

Chapter 2: Locating Lifelong Learning and Education in Contemporary Currents of Thought and Culture

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a picture of the ways and extent to which lifelong learning discourse is dependent on the broader cultural contexts of which it is a part. This is done by firstly articulating three progressive sentiments that may be seen as informing lifelong learning ideology, theory and advocacy. Against that more traditional background is then examined the sort of educational discourse that is generated in the contemporary cultural context, and which therefore prevails in contemporary lifelong learning policy and practice. It is argued that, although this context valorizes lifelong learning, the progressive sentiments are largely and substantively incidental to prevailing lifelong learning discourse, although they do give that discourse its aura of symbolic value. In so arguing, this work builds upon such recent critiques of contemporary lifelong learning discourse as those of Baptiste (1999), Boshier (1998), Collins (1998), C. Falk (1998), Rubenson (1996) and Wilson (1999).

THREE PROGRESSIVE SENTIMENTS

Lifelong learning ideology, theory and advocacy over the last four decades may be seen as informed, very largely, by three progressive sentiments: the individual, the democratic and the adaptive. The notion of an informing progressive sentiment is that of a stream, current or strand of commitment to cultural reform – one that is defined by a central programmatic purpose for reform of the cultural institutions affected (the educational institution in our case). That purpose, then, constitutes an organizing ideal to which advocacy is directed, around which theory is constructed, and in support of which evidence is gathered. It captures the ethical meaning and import of the educational ideal. The three progressive sentiments here recognized are seen as capturing the dominant currents of thought that have shaped our contemporary understanding of lifelong learning. However, their recognition and presentation here involves some degree of distillation from the cultural contexts in which they are embedded, and of separation from each other, for in educational theory and practice they are interrelated, being neither isolated from each other nor discrete in themselves. They combine in different ways and with different emphases to form the more conventionally recognized philosophical traditions in education: progressive, humanist, democratic socialist, liberal,

and so on. They importantly cut across or transcend epistemology, although they are differently expressed within different epistemologies. They emerge, then, in the ideological commitments of philosophical traditions (and are expressed in particular educational ideologies) informing lifelong learning advocacy. Each does so in what may be termed its progressive, authentic or genuine form: that form which is directed to the achievement of human liberation, emancipation, progress and development, through the central programmatic purpose of the sentiment. Those ideologies, and their supporting theories of learning and education, therefore give expression to the progressive sentiments in various hybrid forms. The references here to exemplifying sources in each case must, accordingly, be seen as indicative only, and not as identifying evidence of any unalloyed sentiment.

The Individual Progressive Sentiment

The individual progressive sentiment is defined by its programmatic commitment to individual growth and development. It seeks liberation from ignorance (through individual enlightenment), from dependence (through individual empowerment), from constraint (through the individual transformation of perspectives), or from inadequacy (through individual development). Lifelong learning works that are strongly grounded in this sentiment include those of Brocket and Hiemstra (1991), Longworth and Davies (1996), Overly (1979), Taylor (1998) and Wain (1987).

The focus of its educational advocacy depends on the ideological emphasis given to each of the above-mentioned liberatory commitments. An emphasis on liberation from ignorance gives a focus on cognitive or intellectual development and understanding, commonly (but not necessarily) through the academic disciplines (Lawson 1979, Paterson 1979, Taylor 1998). An emphasis on liberation from dependence gives a focus on the development of skills and on socialization into social conventions and practices (Knowles 1980, Overly 1979). An emphasis on liberation from constraint gives a focus on the transformation and transcendence of frameworks of individual understanding and capability, particularly those acquired through passive acculturation (Barnett 1994, Collins 1991, Mezirow 1991). An emphasis on liberation from inadequacy gives a focus on individual growth and development (Dewey 1961, Houle 1980, Wain 1987).

Its case for lifelong learning is based, variously, on the vast breadth and depth, and the constant progressive advance, of human knowledge with which to come to grips (Paterson 1979, Taylor 1998), on the changing developmental needs of different life tasks at different periods or phases of individual development (Allman 1982, Havighurst 1972, Heymans 1992), on the continuing need for educational transformation in the vast expanse of human conformism (Barnett 1994, Brookfield 1984), and on the endless journey of individual growth in an evolving social context (Houle 1980, Wain 1987).

Although this sentiment focuses on individual development, it nevertheless tends to frame a perception of public benefit from education. This benefit is seen as being through the development of individuals who are more functionally independent, culturally informed and publicly aware (Houle 1980, Olafson 1973, Paterson 1979). The actions of such persons are seen as being more likely to be characterized by individual

responsibility and capability, an ethical orientation, and a sensitivity and responsiveness to others and to the public welfare. A society of such persons, then, is seen as being more likely to be one in which the monitoring and moderation of human action is largely individualized and collective – requiring only minimal state investment in surveillance, policing and administration of justice. Accordingly, this progressive sentiment tends to be associated with a perception of the public value of (lifelong) education as being high. Correspondingly, there tends to be the advocacy of state support (including financial support) for lifelong education and learning, for all citizens, to the limit of their ability to benefit from it, including that for adults, but particularly those who have been unable to capitalize on earlier educational opportunities (Commission on Social Justice 1994, Lawson 1982, Paterson 1979).

Through this sentiment, the educational institution tends to be seen as both important and importantly distinct from other social institutions. Individual development through education calls both for specialist educational expertise on the part of teachers and for specialist organizations through which it is undertaken. The nature of that expertise and the sorts of organizations, however, vary somewhat with the ideological emphasis: an emphasis on cognitive development commonly giving a commitment to teachers schooled in the academic disciplines, and to organizations reflective of academic values; an emphasis on liberation from dependence sees a focus on the formation of teacher capabilities in facilitating the development of autonomous, self-directed learners; an emphasis on transformation is more likely to see a commitment to teacher expertise in the management of learning situations and to similarly structured organizations; whereas an emphasis on individual growth is more associated with the development of interpersonal understanding, empathy and interpersonal skills in teachers (Barnett 1994, Cropley 1977, Goad 1984).

The Democratic Progressive Sentiment

The democratic progressive sentiment is defined by its programmatic commitment to social justice, equity and social development through participative democratic involvement. It seeks liberation from inherited authority of all forms, whether autocratic, oligarchic, theocratic, or whatever, and from oppression, servitude and poverty, in the creation of a truly civil society (Fauré *et al.* 1972, Gutmann 1987, Illich 1973, Walker 1992, White 1983). Education, then, is to serve and mirror those ends (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991, Freire 1972, Gelpi 1985).

The focus of its educational advocacy is on cultural reform through education – cultural reform in the directions noted above and through broadening access to any or all of the liberating learnings of the individual progressive sentiment (Gelpi 1984, Schuller 1979, Walker 1992). The purpose of education is to inform social action for the development of a more humane, tolerant, just and egalitarian society of liberated, empowered individuals, acting collegially in the public good. Education is seen as informing both social action itself and the reflective and discursive evaluation of that action: an on-going process of action and reflection, together commonly labeled ‘praxis’ (Freire 1972). It is seen as being directed particularly to the liberation of

oppressed, marginalized and exploited sectors of society. Education is therefore to be directed to achieving cultural change for the good of humanity as a whole.

Its case for lifelong learning is essentially that human liberation from oppression and exploitation calls for continuing vigilance and action as new forms of oppression are instituted or old ones revived in new forms (Fragniere 1976, Gelpi 1984, Illich & Verne 1976).

Lifelong education, accordingly, is seen as being, first and foremost, a public good. It is from the public good that the private, individual benefit flows (Fauré *et al.* 1972, M. Peters & Marshall 1996). The provision of education, correspondingly, is a state responsibility, calling for relatively high levels of state support, including financial support, for educational engagement by all citizens (Fauré *et al.* 1972, Fragniere 1976, Illich 1970).

Educational ideology that is strongly informed by this sentiment calls for teachers to be relatively well educated themselves, to be actively involved in cultural reform, to be committed to the democratic sentiment, and to be skilled in their role as teachers (Hatcher 1998). The important reflective and culturally critical aspects of educational change call for a degree of institutional autonomy in educational organizations, but one which, nevertheless, is engaged with broader social issues and public policy (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991, Walker 1992).

The Adaptive Progressive Sentiment

The adaptive progressive sentiment is defined by its programmatic responsiveness to cultural change. It seeks liberation from deprivation, poverty and dependence, through adaptive learning. Such development may be at any level of social organization – individual, organizational, national, global, or whatever, depending upon the learning need (Jessup 1969, Knapper & Cropley 1985, Kofman & Senge 1995, Kozlowski 1995, Longworth 1995).

The focus of educational advocacy, then, is on the creation of educational systems and policies that make it possible for individuals, organizations, etc. to keep pace with cultural change and to advance themselves in the changing cultural context (Evans 1985, Hiemstra 1976, McClusky 1974). Individuals are thereby enabled either to maintain themselves as contributing members of society, avoiding an otherwise inevitable slide into anachronistic irrelevance and dependence on welfare or others, or to develop themselves as contributing members of society, if they are already or are still dependent (Cropley 1977, Knapper & Cropley 1985). Organizations are enabled to maintain themselves as viable, thriving entities, in an increasingly competitive and global marketplace (Kofman & Senge 1995, Kozlowski 1995). And nations are enabled to provide a fiscal, political and social context that facilitates the development of their citizens and their interests, while providing welfare support for those who are deemed to need and deserve it (Carnevale 1991, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 1996). Its progressive thrust is grounded in the freedom, particularly the negative freedom (i.e., freedom *from* restraint and constraint) to enjoy the good life, to contribute constructively to society, and to pursue one's interests.

Its case for lifelong learning is based on the impact of accelerating cultural change on the learning needs of individuals, organizations and nations. That impact is on adults as much as it is on children, and on the elderly as much as on those in middle age (Chapman & Aspin 1997, Cropley 1977, Evans 1985). Changing modes of work and employment, production and consumption, communication, exchange, and signification all impact on individuals throughout their lives, albeit in different ways. Through lifelong learning, then, education is seen as being directed to a process of lifelong adaptation to the changing cultural context (Hiemstra 1976, Jessup 1969). That context calls also, though, for education to be directed to the development of metacognitive skills, to allow learners to manage their own actions *as* lifelong learners (Knapper & Cropley 1985, Smith 1992).

Educational benefit through this sentiment has both public and private aspects, depending principally on the balance of perceived benefit. It tends to be focused, though, more strongly on the private, particularly in the post-compulsory sectors of education (Marginson 1993). Through education at that level, individuals or organizations are seen as the primary beneficiaries – through their enhanced or maintained capacity to profit within the changing cultural context. Public benefit tends, then, to be seen as secondary – as a consequence of private gains. From enhanced private security and advantage can flow generosity, altruism, beneficence and an active concern for the public good. State support for education thus tends to be seen as ideally limited to areas of welfare support, basic skills development, socialization, rehabilitation, and public education – areas, nonetheless, which constitute a large and important slice of educational activity (Jessup 1969). The state's role in other areas of educational reform is seen as being more that of regulation, of standard-setting and of establishing and maintaining frameworks for the recognition and transfer of adaptive learning (Melody 1997).

Educational ideology that is strongly informed by this sentiment calls for educational provision and engagement to be contextualized, to be optimally embedded in the adaptive life tasks to which the learning is directed (Gustavsson 1997, Kozłowski 1995). It calls for the cost of education to be privatized to the individuals, collectivities or organizations to the extent that those entities are seen as being its most direct and immediate beneficiaries (Marginson 1993). Correspondingly, good teachers are seen as those who bring relevant (particularly recent) life task experience and expertise to their teaching role, who have an appropriately responsive and open-minded attitude to change, and who have the requisite skills for effectively and efficiently transferring their relevant learning to others (Cropley 1977, Cropley & Dave 1978). Educational ideology and policy tend to have a strong element of enculturation into the ever-changing realities of lived experience, and of coping with the demands of those realities (Gee & Lankshear 1995, Ohliger 1974).

THE CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL CONTEXT

The foregoing three progressive sentiments may be seen as the dominant currents of reformist thought in recent decades of lifelong education and learning advocacy and

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