1997). In Constructco, that champion was the Manager of Training and Development, who had a vision for the industry as a whole and who was instrumental in developing the industry competencies. While the 'design' of the company becoming a learning organization was stated in the company policy and objectives, how this design was enacted became

the responsibility of personnel at all levels within the company, that is, each employee had an organizational role to play. Employees were allocated to teams: 'well for the zone, we sort of answer to one [person] but we're still working as a team' (leading hand); and not only were workers required to attend the various meetings, they were also expected to accept responsibility for the outcomes. This was formalized through a signing-off process. 'The JSAs [Job Safety Analyses] and work activity briefings, the crew actually sit down and go through them. They sign off that they agree' (Training Coordinator). As Gee (2000: 185) argues 'they are meant to proactively and continually transform and improve that work process through collaboration with others and with technology'. In this way, new workers are 'socialized' into the Discourse of the workplace, or 'community of practice' in which they collaborate in distributing roles across available tools and technologies. As a result, tacit knowledge of the company, its rules and values, is gained through immersion in work practices with each project team member being encouraged to become a mentor, while the former manager becomes the team coach.

One of the things that came out of the training summit was a brief that we will ensure that we can do everything we can to make people the best they can be in their roles. ... It's continuous improvement. Within this company it's from the very top down to the very bottom. Our Managing Director; he probably drives the culture ... but again that culture permeates down through the company. ... our supervisors, foremen and superintendents. They're pushing because it's their crews.

(Training Coordinator)

As Frenkel *et al.* (1995: 786) argue, 'the trend away from routine work towards more creative, information and people focused activity ... leads management to cede more control over the work process to employees and requires management to ensure reciprocated trust'. The data depicted in Table 12.1 is an attempt to track the 'people focused' activities at Constructco. Although the informants were not asked specifically about organizational communication or opportunities for dialogue, these activities were referred to often during the interviews. The very frequency of reference suggests that these activities have become essential enabling bureaucracies (Liker *et al.* 1999).

The activities in Table 12.1 represent some of the occasions at which workers at all levels within the company collaborate creatively in innovation and decision-making. What this actually means in practice was articulated by one of the leading hands who described a work activity briefing:

If we're starting a new job or a new task we'll have a WAB [work activity briefing] and that's where we'll sit down with the plans, the crew doing it. And ... that sorta ... covers everything from training, what equipment we're going to need, how long is it going to take us ... So you look at the plans and

Table 12.1 Workplace activities

<i>People Focused Activity</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Personnel</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Inductions	When hiring new employees	Workplace Health and Safety Officer	Induction to company, workplace health & safety
Work activity briefing (WAB)	Commencement of new job	Whole crew	Site plans, training needs, equipment
Pre-start meetings	Every morning (sometimes evening)	Leading hand to whole crew	Objectives for the day, problem solving, discussion of previous day
Pre-start check-lists	Start of shift	Individual	Equipment checks, safety checks
Task specific briefings	Start of shift	Individual	Task objectives, problem solving
Job Safety Analyses (JSAs)	Commencement of new job or task	Whole crew	Analysis of safety procedures, environmental issues
Toolbox meetings	Once a fortnight	Leading hand or foreman to crew	Job issues, safety issues

work out the whole job, how it's going and who's doing what and how we can get a bit of training – maybe swap guys around.

The crucial role of communication and literacy in understanding, recording and signing-off on these meetings will be discussed in a later section. Here it is argued that while the people focused activities might be seen as top-down bureaucracy, they also enable a shared learning environment to be developed. One method of achieving this is for the training managers to attend workplace meetings, to encourage workers to 'own' the training and to model and support learning. In summary, a learning organization is one in which the employees are continuously learning while at the same time being active in scanning and responding to the environment (internal and external) as consistent with company values and ideologies. Thus 'learning becomes the new form of labour' (Zuboff 1988: 395) and the sought-after employees are the 'knowledge workers'. But, does the new credentialism result in more knowledgeable workers? This issue will be taken up in the next section.

New types of workers

We have seen that fundamental to the development of a learning organization is the promotion of dialogue. In order to advance change within the company, it was important that workers understood that their experiences and opinions were valued. So, workers were encouraged to question and problem-solve, in the knowledge that they would receive supportive feedback. As the Safety Officer/Trainer commented, once all the industry wanted was a labourer 'from the neck

down'. Now, he encourages young workers 'to start using their heads'. So, despite training packages focusing on competence relating to performative skills, there has been a shift in training from a focus on 'doing' skills to high-order 'thinking' skills. In addition, there has been a transfer in conceptualizing the new 'model' worker from a focus on 'ability' in terms of knowledge, dexterity and experience, to a focus on the 'willing' worker who is motivated and identifies with company values (Flecker and Hofbauer 1998). This was evident in the transcripts of interviews from the Systems Manager (see below) and the regional Training Coordinator (see previous extract), who both spoke about a culture of 'continuous improvement':

We ... have a very strong push on training with Constructco and it's been evident in our motorway project...it hasn't happened overnight with the company, that we have a culture of training and a will and desire and in fact our supervisors are trained to make that part of their repertoire ... time is made available to train our employees so we get better outcomes at the end of the day. ... And it comes from people...very high up in our organization, that have the vision to see that this is something that is worth investing in. ... And by doing that and allocating that resource you've then got a dedicated person, well trained, well skilled, well versed and experienced in that sector.

Each of the extracts demonstrates the ownership of training in this company through use of the inclusive 'we', the repetition of the commitment to a 'culture of training' and the reference to this being a 'visionary' project. Further, this commitment results in a positive outcome which takes the form of a 'dedicated, well trained, well versed and experienced' employee. Thus workers are selected and promoted not only on the basis of their technical competence but also on individual performance, commitment, loyalty and compliance with company values as evidenced by the following statement by the Constructco Safety Officer.

We had another Superintendent that came from an outside company and it just didn't work out. He didn't follow the [Constructco] philosophy and wanted to do his own thing... so they decided that perhaps he wasn't the man for them. [Constructco] wasn't the company for him.

As a result, individual workers must be prepared to reposition themselves, to reshape their identities, behaviour and mental/emotional dispositions as part of organizational socialization. In Constructco, engagement in organizational activities is seen as worker empowerment, the importance of which is described in the following excerpt in which the Manager of Training and Development articulates his vision for the success of the work activity briefings:

Now, that's pushed that right down and gained ownership. Everybody in that team is then empowered, in fact, to do that because it's been discussed, it's been signed off. They physically sign it off, as you know. So that then

empowers people to take action without having to wait and be directed as long as it's actually in line with that plan.

Increasingly, the responsibility for compliance to industry standards, to workplace health and safety requirements and environmental legislation is pushed onto workers. There is an expectation that workers will take on these new responsibilities, but in addition, that they will need less supervision and be able to internalize their new roles in the workforce. They will, in fact, be 'empowered' to make decisions. Thus management and workers will together transform the workplace.

After reengineering, work becomes more satisfying, since workers achieve a greater sense of completion, closure, and accomplishment from their jobs ... work becomes more rewarding since people's jobs have a greater component of growth and learning. ... People working in reengineering processes are, of necessity, empowered. As process teamworkers they are both permitted and required to think, interact, use judgement and make decisions.

(Hammer and Champy 1993: 69–70)

Thus, workers are being directed to change from being 'constructors of knowledge' affected by but fundamentally not part of their environment, to become 'enterprising selves' being responsive, adaptable and flexible, engaging in work learning as 'changing participation in the culturally designed settings of everyday life' (Lave 1993: 5–6). So, the discourse of worker 'empowerment' at Constructco, while giving space for worker innovation and participation in decision-making, is at the same time constrained by a range of guiding mechanisms, a recycling of Weber's 'iron cage of control' (Barker 1993). With the introduction of workteams, the locus of control has shifted from management to workers – a form of 'concertive control' (Hirschhorn and Mokray 1992). Not only are worker identities being shaped by the company mission statement but they are also constrained by compliance with normative practices and controls as part of internal audit trails.

Further, studies by Hull (1997) and Darrah (1997) indicate that some workplace practices are highly contested. For example, access to knowledge, learning, guidance and support is not equitably distributed. Access depends on compliance with company values or potential, either as a member of staff, or as a 'core' project worker. Gee and Lankshear (1997) refer to core workers as 'enchanted' (as in 'under a spell') workers. That is, as project workers they have a 'portfolio' of skills and knowledge and a willingness to comply with company systems and values. They are therefore able to market their skills and knowledge in order to move on to new projects. At Constructco, the concept of 'core worker' was defined by an engineer as being those workers 'that know our systems, understand our work ethic and culture, and help disseminate that to others that work in and around them'. Given that work in this industry is essentially project based, then taken a step further, workers who build up a portfolio of skills should find it much easier to move from project to project – a seamless movement of qualified workers across

industry sectors. However, in practice it is not that simple. There is no guarantee that the company will sustain them in the long term, or that their portfolio of skills are those required on the next project. They could be replaced by a different team with a different skill mix. Also for project workers there is an increased blurring between their public 'company' lives and their private lives, as they have to choose whether to take their families with them as they move geographically to another project, or go without them. But, as indicated earlier, while these core workers are likely to be employed on projects, increasingly the company is outsourcing work to subcontractors and labour hire firms. In general, these 'disenchanted' workers do not have access to the same social capital as training includes competencies assessed on-the-job. The apparent paradox was identified by O'Connor who argued,

In order to achieve maximum flexibility, companies will increasingly [subcontract] a range of functions, and further reduce and segment their workforce by maintaining a core workforce which is multi-skilled, flexible, and can be used across operational functions, and a peripheral workforce which is more disposable, based on part-time and temporary work, short term individual contracts, and fewer employment rights and entitlements ...

(O'Connor 1994: 13)

At Constructco, some subcontracted workers are offered training (if their employers are prepared to pay for it) but most are excluded, as are hired labour. This has enormous implications for these workers. In an aside, one of the trainers commented that unless workers achieve basic qualifications at Certificate Level II within the next two years, they would become virtually unemployable, a fact that was recognized by the Systems Manager who stated '... and we need to find ways that we can actually include others outside our own direct employees, employed in the same process'. Hammer and Champy (1993: 70) summarized the situation as,

If the old model was simple jobs for simple people, the new one is complex jobs for smart people, which raises the bar for entry into the workforce. Few simple, routine, unskilled jobs are to be found in a reengineered environment.

Thus, non-core workers are likely to become the displaced, marginalized or 'disenchanted' workers (Gee and Lankshear 1997).

Implications for workplace learning

So far, we have examined the workplace from a fast-capitalist perspective in terms of lean production, and second in terms of social capital. Now we will take a critical stance. Viewed from a 'political' perspective, the organization might be seen as a site of struggle between competing interests and identities. One apparent contradiction lies in the difference between the 'symbolic reality' of the company

mission statements and the 'material reality' of organizational relationships. We have seen how the company discourse includes 'empowering' workers but in practice this means they take on more tasks, demanding higher order skills and responsibilities, but have little opportunity to influence strategic directions. Further, based on the evidence from the transcripts, it could be argued that while the company is focused on transformation through developing as a learning organization, it is still mainly a top-down approach.

But it's not all negative. From the workers' point of view the introduction of competency-based training has meant that their skills are being recognized, often for the first time. Workers who previously had not considered any form of training now saw that a pathway was available and achievable. They could talk to others about their progress on the matrix and how their training might be extended. For the first time, some project workers had received a certificate and several informants commented on the difference this made in terms of self-confidence.

So, for some workers, gaining qualifications is transformative. The opportunity to be part of a team, to be engaged in decision-making (albeit with constraints) has on the whole been greeted enthusiastically. They know that the bottom line is to make a profit, to be efficient, safe, and not damage the environment but most comply willingly. As one of the leading hands pointed out,

You've got to have a certain standard that you're meeting with your workforce. If you haven't got that standard there, then you get a lot of re-working. You have to spend more time relaying the instructions and it all comes back to time management.

This then relates to workplace communication. We have already seen how each employee from project manager to leading hand, is encouraged to contribute to workplace activities but must 'sign-off' as accepting individual responsibility. In terms of worker literacy, this is not only about being able to participate successfully in what is considered a learning organization but there are also socio-legal implications. For Constructco, literacy is seen as an enabling skill, useful to maintain the social order of the workplace. For example, the Systems Manager, when commenting on the need for good communication skills, suggests that

... good communication skills still remain a core basic requirement for a good outcome, and we've got things like work activity briefings, Job Safety Analyses that we do. We record or document those, and more and more we're trying to thrust that responsibility back down the workforce, to the people that carry out the work.

So, on the one hand there is a need for good communication skills but on the other hand, earlier in the interview the manager had stated that there was a greater need for 'practical' skills in the workforce. Paradoxically, at a later stage in the interview, the manager argued that 'back down the workforce' workers required

literacy and numeracy skills. He described the situation as 'frightening' and how you 'have to be selective' because 'a lack of literacy and numeracy skills will put a platform on just how far you can go'. Lack of literacy skills was also seen by the Project Training Officer to be a concern in relation to accountability, '... the more and more we ask people to fill out forms because of safety and environmental legislation etcetera, etcetera, and quality assurance as well, I think we'll really open up a can of worms'. He also referred to 'handpick[ing] our own workforce', that is, using written assessments as a screening measure. If workers 'struggle to put their thoughts on paper', they will take 'too long to do training'. Further, 'these guys have to fill out and sign dockets and all that sort of thing. You tend to pick up quite quickly who's literate and who can't do the job'. In these extracts from interviews it is apparent that there is a slippage between communication as a social practice and the necessity for workers to have the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in order to comply with audit requirements and to progress with training. There is also a tension between the stated objectives of becoming a learning organization and the 'accepted evil' of having to 'teach these people how to read and write'.

From the above, it appears that the Project Training Officer espouses a deficit view of the literacy skills of his workforce. His focus is on the apparent lack of basic reading and writing skills required to accomplish certain workplace tasks. However, it is also clear from the talk of the Training Coordinator that an autonomous view of literacy relates to other core values such as cost effectiveness:

I mean we've spent x amount of dollars developing all these training manuals, it's no good if 90% of the guys out there can't read and write, is it? You've wasted your time and money. ... The first round were paper based, book based, now we're starting to get them on CD Rom ... all that sort of thing.

It can be seen from this excerpt that literacy is perceived to be an autonomous skill which a worker requires prior to training – the 'bolted-on' approach referred to earlier in the chapter. Further, the crucial role of literacy in relation to workplace health and safety, and assessment of risk, is indicated in the following interview extract:

Pre-start checks for equipment. A bloke gets on a dozer in the morning, he does his pre-start bla bla bla and away he goes. Now again if he has literacy problems, is he actually understanding what is supposed to be in there or is he ticking the box so it keeps him out of trouble?

(Training Coordinator)

But it is not just a question of de-coding or 'understanding what it says on paper'. In the 'high performance' workplace the bottom line is getting the job done, right the first time, safely, thus reducing costs. In Freebody and Luke's (1990) terms, workers are required to go beyond being 'code breakers', they must be proficient 'text users', knowing how to read a range of texts for different purposes, as well

as being 'text participants', able to contribute to the work activity briefings with the engineer, project manager and other team members. So, from an ideological perspective, literacy is also about being able to participate successfully in what is considered 'workplace communication'. It has been shown that together with the company focus on developing a training culture, there is also a strong emphasis on workplace communication as a means of ensuring that everyone working on a project is fully informed about the project and each employee, from project manager to project worker, is encouraged to contribute to the discussion. The activities documented in Table 12.1 are examples of how workers are 'socialized' into specific workplace practices and we have seen that these literate practices are recognized by the Systems Manager as 'communication skills': 'Communication skills still remain a core basic requirement for a good outcome'. Further, these practices are recognized by supervisors and management as important elements in quality assurance, risk assessment and in developing as a learning organization. However, the literacy skills and practices involved are either assumed or neatly glossed under the generic competence, 'Carry out interactive workplace communication'. So, although literacy and numeracy training occurred in relation to industry competencies, the literacies required to participate in workplace activities and auditing processes were not addressed. As a result, workers needed to be mentored in order to understand and use the appropriate social literacies which were required for successful engagement in work practices, including workplace communication meetings. Further, it is contended that additional literacies would be critical to the maintenance of the social order within the workplace. As 'text analysts', (Freebody and Luke 1990) workers will be reflecting on their new roles within the learning organization, as a team member, problem-solver, or workplace mentor, or perhaps their position in relation to the company values.

With the move towards developing a learning culture within the workplace there is a necessity for all workers to engage in a range of communicative activities and learn new literacy practices. The implementation of new structures has resulted in increased responsibility being pushed onto the individual worker, while at the same time, increasing the audit/paper trail of accountability. Constructco has adopted the discourse of 'empowerment' and 'developing a learning organization' where everyone has a role and aims 'to be the best they can be'. But while this may appear to be transforming it can also be constraining, as with this new discourse comes the increased responsibility for productivity, safety and accountability. It is also noticeable that alongside the 'enchanted' language, exists the negative, horror discourse of illiteracy: being 'frightening', 'an accepted evil', a 'threat', or like 'opening up a can of worms'. This discourse represents the dark side of fast-capitalism. Entry-level workers who 'struggle to put their thoughts on paper' or (il)literate subcontracted and hired labour are positioned as being of little value to the company. In turn, this will result in increasing numbers of second class workers or an underclass of the unemployed. This is not to say that lack of literacy causes unemployment, but that the new high performance workplaces which demand just-in-time efficiencies, productivity and accountability are also sites of increased textualization. So, not only do workers

require the enabling underpinning literacy and numeracy skills to access and engage in training, they also need to be proficient in the literate practices associated with the new work order. It must be recognized that these essential literacies play a crucial role in the socialization of workers into the communities of practice and the distributed literacy knowledges valued by members of the Constructco Discourse. Further, they can only be acquired through enculturation or 'apprenticing' (Gee 1996) employees into the discourses of the workplace. Workplace learning, both informal and formal, is at the heart of this process.

Conclusion

It has been argued that the new high performance workplace is characterized by a bureaucratic system of top-down control while at the same time adopting the discourses of empowering workers through becoming a learning organization. Further, there is an apparent contradiction between codifying, measuring and auditing skills and knowledge, and rewarding workers with their skills passports. There is also a similar paradox in empowering workers to make decisions as participants in 'people focused activities', which are related to the implementation of pre-designed company policies, while at the same time requiring them to be self-regulating and legally responsible for their actions. Gee and Lankshear (1997) argue that the response to global economic pressure is to produce 'cleverer' workers who have developed high-order thinking skills, situated expertise, the ability to problem-solve and 'learn to learn', and who are therefore economically more productive.

The logic of the new work order is that the roles and responsibilities of the middle [management] will pass to the 'front-line workers' themselves... Workers will be transformed into committed 'partners' who engage in meaningful work, fully understand and control their jobs, supervise themselves and actively seek to improve their performance through communicating clearly their knowledge and needs.

(Gee and Lankshear 1997: 85)

While this company appears to be moving towards a collective vision – the development of a learning culture, based on the valuing of new forms of 'human capital' – this is explicitly linked to the necessity for improved, visible outcomes for the company. Some workers appeared to be pleased that their skills were being recognized formally, however, not all were convinced about participation in the reorganization of work. As a result there is still a question over whether workers' lives, or individual 'selves' have been or will be transformed.

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Notes

- 1 Copyright © 2001 Commonwealth of Australia. Funded under the ANTA Adult Literacy National Project by the Commonwealth through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- 2 Training packages are sets of industry competency standards and assessments which relate to the Australian Qualifications and Training Framework (AQTF).
- 3 In Constructco a distinction was made between company 'staff' and 'workers'.
- 4 Owing to the transient nature of project work, those interviewed were employed staff and project workers, from the Manager of Training and Development to leading hands, but not subcontractors or hired labour.

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Lifelong learning reaching regions

Where other learning doesn't reach

Kate Sankey and Mike Osborne

Introduction

In this chapter we present an analysis of the use of self-audit tools that seek to monitor and measure the contribution of various stakeholders to the development of the lifelong learning region. This material is based upon research work undertaken within a European Commission (EC) programme, *European Networks to Promote the Local and Regional Dimension of Lifelong Learning (The 'R3L' Initiative)* (EC 2002a). The initiative as a whole consisted of 17 projects, and we present findings from a part of one project, *ELLECTROnet: European Lifelong Learning Expertise for Cities, Towns and Regions' Organizational Networks*.¹

Immediately upon introducing this aim, a number of conceptual issues arise, most notably what is understood by the concept of the 'lifelong learning region', who are the 'stakeholders' and what is the feasibility of measuring contributions to the development of the lifelong learning region.

Background to R3L and learning regions

The concepts of 'learning region' and 'learning city' are closely associated. The concept of the 'educating city' is longstanding and is associated with a well-known OECD (1973) initiative. The term 'learning city' became more popular parlance in the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting a more general tendency to emphasize the agency of both economic and social actors, and throughout the world there are cities using this nomenclature. The UK's Learning City Network (DfEE 1998) offers a useful overarching definition of the concept in stating that:

Using lifelong learning as an organizing principle and social goal, Learning Cities promote collaboration of the civic, private, voluntary and education sectors in the process of achieving agreed upon objectives related to the twin goals of sustainable economic development and social inclusiveness.

(DfEE 1998)

The learning city and the learning region are now often used interchangeably, and in more recent work of the OECD (2001), it is the regional dimension that is emphasized. Within the R3L initiative the notion of a *learning region* extends the learning city in scale and scope and is seen generically as referring to a region, city, urban or rural area, regardless of whether its identity is defined in administrative, cultural, geographical, physical or political terms. The impetus of the particular initiative came initially from the TELS (Towards a European Learning Society) project (Longworth 2000), which surveyed 80 European municipalities from 14 countries by measuring their progress towards becoming 'Learning Cities, Towns and, in some cases, Regions' in 10 domains and 28 sub-domains of their learning activities.² To take an example, one of these domains is 'Partnerships and Resources' (Longworth 2000). It is measured by the 'extent to which links between different sectors of the city (or region) have been encouraged and enabled, and their effectiveness'. This measure is concerned with links between schools, colleges, business and industry, universities, professional associations, special interest groups, local government and other organizations and includes physical and human resource sharing, knowledge generation and mobilization of various forms of resource. Its three sub-domains are partnership types, use for new resources and combining existing resources.

The TELS project produced ten major recommendations³ for the continuation of learning city and region work and these were incorporated into a European policy document (Longworth 2001), which in turn stimulated the work of R3L. It is the fourth recommendation of the TELS report, 'the development of Indicators which measure and monitor aspects of the growth of Learning Cities and the Learning Society and initiate surveys and studies on these in and across member states', that the Indicators project addresses.

In the call to invite bids to deliver R3L projects, the EC (2002a) also specifically made a link to its own *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (EC 2000). This document speaks of the transformation of the concept of lifelong learning into 'concrete reality' and thus the R3L call suggests that in order to do so there is a requirement that there should be a

... mobilization of all 'players' involved in ascertaining learning needs, opening up learning opportunities for people of all ages, ensuring the quality of education and training provision, and making sure that people are given credit for their knowledge, skills and competences, wherever and however these may have been acquired.

(EC 2002a: 1)

Co-operation and partnership between decision-makers, a variety of providers in the formal and non-formal sectors, social partners and citizens are emphasized in achieving this objective. It is also argued by the EC (2002a: 1) that 'intensified partnership and networking' is most beneficial 'if it is implemented close to

the learners themselves – in the particular social, geographical and economic environments in which Europe's citizens live'.

Thus at a European level from a policy perspective we have seen, since the publication of the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, increasing emphasis on regional and local levels of governance and the provision of services, including those of education and training 'close to the ground'. The R3L call explicitly states that:

The Memorandum therefore sees mobilizing regional and local authorities, but also civil society organizations and associations, in support of lifelong learning as essential, and regards 'lifelong learning as the driver for local and regional regeneration'.

(EC 2002a: 1)

From this brief introduction to the EC policy context, a multiple set of perspectives of the measures of a (lifelong) learning region begin to emerge. These reflect the range of ways in which the learning region has been conceived in both economic and social development terms by a number of researchers. There is clearly no one definition of what constitutes a learning region, though Larsen (1999: 73) helpfully suggests that 'the concept draws on theories about innovation and systems that promote innovation', and that learning cities and regions place innovation at the core of development. This is the basis in the European Union for the Innovative Regions in Europe (IRE) Network⁴ within which the development of an innovative culture as a central element of economic competitiveness at regional level is seen as key.

Wolfe (2002) suggests that the learning region provides the right institutional environment to promote private and social learning at four scales: individual; company; groups of companies; government. For Florida (1995 and 2000) the concept refers to knowledge and structures; learning regions are seen as collectors and repositories of knowledge and ideas that provide an underlying environment or infrastructure, which facilitates the flow of knowledge and ideas.

Hofmaier (2003) usefully summarizes six distinctions between a 'mass production region' and a 'learning region'. The latter has, as the basis of its competitiveness, sustainable advantage based on 'knowledge creation' and 'continuous improvement'. Its production system is one of 'continuous creation' with 'knowledge as source of value' and with 'synthesis of innovation and production'. Third, its manufacturing infrastructure consists of 'firm networks and supplier systems as sources of innovation'. Its human infrastructure is that of 'knowledge workers' and there is an emphasis on 'continuous improvement of human resources' and 'continuous education and training'. Its physical and communication infrastructure is 'globally oriented and based on electronic data exchange'. Finally, its industrial governance system is one of mutual dependency based on 'network organization' and a 'flexible regulatory framework'.

Clearly then it is the economic imperative that has dominated much of the thinking in relation to learning regions, but at the same time there is a recognition that learning fundamentally is not simply an individual act, but it is a social process. The 'social' is fundamental in conceptualizing the learning region, and it is closely associated with notions of 'social capital'. Highly dynamic regional economies that capitalize upon local assets within their region, according to some commentators (see Cooke 1997), create competitive advantage. This relates to a large extent to particular social, cultural and institutional networks based upon mutuality and trust that thrive within regional settings where individuals and organizations are in close and frequent contact (see Storper 1997). As Putnam (1993) states:

social capital refers to features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit. Social capital enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital and is coming to be seen as a vital ingredient in economic development around the world.

(Putnam 1993: 38)

The concepts of social capital and trust, and the role played by co-operative and collective learning is also highlighted by commentators such as Asheim (1998); the focus in such an interpretation is the ability to link together co-operative relationships between a wide range of social actors in regional development coalitions.

It is notable that up to this point our discussion largely pertains to the 'learning region' rather than the 'lifelong learning region', though the 'lifelong' concept is embedded in a number of models. As is very well known there has been much critical discussion of the emergence of lifelong learning as a policy driver for education and training in the late twentieth century (see Bagnall 2001; Boshier 2001; Coffield 2000; Duke 2001 and Field 2000). Elsewhere, drawing on these and other authors, we have suggested that 'lifelong learning has lost any narrow definition around age, purpose or location' (Osborne 2003: 15–30). It is understood rather as learning across the lifespan, learning related to employment-related skills *and* other aspects of living, and learning within various sites and spheres of living, the *lifewide* dimension (see Cropley 1981: 189; Schuetze and Slowey 2000: 11). These senses of *lifelong* learning thus provide added perspectives to the learning region concept, and EC policy has cogently highlighted the relationship, and argued that in itself lifelong learning is the driver for local and regional regeneration. Furthermore it has put emphasis on the role of particular stakeholders, the most important of which have been local and regional authorities. In introducing the R3L initiative, Alan Smith (2003) of the EC argued that these bodies 'provide the infrastructure of access to lifelong learning, including childcare, transport and social welfare services. Mobilizing the resources of regional and local authorities in support of lifelong learning is therefore essential'.

The stakeholders

Irrespective of whether the focus is economic or social, and of course these are not mutually exclusive objectives, there is no doubt that the learning region has considerable resonance, and at a European level is perceived to have a number of advantages. In the call for R3L proposals, four principal reasons for a focus on the learning region were outlined:

- Mobilization of all actors
 - To assess learning needs
 - To open opportunities for all
 - To provide flexible mechanisms for credit
- Closer co-operation and partnership
 - Formal, non-formal and informal
 - Local and regional government
 - Associations, NGOs, social partners
- Local Decision-making
- Services close to the ground with 'lifelong learning as the driver for local and regional regeneration'.

There are of course limitations to the use of the learning region as a concept. There are for example a multiplicity of geographical regions within which particular stakeholders might act. Furthermore with advances in the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), for many potential stakeholders the region is a virtual entity. In our understanding and interpretation of the region as a concept we have attempted to take into account such issues.

The focus of the work described within this chapter pertains to aspects of the first two reasons referred to above. We start from the premise that at a regional level a range of actors play a role in the development of lifelong learning, and that there are inevitable and highly desirable interactions between them. We have identified five principal actors, but it is important to note that these are not the only contributors to the development of a lifelong learning region. It is simply that the scope of our project has not allowed us to extend our work beyond the regional authority, universities, adult education establishments, schools and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Measurement

There has been much discussion of the question of *measurement* in the field of lifelong learning (Eurostat 2001).⁵ Whilst a number of datasets and tools exist that aid the measurement of activities that contribute to formal, non-formal and informal learning, this is a multifarious and complex task with major problems of comparability at an international level.⁶ At the European Union level the ultimate goal has been to establish an integrated statistical system that would

combine information coming from different sources to provide a global overview of lifelong learning. A working group on *Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning* was established in 2001 (EC 2002b) and 15 quality indicators in four areas were chosen: skills, competencies and attitudes; access and participation; resources for lifelong learning; and strategies and system development. Much of this work largely focuses on quantitative measures. Our work does not focus on this form of quantitative measurement, although it is clearly valuable to establish meaningful numerical measures of progress. Rather it concentrates on linkages and processes in organizations.

Hofmaier (2003) argues that most studies of national and regional innovation systems are static and focus on structure rather than processes. Mothe and Paquet (1998: 2), by contrast to many researchers, use a framework entitled 'process rather than structure' (PRTS) and argue that innovation processes are 'dynamized in a fundamental way by a complex multilogue, which weaves the various partners together'. In our study we are concerned with both aspects of organizations in the context of the contribution of stakeholders in the lifelong learning region, but we, like Mothe and Paquet, focus on process. In relation to policy at a European level, our work pertains most closely to aspects of the fifteenth of the lifelong learning indicators, quality assurance, which is concerned with the quality of product and the process that leads to the product.

Our methods seek to elucidate from the perspective of stakeholders their perceptions of how well they are progressing against a set of indicators. In this sense our work has some similarity to the work of Keating *et al.* (2002) in Australia that has sought to describe and analyse the progress of Victoria as a learning region within the context of international developments and benchmarks, in particular those set by the OECD (2001).

In our work, the instruments chosen to deliver the indicators were known as 'Stakeholder Audits'. These are carefully worded, interactive documents that enable respondents to understand the many basic elements of lifelong learning as it affects their organization, and to convert this new knowledge into actions that will implement its concepts both internally within the organization (i.e. turn it into a learning organization) and externally (i.e. work with other organizations to help build a learning society, a learning city or a learning region within the geographical area where the organization resides). Stakeholder Audits are much more than questionnaires. The objective is as much to give insights and knowledge and provoke reflection as to gather data (though this is a desirable spin-off). The audit was therefore designed to perform several tasks:

- to establish a 'dialogue' between the designer and the respondent.
- to provide access to a range of lifelong learning policy contexts and experiences that will provoke knowledge transfer and reflection.
- to allow the opinions, experiences and ideas of the respondent to be internalized and expressed in the context of organizational change towards a lifelong learning region.

- to act as a staff training stimulator, for example as the basis for focus group discussion on particular topics and as indicators of the need for change.
- to provide ideas for the development of innovative internal policies and strategies to accommodate lifelong learning organization principles.
- to energize stakeholders to contribute to lifelong learning region development according to their role and ability.

With these requirements in mind ‘Stakeholder Audits’ were developed through a staged process with five separate audits for schools, universities, small companies, adult education colleges and for local and regional authority administrations being produced.

Stage 1 – Lifelong learning concepts as expressed in a range of literatures by a number of researchers drove the initial development of indicators. These concepts may be expressed briefly as *lifelong* (i.e. cradle to grave), *learner-centred* (i.e. focused on the needs and demands of the learner) and *for all* (i.e. increasing accessibility and participation for everyone). ‘Active Citizenship’ in the community, in the organization and in the wider world also drove the indicator audit development. A comprehensive list of topics was covered in each audit. The topics which were included are discussed in terms of their contribution as key indicators for the stakeholders’ progress in their journey towards a lifelong learning region.

Stage 2 – Audit developers worked with key individuals in their own municipalities and within stakeholders to identify and exchange ideas on need, development and local content, and to establish the relationships that would aid the field-testing of outputs. Cognisance was also taken of work that had already been carried out in other European expertise centres and projects so as to solicit their views, experiences and opinions.

Stage 3 – Initial versions of audit tools in both short and long form were piloted with relevant stakeholders, results of these field trials were analysed and refinements to the tools were made as appropriate.

Stage 4 – One audit tool (that designed for the use of regional authorities) was developed for web-based delivery within the VCP platform used by the related R3L Promotor project.⁷

Stakeholder audits as a tool for understanding and agreeing on a common purpose – some initial findings

Different stakeholders are to a greater or lesser extent engaged in the lifelong learning agenda as defined by the EC. A clear finding is the role of the local authority/ municipality as a stakeholder, which is pivotal, in particular its vital symbiotic partnerships with all the other stakeholders. However, we offer selected findings to illustrate the key issues facing selected stakeholders in being part of a ‘lifelong learning region’ and consider problems of the operationalization of the audit approach across the European regions of the project.

The school

The school as a stakeholder in the 'lifelong learning region' is particularly challenging. For a variety of social, cultural and political reasons, they are latecomers to the lifelong learning agenda, although they are viewed as key institutions in the development of a lifelong learning society (see for example Scottish Executive 2004) within which learning for citizenship and civic engagement are core components (Alvarez *et al.* 2003). Furthermore schools are viewed as one starting point for the enhancement of social capital, and as a consequence as a locus for combating exclusion and inequity in society more generally. An example of this is the New Community Schools initiative in the UK (Sammons *et al.* 2000). However, in many countries, commonly espoused principles of lifelong learning, such as ensuring ownership of learning, focusing on the needs of the learner, individualized approaches based on learner demand, continuous improvement programmes for all staff and a community inclusion function, are not yet part of practice in the schools sector.

The comprehensive list of parameters explored through the audit process for schools included:

- School leadership and lifelong learning including the extent to which the school is itself a 'learning organization' and the management and organizational changes it has made to accommodate this;
- The community in the school and the school in the community, exploring all aspects of the school's relationship with people and organizations in the community within which it resides;
- The curriculum for a Learning Age and the methodologies adopted by the school, including support structures, ownership issues, inclusion issues, learning styles and assessment methods;
- Communicating the school's message and its internal and external communication structures to convey the excitement of learning to staff, students and the community at large;
- Continuous improvement strategies for staff and students including teacher development for an expanded role;
- The effective use of technology in the school, including networking with other schools, using the internet and multimedia learning technologies.

In the project, the partner leading our work in the schools sector was the University of Catania, Sicily and here nine schools were selected for the testing of the audit tool and associated interviews. These schools comprised three middle schools, five high schools with particular specialist roles (known as *Liceo*, *Classico*, *Magistrale*, *Tecnico*, *Industriale*) and one private high school. In France, five secondary schools, and in Ireland, a primary school (4–13 age range) and a secondary school (13–18 age range) took part in the study.

In Sicily, the concepts of lifelong learning were reported as important where they affected collaboration with other organizations and people in the locality

such as families, local authorities, businesses, the university and other bodies. The audit provided the headteachers with a valuable space for reflection on their school's responsibilities to their students and to the world outside of the school. Moreover it led to a general questioning of the role and deficiencies of the existing educational system, both regional and national. The French and Irish headteachers showed a similar reaction commenting that the audit had helped to clarify thinking on a number of aspects concerning the future of school education and management and introduced new topics for discussion. The Audit enabled schools to record and organize activity that contributes to the 'lifelong learning region'. This highlighted for the French schools the difficulty in implementing lifelong learning solutions, largely because of the lack of options imposed by a centrally organized system, and the implied danger of these activities 'getting in the way' of achieving nationally set goals. For example only one school used the talents of local people to enhance the curriculum. In both Ireland and France the centralized imposition of a full curriculum leaves little scope for innovation. Equally the professional training of teachers was noted as an area that a school was unable to influence.

The implications raised by the audit of lifelong learning principles for new and active relationships between the school and its pupils, parents, community and staff were seen to challenge the way that the school as an organization operated. Giving pupils a proactive role and involving parents, families and the community in the life of the school was considered highly desirable by the Italian and French headteachers but was not yet an accepted or normal practice. This highlights the problem of introducing ideas surrounding lifelong learning to a sector which operates within a school curriculum-centred structure. In Ireland the situation is different. Community is very much a part of the culture of schools, and schools are the focal point for, and in many ways drivers of, community activities. Links between the university and the local education authority are strong and community groups make extensive use of the premises of both schools in the project. The secondary school has links with industry through its 'transition year' programme.

Values such as tolerance, understanding of other cultures and the ability to learn with pupils of other ethnic groups and countries are considered by all headteachers to be a central element of a good curriculum. Actual practice was not necessarily evident, though examples included an open access policy and additional extra-curricular programmes to confront social justice issues. Strategies to combat violence and racism have been adopted in all Italian schools and five of the schools included activities to protect the environment and to foster equal opportunities.

We can say that much of the good practice and commitment given to the issues are indicators of the school's role in a lifelong learning region. However, without the overall policy commitment and an acknowledgement of lifelong learning as a common purpose from national agencies that control the curriculum, teacher training and resources, schools are unable fully to fulfil this potential.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as stakeholders in a lifelong learning region presented different challenges. This is a target audience that may not normally believe itself to have a role in the building of a learning region. Indeed there are real problems in convincing SMEs to introduce a lifelong learning culture within the company itself because of the stresses of daily operational demands and pressures of workload (see Gibb 1993; Seagraves *et al.* 1996; Bridge *et al.* 1998; Ram 2000). Consequently, much of the learning that is done in SMEs is more likely to be unplanned and informal, and tailored more to daily operational demands (Westhead and Storey 1999; Gibb 1999; Gray 1999).

SMEs do, however, in the interests of survival in a harsh competitive world, have a need to keep up to date with the latest challenges and to develop internal human resource and learning development strategies that will enable a company and its people to learn continuously and remain competitive. In that sense the company has a self-interest in ensuring that it can draw the things it needs from the resources of the locality, region and indeed world. These include:

- A flow of potential recruits who are creative, adaptable, flexible and versatile enough to be willing to continue learning throughout life;
- Links to other regions which offer potential marketplaces for their products;
- The support of local politicians and professionals in the local and regional authorities;
- Access to the services that would enable them to continue to develop;
- Continuing education and training facilities for their workforce to develop cutting edge skills and competences, and a knowledge of opportunities that may be available to them for further growth of both industries and people.

The rationale therefore for including SMEs was that they would benefit significantly from inhabiting an area that exhibits all the characteristics of a learning region as they are defined for the Indicators project. In return, of course, the sector would be expected to contribute some of its own expertise and resources in order to support the well-being of the region. Such a symbiotic relationship is the hallmark of all sectoral activities in a learning region.

For small businesses this has important implications and benefits. The prosperity of a region depends upon the ability of industry to create wealth and the basic fuel of a knowledge society is learning. SMEs have much to contribute and much to gain from an active partnership with local government and other local and regional organizations to help create the sort of vibrant learning society that will deliver more skilful, productive and fulfilled people.

The specific parameters explored through the audit relating to the generic objectives included were:

- The company as a 'learning organization' and how its profitability is related to the continuous or lifelong learning of its workforce;
- The company's relationship to the learning city and region – how it becomes a valuable and valued member of the local community and both receives and makes a contribution to its growth as a learning region;
- The company and the learning habit – why, who, where and how it encourages and facilitates continuous learning among its staff;
- The company and learning support – the incentives, rewards and support that the workforce receives in order to encourage it to continue learning.

The lead partner was the Akershus University College in the Drammen region of Norway. The short version of the Stakeholder Audit was used with all the SMEs which participated since it proved difficult to find a company that was active in the process of formulating strategies and policies during the project year and thus was able to engage in depth with the Indicators project.

In Ireland, in particular, the threat from multinationals to locally grown SMEs involved in the manufacturing sector and the knowledge economy was highlighted. In the University of Limerick, the Programme for University Industry Interface (PUII)⁸ specifically seeks to address these issues by identifying the skill sets and technical competencies needed by individuals to guarantee the future economic development of Ireland, using the communities of practice model based on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991).

Our respondents in all countries indicated that as a consequence of national policies and imperatives such as the knowledge based economy, knowledge and competitiveness, mobility and knowledge intensive products and services, lifelong learning concepts were seen as closely allied to those of continuing vocational adult training and employability. SMEs have strong supporting networks through local Chambers of Commerce and the Local Authorities Enterprise Boards where a number of formal training initiatives have been established.

All SMEs included in our project had some links to their local community through activities that included taking on students from schools, participating in mentoring programmes, encouraging family learning, running open days, sponsoring charity events and supporting local voluntary organizations. However, none worked or researched with local colleges and universities to develop and deliver courses for employees, shared their resources with local organizations or was represented on local lifelong learning committees. This is a major concern, and one which needs to be addressed in order for the SME sector to fulfil its important sectorial role in 'lifelong learning' regional development. The current EU 6th Framework programme addresses some of these challenges. Capital and physical infrastructure interventions have been the major interventions in the past. However, as indicated in the 2003 pilot action on 'Regions of Knowledge', it is now recognized that it is critical that actions should involve 'fostering partnerships between the public and the private sector in order to contribute to

the European knowledge-based economy and stimulate knowledge creation and diffusion' (EC 2005).

This programme seeks to strengthen the support for regional co-ordinated research and development policies, and to improve the regulatory and administrative environment for research and innovation in Europe. A key factor in the success of this is seen as being the effective knowledge transfer between public research organizations and enterprises (EC 2000c).

The university and adult and vocational education institutions

Across Europe the place of lifelong learning in universities, and adult and vocational institutions is varied. Some place great emphasis on the practice of widening access to all those in their community; others restrict entry to an elite. Some are more vocationally oriented than others. Some are self-governing while others are directed by strong governance from central administrative and accreditation policies. These differences make generalization difficult. Nonetheless although the Indicators project considered these two stakeholders separately, the findings from both sectors illustrate similar key issues of the audit approach.

Whilst the overall objectives of each audit remained the same, the specific set of parameters explored through both audits included:

- Existing institutional commitment to lifelong learning;
- The relationship with the city and region, including its relationships with the local and regional authorities, partnership working with other organizations and contribution to local research and development;
- Wider participation in learning and the extent to which it caters for the non-traditional student, including flexibility of access, Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and credit and support systems;
- Communicating the institution's message internally and externally and the key learning messages it gives to the community it serves;
- Staff and student development and support and the use of learning development tools;
- The effective use of technology including distance learning, multimedia, the use of email and the internet, and the way in which the institution brings the international audience to the local scene;
- Employability, skills, celebration, environmental responsibility, democracy and other lifelong learning issues with which the institution is involved.

For those educational institutions engaged in the Indicators project there was an overall assumption that lifelong learning was central to the *raison d'être* of the life of the institution. As such it is implicit in strategic and corporate plans. However, the acquisition of essential lifelong learning skills, such as learning to

learn, decision-making, information-handling and self-management, does not feature highly in curricula. At a city/regional level there was little evidence that universities are taking a position of leadership, although in the adult and vocational sector there were examples where a greater proactive role is being followed. The adult and vocational sector is highly specialized, and in some countries has links to specific industries and professions, economic development agencies, community development programmes and the local authority. This gives access to and involvement with many of the key players associated with the development of the 'lifelong learning region'. Lifelong learning opportunities offered particularly by the adult and vocational education institutions are firmly rooted in regional priorities for employability and social inclusion, thus contributing very directly to improving the quality of life for people who otherwise might be excluded.

In a lifelong learning world it is likely that the adult and vocational education sector will experience the greatest increase in demand for learning. The changes demanded in methodology and approach to cope with a wider range of learners will impose challenges to management, staff and students alike. The creation of a flexible approach and a focus on local delivery are likely to be essential ingredients in bringing learning into communities. This sector's critical contribution to a learning region relates to developing enterprise and employability skills of citizens. The value of the audit approach lies in connecting these with the wider policy areas of social inclusion, and regeneration of the whole region.

The local and regional authority

It was through working with the local authority as a stakeholder in the Indicators project that the potential of the auditing approach was best demonstrated. The lead partner was the University of Stirling working with Stirling Council, and over the period the researchers built a productive dialogue with senior staff from a variety of service departments. While other sectors offer important components in a lifelong learning partnership it is the role of a local authority to lead by virtue of its position at the centre. The EC defines a learning region as follows:

A learning city, town or region recognizes and understands the key role of learning in the development of basic prosperity, social stability and personal fulfilment, and mobilizes all its human, physical and financial resources creatively and sensitively to develop the full human potential of all its citizens.
(EC 2002a)

This implies that the role and responsibility of decision and policy-makers at local and regional level, is to help construct a mutually advantageous and interactive learning city, town or region that will deliver prosperity, social stability and the personal well-being of its citizens. The learning region model is therefore a framework for analysing key relationships and developing effective strategies

for regional policy. It includes concepts of social capital, individual learning, organizational learning, economic competitiveness and social inclusion.

But it is politicians and professionals in cities and regions who will have to initiate the transformation process, and bring their citizens along with them, through consultation at all stages and at all levels.

The local and regional authorities Stakeholder Audit explored the following topics and questions:

- Current perceptions, commitment and strategies, including content and implementation methods, the authority as a learning organization, quality and standards, membership of learning city organizations and surveys and studies already completed;
- Participation and partnership in the community and the authority's role in making it happen, including measures to encourage active citizenship and volunteering, consultation processes, and relations with stakeholders and leadership;
- Accessibility and wider participation in learning from the enablers' viewpoint, including provision of learning where, when and how people want it, support systems in place for all populations and removal of barriers to learning;
- Communications and information strategies to increase the incidence of learning, including internal information-giving in the administration, methods of communication, key learning messages and their accessibility, and the creation of a 'wired' city;
- Use of technology for learning in the city/region, including distance learning availability and strategies, multimedia development and use, and internet use locally and with cities and regions nationally and globally;
- Socio-economic and resource matters, creating wealth, skills surveys, development policies, finance and related initiatives;
- Other topics of value to the development of the learning city – environmental policies, sustainability and celebrating learning.

It was clear from feedback, that lifelong learning is not currently a policy priority in local government in Catania, Sicily or the Toulouse Municipal Authority, Midi-Pyrenees. Moreover the concepts and principles that lie behind the EC definition have as yet not been explicitly and wholly addressed. The audit interviews raised awareness, but there was not at regional authority level a unifying structure to bring these issues together under the concept of the lifelong learning region. For example in Sicily there are environmental and sustainable development strategies, but their relationship to lifelong learning was at that moment unclear. This highlights the differences in the stage that different national/regional governments have reached in embracing the EC concepts of lifelong learning. The situation is somewhat different in Scotland where there is a statutory obligation (Local Government in Scotland Act 2003) on all local authorities to address 'community planning'. This concept is based on the principles of partnership working and engagement with communities

in decision-making that affects the delivery of public services. It requires a holistic approach to the region, and this has led in Stirling to a variety of Community Planning Partnerships being set up to address regional issues of economic development and community safety, health and well-being, and lifelong learning.

In Stirling 22 professional staff working in a variety of services engaged in the audit (including Children's Services, Community Services, Youth Services, Leisure Services, Environmental Services, Corporate Services, and Planning and Economic Development). Feedback from the authority illustrated the existence of a number of different discourses, or forms of discourse, within the local authority and the need for a co-ordinated strategic investment. In particular there was tension between those who saw lifelong learning essentially being to do with improving knowledge, skills and competence from an employment-related perspective, and those who wished to stress the value of lifelong learning in developing personal, social and civic learning. It was also clear from the feedback that what is more problematic is the difference between the 'lifelong learning region' as a passive validation of what the local authority is already doing, as against it being a dynamic template for new forms of activity which the local authority is promoting through engaging with its partners (the other stakeholders and citizens). This is in itself problematic as there are a plethora of strategies with which each stakeholder must operate, including for example, *Better Communities in Scotland: Closing the Gap*, Community Regeneration Statement (Scottish Executive 2002b), *Social Justice – a Scotland where Everyone Matters* (Scottish Executive 1999), *Determined to Succeed: A Review of Enterprise in Education* (Scottish Executive 2002a), *Smart Successful Scotland, Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland* (Scottish Executive 2001), and *Life through Learning through Life: Scotland's Lifelong Learning Strategy 2003–2007* (Scottish Executive 2003). The audit tool was trialled with Stirling Council during the period of development of the *Lifelong Learning Strategy for the City Region of Stirling* (Stirling Community Planning Partnership 2005).

The different opinions expressed by officers of the council illustrate well the use of the audit tool as a basis for self-diagnosis of deficits in organizational learning, communication or knowledge-sharing. Since the realization of the learning region is dependent on the creation and maintenance of a large number of feedback loops at all levels, the tool provides a way of assessing how well these are functioning at any given point. The questions also allowed us to assess where priorities in lifelong learning lay, and in this case the responses lay close to national priorities, namely: 'design imaginative strategies to reach those who are currently excluded from lifelong learning'; 'Increase the employability of people in the region'; and 'Reduce the proportion of 16–19 year olds not in education, work or training' (Scottish Executive 2003: 65).

One comment from a policy officer is significant:

From my work to promote lifelong learning through community planning, I can already see how using the EC definition of a learning region helps to provide a strategic context for learning which articulates the connections

between prosperity, wellbeing and learning. In some ways we are doing much of this work already but until recently have not necessarily been thinking of it within the context of a learning paradigm. We are used to considering our work in terms of other paradigms such as health and wellbeing (e.g. the connection between mental wellbeing and employment). To create a learning context for our work allows us to focus on the learning aspects of our strategic work and complements other thematic approaches.

Accepting this perspective implies that learning activities should attract additional resources and that learning should become an integral component of regeneration projects and initiatives which seek to address other areas of regional development, for example health, economic development, planning and leisure. This is illustrated by the comments:

partnership working which enables the development of flexible client focused learning resources will be key to achieving national and local learning targets. I would have thought that a learning region has the potential to make a considerable contribution to lifelong learning priorities in a community planning context.

There is evidence in Stirling city and region that this is indeed the case, as one respondent notes:

building the capacity of the resident community is a fundamental requirement of a sustainable, growing economy, maximizing the opportunities for a better quality of life. Only through the application of learning can we develop the skills within the community to realise this goal.

These responses demonstrate a climate of organizational reflection and joined up thinking. A unifying concept for lifelong learning in the region is sustainable development encompassing as it does issues of enhancing the natural, social, human, cultural and economic resources of a region. Stirling city and region has adopted the concept of Sustainable Stirling as part of its city vision though it is acknowledged that to date this has been:

primarily in the field of environmental sustainability as opposed to the wider definition promoted in terms of securing 'well-being' i.e. economic, social and environmental sustainability – work is ongoing to address this in the medium term.

A key element of a lifelong learning region is the opportunity for community participation in determining the future policies for the development and direction of the region. Part of this depends on good consultation processes but also on the approach taken by the local authority in communicating *with* the people.

Concluding remarks

The use of the interactive audit tool with stakeholders served to raise awareness of the scope and complexity of dealing with indicators that capture the full lifelong learning agenda; the focus being on linkages and processes in organizations, and the process which lead to quality outcomes and products, and those which can be identified with indicators as evidence of a whole shift towards a 'lifelong learning region'. This can be daunting and requires engagement from a wide variety of sections, departments and players within each stakeholder organization in order to cover lifelong learning approaches to social, economic, cultural and sustainable regeneration and development. The shortened versions were effective in starting this debate and involving the whole stakeholder organization in the process, thus aiding with internal communication and the identification and sharing of a common purpose. There is great variation in the understanding of the concepts of 'lifelong learning' and 'learning regions' across the regions of Europe, and of the potential contribution of different agencies. Therefore, methodologically, it is vital that the shortened version of the tool is used to establish through dialogue the parameters of 'measurement', and that it is not used in a rigid fashion or to impose culturally and contextually-specific concepts.

As with many qualitative approaches the data gathered depends on who in the organizational hierarchy is the respondent. It is therefore important that multiple perspectives are gathered especially in complex organizations. In some cases where the audit was completed only by senior management there appears to be a mismatch between espoused understanding and actual implementation of lifelong learning activities. This contradiction is of course well-known in the field of lifelong learning (see for example Williams 1997), but that in itself is an outcome that is useful for organizations to know and to act upon. Ultimately the audit tool is *theirs*, and is redundant if not used as a means to improve practice as learning organizations. Hofmaier (2003) argues that 'the natural result of focusing on systematic institutional arrangements for the integration of planning and execution at all levels of a firm, synthesizing existing knowledge and skills across departmental boundaries and along the value chain, is the learning organization'. This neatly expresses the potential of the Indicator tool at an organizational level. At an inter-organizational level between stakeholders, it has the potential to measure process as against structure.

The comprehensive nature of the indicator agenda requires that all aspects are in the first instance generalized, allowing institutions only to gauge the extent to which statutory responsibilities and contributing policies and practices require to be changed or re-orientated.

There also remains considerable potential for testing the structure of the comprehensive audit for the purpose of a strategic policy driving tool for change, including as it does suggestions, ideas, possible courses of action, discussion points, source materials, interactive exercises, and places for detailed comments from respondents. In practical terms, major issues are how all potential contributors to

such an audit can be identified, how they all can independently and collectively respond, and how their contributions can be synthesized. The value of employing an interactive ICT approach has been indicated by the initial pilot using the VCP platform used by the Promotor project. This gives the option for a respondent to access supporting information, case studies and comparative policy documents at a variety of levels and depth where required for insight and reflection. This will address to some extent the difficulties of the tension generated between generalization and detailed implementation.

Finally, the responses to the pilot project indicate that ongoing co-operation with local authorities and other stakeholders is itself the essence of what the learning region is about. Partnership between them, and informed and up-to-date research and development departments in centres of expertise can only enhance the development of more, and better, learning regions, to the benefit of the region, its organizations and its citizens. All is not rosy, however, and our research suggests that there is a lack of prioritization amongst many stakeholders of the concerns that underpin the *raison d'être* of the audit process. Commitment to lifelong learning and/or their role at a regional level simply does not impinge on the consciousness of many organizations, especially schools and SMEs. It seems to us that by engaging all potential stakeholders in this sort of collaborative and reflective exercise, then opportunity for awareness-raising and ultimately action beyond the confines of one sector, service or interest group will be generated. As Lundvall and Johnson (1994) have suggested learning within the 'learning economy' is situated and depends on interaction between stakeholders. Structure and process is important, and as we signalled earlier, process is foremost in our work. More research and co-operation is needed on the use of audit tools, but despite its short duration, the work described in this chapter offers a contribution to our understanding of what a learning region is and the consultation processes that must underpin it.

Notes

- 1 See <http://www.ioe.stir.ac.uk/Research/Projects/ellectronet.htm> for a summary of this project. We are grateful to our partners in this project, the University of Catania, ESC Toulouse, Akershus University College and the University of Limerick as well as associated regional and city authorities for their contribution to this work.
- 2 The 10 domains are: Commitment to a Learning City; Information and Communication; Partnerships and Resources; Leadership Development; Social Inclusion; Environment and Citizenship; Technology and Networks; Wealth Creation, Employment and Employability; Mobilization, Participation and the Personal Development of Citizens; Learning Events and Family Involvement.
- 3 These recommendations are as follows: 1. Create a cross-sectoral strand in the Socrates Programme to support the development of learning cities and regions. Name it after a famous civic leader or the goddess of communities. 2. Establish a programme for Cities of Learning similar to that for Cities of Culture. If necessary run a competition to decide which city it will be in each country. 3. Provide incentives for the formation of new regional, national, and European infrastructures which help Learning Community concepts to develop more quickly. 4. Develop indicators

which measure and monitor aspects of the growth of learning cities and the learning society, and initiate surveys and studies on these in and across member states. 5. Raise the awareness of learning community concepts in municipalities throughout Europe through high-visibility events such as the European Learning Cities Week 6. Develop a 'Charter for European Learning Cities' outlining the city's responsibilities vis-à-vis its citizens as learners, and its relationship to a wider European learning community, which cities sign up to. 7. Create a European network of one or more university departments in each country able to specialize in learning city research and development. 8. Develop an all-encompassing, easy-to-use, web-based learning community simulation tool and make it accessible to all. 9. Promote Europe-wide interactions and partnerships between local government, industry and others for wealth/employment creation and international employability. 10. Establish links with global organizations and countries to share good practice and foster joint cultural, economic and educational development in the area of learning communities.

- 4 See <http://www.innovating-regions.org/index.cfm> for details of this network funded as part of the European Commission's 6th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development.
- 5 See the accessible documents within the online public library of DSIS: Education, Training and Culture statistics at <http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/dsis/edtcslibrary> for more information on the EC's debates in this area.
- 6 See EC 2002b: 74–5, table 18 which shows the presence/absence of comparable data related to quality indicators of lifelong learning in a range of countries.
- 7 See <http://r3lpromotor.euproject.org>
- 8 See <http://www.ul.ie/~puiii/>.

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Researching learning outside the academy

Emerging themes

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Introduction

This book, and the 2003 Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRL) conference from which it has emerged, have been designed to bring together research on different aspects of 'learning outside the academy', and explore the possible common themes which run across apparently rather disparate areas of activity and learning. In planning the conference, 'learning outside the academy' was not defined in any exclusive way, although it was indicated that papers on topics such as experiential learning, community-based learning and work-based learning were expected and would be welcomed. It was expected that issues of definition would emerge in a number of the papers, and as can be seen in the chapters of this book, a number did explore these issues in an interesting and insightful way. The conference planning group was aware that these are areas of work and investigation in which the connections between those who are active in the fields, both as practitioners and as researchers, are often limited. They have their own conferences and journals and discussion of common themes can be limited. With this in mind, a major focus for the conference was to explore within this area of inquiry the extent to which common themes do exist, and can be developed in ways which will enrich research, policy and practice. In the 'Introduction' to this book, we referred to this idea as a quilt, in which the patches are held together by a number of common threads. The chapters of this book have demonstrated, in a very strong way, the existence of a number of these common themes. They have also shown that these are themes which extend across many countries and continents. This chapter seeks to pull out a number of these common issues and themes and consider their implications for future research in these fields.

Learning outside the academy: a major theme for policy, practice and research

The first issue which can be noted as emerging from a number of these chapters is precisely the growing importance of learning outside the academy in policy, practice and research. A number of factors have been identified as underpinning

these developments. First, in the UK and more broadly in Europe, there has been a growing emphasis on policies designed to promote lifelong learning and, within this, informal or non-formal learning has been given considerable prominence. Helen Colley and her colleagues suggest that this focus on non-formal learning was underpinned by two major concerns: the need for increased social cohesion and engagement; and the need to improve economic competitiveness. While this led to increased interest in learning outside formal educational institutions, the focus was primarily on learning in the workplace rather than in wider family or community contexts. Tara Fenwick also notes the tendency to commodify experiential learning as human resource capital or social capital, while Jean Searle associates the emergence of a revitalized interest in workplace learning with the development of the 'new capitalism'. In these contexts, Helen Colley *et al.* suggest that a central concern has been to make non-formal learning visible and to find methods for assessing and accrediting it for utilization in relation to employment.

However, this emphasis on the importance of non-formal learning for economic development sits alongside an interest in its potential to widen access to educational opportunities, empower disenfranchised learners and introduce greater flexibility within the educational system. Thus, while Judy Harris provides a critical analysis of a project associated with the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in South Africa, she indicates that it was introduced in a context in which it was hoped that it would help promote social justice and democracy. Similarly, in Scotland, Jim Crowther emphasizes the potential of learning within social movements, while Lyn Tett discusses the potential for community-based and informal settings in providing a comfortable place for the 'learning poor'. This interest in the potential of learning outside the formal educational establishments to empower learners and promote social justice is recognized by a number of contributors to this book. They also recognize the potential for new forms of control and regulation associated with these developments.

The policy and practice context in which this increased interest in informal and experiential learning has emerged is therefore a complex one and a challenge for research is to explore both the factors which contribute to an increased interest in learning in non-formal contexts and the implications for those involved.

Issues of definition

A second key issue which emerges for researchers in this field is the one of definition. Concepts such as informal, non-formal and experiential learning are used widely in the fields of community-based learning, learning in social movements and workplace learning. However, as the discussions presented in a number of the chapters in this book have shown, these concepts are themselves problematic.

Helen Colley and her colleagues suggest that attempts to distinguish between formal, informal and non-formal learning are unsatisfactory. In particular, they suggest that this can lead to ignoring the social structures and covert formalities of

power relations that exist in community and workplace settings. This has led them to suggest that it is more helpful to conceive of formal and informal attributes of different forms of learning. They have further suggested that these might be classified in terms of process, location/setting, purposes and content of learning. This approach is interesting and one which many researchers in the field have already found useful in attempting to analyse the nature of learning in different contexts.

Similarly, with regard to the key concept of experiential learning, Tara Fenwick provides a valuable discussion of the ways in which the term has been used. She is critical of earlier ways in which experiential learning has been described. She suggests that these have failed to capture the complexity of learning and have been used to regulate it, excluding certain types of learning which do not fit with dominant cultural meanings. However, rather than reject the idea completely, she suggests that, because its democratic intent remains important, it can usefully be redefined. In doing this, she draws on complexity theory, feminist and psychoanalytical theory, and ideas of learning as struggle. This leads to an emphasis not on the learning subject, but on the larger collective, to systems of culture, history, social relations and nature. This leads to a 'co-emergent', fluid concept of experiential learning. This concept is complex and in some ways elusive. However, it encourages us to reflect critically on how experiential learning has been defined and how learning of this kind is shaped not just by the individual, but by their place within the social order and communities within which they live. This analysis of experiential learning is one which can be deployed across the range of settings where learning of this type occurs. Conceptual analysis and clarification of this kind is important in the development of systematic research in this field.

Theoretical perspectives

A third set of issues which emerges as important for the development of research in this arena is the need for appropriate theoretical perspectives. In this respect, a number of issues emerge from the discussions in this book and a number of different perspectives are used by the authors in attempting to understand both the processes of learning, and the wider structural context which shapes dominant ideas of knowledge and of learning. In attempting to understand issues associated with the learning process, the work of Lave and Wenger is used by Linda Cooper in a setting where teaching and learning are not the primary purpose of the organization (a trade union in South Africa). Linda Cooper also suggests that their notion of 'learning in communities of practice' captures the action-embedded nature and collective shared dimensions of learning and knowledge construction which are so central to the trade union context. The work of Engeström is also used by Linda Cooper as a way of understanding the potential significance of tensions and contradictions within the life of the union as a possible source of breakthrough into learning. Janice Malcolm and Miriam Zukas also use Engeström's activity

theory in analysing issues of compliance, resistance, conflict and dissatisfaction with regard to workplace learning among post-compulsory teachers in England.

As a further aspect of her analysis of the place of power in pedagogy, Linda Cooper also makes use of the work of Bernstein and his analysis of the ways in which power can be exercised through both 'visible' and 'invisible' pedagogies. The work of Bernstein is also used by Judy Harris to analyse curriculum-making in the context of a recognition of prior learning (RPL) project in South Africa. In this case, Bernstein's idea of 'recontextualization' is used to help us understand how learning is reshaped through the RPL process. At a more macro level Colley, *et al.* use Foucault's idea of a 'regime of truth' in analysing the dominant discourses in European policy on non-formal learning and how these help reshape people's understanding of learning, and its relationship to employers' demands.

It should also be noted that in some cases authors use a number of these perspectives in developing their analysis of learning outside the academy. We have already made reference to Tara Fenwick's use of complexity theory, psychoanalytical theory, and ideas of learning as struggle in her analysis of experiential learning. Linda Cooper makes use of the ideas of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, in addition to the ideas of Lave and Wenger, Bernstein, and Engeström.

It is clear then that a number of authors in this volume who are working in different fields are both recognizing the importance of theoretical perspectives in their analysis of learning and, in some cases, drawing on the work of the same theorists. The use of these theoretical perspectives is illuminating and indicates how analysis of these issues can be enhanced and the need for further work in deploying and developing analytical perspectives.

Research methods

While the range of research reported in the chapters of this book reflect the growing interest in researching learning in contexts which are outwith formal educational institutions, a number of authors comment on the difficulties in undertaking this type of research. In the first instance, this is because many people do not define the activities in which they are involved as learning. Veronica McGivney discusses this at some length in the context of the work which she and others have undertaken in the field of adult learning in community-based and other informal settings. Dave Boud and Natasha Kersh and Karen Evans also comment on this in the context of workplace learning. Indeed Dave Boud suggests that workers may actively disassociate themselves from the identity of a 'learner', as it is important for them to present themselves as competent workers.

For these reasons, Veronica McGivney suggests that questionnaire-based research, which asks questions about learning, has had little success in exploring the nature and extent of learning of this kind. This has led to an emphasis on more qualitative approaches where information about involvement in learning emerges through a more indirect discussion of involvement in a range of activities. Veronica McGivney reports on this type of approach from her own work, while

Salma Ismail discusses her use of a methodology which draws on feminist perspectives and a constructivist view of knowledge, learning and research in her study of the participation of women in a housing project in South Africa. In the rather different context of workplace learning in Australia, Jean Searle also comments on her use of a social constructivist approach to interviewing, in which the parties to the interaction actively and co-operatively construct the content of the interview. Natasha Kersh and Karen Evans also report on their attempts to develop tools for analysis of data in this context through their use of Dynamic Concept Analysis.

However, while qualitative approaches to research are clearly dominant, other approaches are being developed and are reported on. In particular, Kate Sankey and Mike Osborne report on the work which has been undertaken within a European project to develop and use a self-audit questionnaire with various stakeholder organizations in their study of the development of learning regions. In this context, the focus is not on learners, but on the organizations which contribute to the development of learning regions. It is suggested therefore that a questionnaire approach is more appropriate. It is also suggested that, as an audit tool, its function is not just to investigate the extent of existing contribution to learning regions, but to encourage reflection about this contribution among members of staff in the organizations surveyed.

It would appear then that there is increasing recognition of the difficulties and complexities of undertaking research into learning in these contexts. A key task for researchers in these fields will be to continue to consider what methods are most suited to uncovering and exploring learning outwith formal institutions, particularly when many people involved will not themselves define these activities as learning.

Implications for pedagogy and for educators

A number of chapters in this book raise, from different perspectives, issues about the implications of the growing recognition of the importance of learning outside the academy for those involved as educators and for educational institutions.

It has been noted above that Tara Fenwick advocates a shift to co-emergent fluid conceptions of experiential learning. Within this she suggests that educators should be critics of pedagogy that over-rationalizes experiential learning. She advocates for social reconstruction through a fully embodied and collective experiential learning. She suggests that educators should 'disturb' approaches which seek to commodify experiential learning as human resource or social capital and the categories used to recognize experience and judge learning. They should draw attention to the historical and shared nature of experiential learning and help to restore it.

The implications of this analysis for the work which educators actually do is not really spelt out in Tara Fenwick's discussion. However, in the context of work on literacy and health issues, Lyn Tett discusses the opportunities to develop an

agenda which aims to extend the autonomy of individuals and communities that have been marginalized and ignored. However, she emphasizes that an informal setting does not in itself lead to different practices. The agenda has to be informed by issues of social justice, equality and democracy in everyday life. This means a focus on what people have rather than what they lack. Similarly, in his discussion of learning in social movements, Jim Crowther suggests that the educator does have an important role. Drawing on Tom Lovett's earlier approach, he suggests that there are four important dimensions to this role: network agent; resources agent; educational guide; and teacher.

However, it might be suggested that while these discussions are useful in indicating how educators may support learning in these contexts, they build on existing traditions of 'radical' or 'critical' adult education and do not really explore issues associated with wider changes within education. The issue of institutional change is addressed by Judy Harris. However, she concludes that the idea of using RPL as a lever for change in higher education needs to be revisited. She suggests first that, despite rhetoric to the contrary, there may be a lot of reproductive work going on. Second, she suggests that given the marginal position of RPL workers in universities, they are unlikely to be able to effect change, and third that envisaged changes have unintended consequences.

The issue of institutional change is also addressed from a very different perspective, and in the context of work-based learning programmes by Dave Boud. He suggests that the increasing emphasis on learning at and in work is raising a number of fundamental questions for educators and the institutions in which they work. He suggests that, associated with the development of work-based learning programmes, the conventional notion of educational programmes is questioned and the role of educators in fostering learning in and for work should be reappraised. This involves a de-centring of the role of teachers and their courses and a greater emphasis on their pedagogical ability to foster learning in areas in which they are not expert. Like Tara Fenwick, he uses the term 'disturbing', although in a different way. He refers to assumptions about the division of learning and work breaking down, leading to 'disturbing and renewing' educational practice. Whether change of the type and on the scale which Dave Boud envisages will occur remains to be seen. His suggested realignment of education and work is one which many educators may question. However, his analysis is one which raises interesting and important questions for those who are investigating the development of workplace learning.

Kate Sankey and Mike Osborne's chapter also raises issues about the role of educational establishments in supporting learning outside the academy in the context of learning regions. However, on the basis of the evidence available from this pilot project, it would appear that engagement with the idea of the learning region among stakeholder groups is very patchy throughout Europe.

While it seems clear that the implications of the growth of learning outside the academy for pedagogy and change have been recognized, it is less certain that these have yet been adequately addressed in the research which has been

undertaken. This would seem to be an important and potentially fruitful area of future work.

Power, conflict, resistance and empowerment

An important theme which runs through a number of the chapters in this book is the importance of power in understanding how learning outside the academy is being shaped and its implications for learners. In their genealogy of non-formal learning, Helen Colley *et al.* conclude that political dimensions, including power relations, are at the heart of the different meanings given to it. For them, the dominant discourses in current European policy in this area constitute what Foucault referred to as a 'regime of truth', which is designed to shape people's ways of thinking and acting with respect to these issues. At more micro levels, Judy Harris and Linda Cooper explore the role of power relations in shaping the curriculum and pedagogy in the studies they report.

Alongside this theme is also the one of conflict and resistance. This is recognized by Helen Colley *et al.* and explored in Jim Crowther's discussion of social movements, Janice Malcolm and Miriam Zukas' discussion of workplace learning and Linda Cooper's analysis of learning within the trade union. All bring out the importance of conflict and resistance in shaping the learning experiences in these contexts. All of these analyses lead one to be wary of accounts which over-emphasize the potential of learning in non-formal contexts for empowerment. Nevertheless this is also a theme which emerges through the critical discussion of experiential learning in Tara Fenwick's chapter, and even more strongly in the work of Lyn Tett and Jim Crowther. It is also present, if less explicitly, in Dave Boud's and Jean Searle's analyses of workplace learning.

These then are important themes for future research in this field. In what ways is learning outside the academy being shaped through power relations at both a macro and micro level? What are the implications for the learners involved? But also what forms of conflict and resistance are occurring and with what consequences? Finally, in what ways does or can learning of this kind contribute to equity and social justice?

Conclusion

Research reported in this book has shown clearly that learning outside the academy is now of considerable importance in many countries throughout the world. Furthermore it is also clear that the patches which make up this quilt are linked by a number of threads. There is now a growing volume of research on these issues and a growing awareness of the complex conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues which have to be addressed in developing further research in this field. It is hoped that this book may stimulate further research which will enhance knowledge and understanding of this arena in an international context.

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Lifelong learning is a key feature of the educational landscape today. This important book breaks new ground in examining issues of gender in relation to lifelong learning. Drawing on policy analysis and research in the UK, European and global arenas, *Gender and Lifelong Learning* demonstrates the ways in which patterns of access to, participation in, and outcomes of lifelong learning reflect gender divisions and power relations.

The scope of the book is wide-ranging. Divided into three sections, the discussion encompasses school, adult, community, further and higher education. The issues covered include gendered subject 'choices', reasons for non-participation and pedagogies of lifelong learning. There are also fascinating chapters that explore the widening of participation, the experiences of disabled students, and the visibility/invisibility of black women in higher education. Utilising many different theoretical and methodological approaches, the book offers a range of critical feminist engagements to make visible, understand and critique gender inequalities in lifelong learning.

A key theme throughout the book is a critique of neoliberalism and of the dominance of economic rationales in shaping the concept of lifelong learning. Yet the book offers not only criticism of current policies and practices, but also alternative visions, different possibilities and new ways of conceptualising and doing lifelong learning that might better reflect social justice concerns. It also includes many ideas and suggestions that can be practically drawn upon, and the concluding chapter ends with a summary of key implications for both policy-makers and practitioners.

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