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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the concern of education policy in the United Kingdom has been with public education systems, but a question that needs to be addressed is whether lifelong learning lends itself to the same kind of analysis. The following forces are putting traditional forms of social policy out of business: challenge to the autonomy of the state in legislating policy, reconceptualization of the life world and the social system, and changing significance of the "social" and "public" domains. Current conditions for lifelong learning are a very long way from those in which policy analysis developed, but the same claims about citizenship, justice, equality of opportunity, and social inclusion are being made for lifelong learning, even though the role of the state to secure these objects of policy is diminished by the forces shaping the context of lifelong learning. Conventional policy analysis cannot be adopted in the case of lifelong learning because of ambiguities in its meaning and in the case of some of these meanings, lifelong learning could not be an object of public policy at all. If the meaning of lifelong learning is co-extensive with further development of the public system of education and training, which it is in many respects, then it is subject to policy analysis in the traditional sense. Other meanings of lifelong learning, such as the adoption of a strategic position or a culture of learning, imply a lesser role for government control of inputs and outcomes. In these cases, policy analysis is redundant because its object is public policy. (Contains 40 references.) (YLB)

Lifelong Learning : Policy, Strategy and Culture

Colin Griffin

Introduction : understanding policy

Traditionally, the concern of education policy has been with public education systems, but the questions to be addressed in this paper are whether or not lifelong learning lends itself to the same kind of analysis. In what sense is lifelong learning a public education system, or to what extent could traditional policy analysis treat it as though it were? Is lifelong learning a policy for public education at all, or is it rather part of a global trend towards the dismantling of the public sector?

The discipline of policy analysis, ever since its earliest classic texts such as that of Marshall (1965) has paid little attention to education, and concerned itself exclusively with provisions of the welfare state such as health care, social security, housing and community services (Griffin 1987: 4-8). This continues to be largely the case. Even today, social policy pays scant attention to education amongst its more contemporary concerns such as crime, gender or multiculturalism (Lewis *et al* 2000)

The fact is that education, for whatever reason, has been seen to be something set apart from the welfare state, and its policies analysed in a quite separate and extensive body of theory and research. This although commonsense might suggest that the education system constitutes one of the most important mechanisms of social redistribution and social justice which a welfare state entails. What this suggests is the arbitrariness and instability of the divisions between what have been described as the "foundation disciplines" of social theory. In education, for example, these have usually been thought of as philosophy, psychology and sociology.

Policy analysis is not a foundation discipline in this sense: its origins are entirely contingent on the fate of the welfare state, the so-called "crisis" of which in many countries is now the primary focus of attention, and in which, as will be suggested, lifelong learning itself may be located.

Foundation disciplines of education, and by extension lifelong learning, tend therefore to lock us into the kind of conceptual boundary divisions which may be unhelpful in the analysis of the public provision of welfare services. And if education policy analysis has any distinct identity this is because it was concerned with the system of *public* provision. As will be argued later, it is the characteristic of public provision that distinguishes policy from its family of related concepts because it is concerned with politics, power, and control over the *ends* or *outcomes* of policy.

It is important to exclude policy analysis from the category of foundation disciplines, and to distance it from their bounded conceptual frameworks. Anti-foundationalism is in fact older than both policy analysis and the welfare state itself, and certainly predates postmodernism :

> Modernist anti-foundationalism challenges and undercuts ultimate (or even enduring) grounds for knowledge, moral action, and aesthetic judgement as well as the stability of everyday life. (Lash 1990: 125)

The contingency of policy analysis makes it a process determined by its object : the welfare state comes and goes, and so does policy analysis, to be replaced by another contingent mode of analysis:

> ...practices in theoretical, moral-practical, and aesthetic spheres become 'contingent' in their independence from externally imposed order. In their very independence, these cultural practices take on a certain 'facticity' or 'materiality' very much like the profane materiality of the practices of everyday life. (Lash 1990: 205)

It follows that we need to problematise the policy analysis of lifelong learning and to distinguish it from any kind of foundation discipline perspective.

This may be illustrated by the case of 'defining' what is meant by lifelong learning. According to the anti-foundationalist analysis, definition itself is an example of an "externally imposed order" of meaning. An example might occur in the case of some kind of philosophical definition of lifelong education (Wain 1987 ; Chapman and Aspin 2000) or of the "vain quest" for definitions of lifelong learning (Chapman and Aspin 1997: 28-31). The "futile search" for the "essential" or "real" meaning of lifelong learning concludes in another foundationalism, namely, pragmatism. Ultimately, however, "facticity" triumphs over foundationalism. Despite the fact that lifelong learning cannot be defined, and has no essential meaning, it is, nevertheless, a good thing and ought to be an object of policy :

> ...governments in many countries are now concerned to increase their economic potential, to make their political and social arrangements more equitable, just and inclusive, and to offer a greater range of avenues for self-improvement and personal development to all their citizens - because in the interplay of all these three they believe that the welfare and felicity of all their individual and community constituencies may best be secured and extended. (Chapman and Aspin 1997: 45)

Whatever the vain quest for definitions, and the advocacy of a form of pragmatism, the philosophical exercise ends in a normative policy proposition which comes very close to a statement of social welfare policy. So does this square with the fact that governments in many countries are actually reducing the scope of public welfare provision and replacing it with private markets? If it is philosophically impossible to define lifelong learning then it may be impossible to define equal opportunities, social justice, social inclusion and exclusion, and all the other supposed objects of social policy discourse.

Clearly we need to think carefully about what we mean by policy, as well as about what we mean by the 'social' or the 'public'. Traditionally, policy has been concerned with education, or learning in the public domain, or learning which is publicly financed. But *is* lifelong learning actually a system of public education in any case, or

is it something different which traditional policy analysis, let alone foundation disciplines, could not address? Does it reflect the kinds of changing perceptions of the 'social' which can be detected in other policy fields? Even in the case of social welfare, it has been argued, a process of commodification has occurred (Lash 1990: 49)

If we think of social policy analysis as a contingent body of theory and research, rather than having the characteristics of the so-called foundation disciplines, then its contingency is upon the welfare state. In the same way, economics is a body of theory and research contingent upon a market economy (no theory of economics being thought necessary under Marxist regimes). But if policy analysis is contingent upon social welfare, it is also contingent upon the public domain, in other words, activities regulated by the state. Policy analysis is also contingent upon what counts as 'social' or 'public', in a way that, throughout the period of the welfare state, was taken for granted: the problematisation of policy analysis reflects this contingency, and it is particularly brought out in the case of lifelong learning discourse.

Thus, when adult or lifelong learning policy is analysed, it is often the incoherence and inconsistency of government policy which are addressed, but rather in isolation from other aspects of policy, such as employment, redistribution, taxation, and so on. And it is precisely the absence of agreed definitions which is the problem :

> How much more might be achieved if some basic agreements could be made, about the minimum levels of provision everyone should have within easy reach; about the financing of adult learning; about how much the individual, employers and the state should contribute to enable the rhetorical commitment to the learning society to be put into practice. (Tuckett 1996: 57)

Such basic agreements may be a "vain quest", according to the view that universal definitions are not to be sought. And yet we could learn much more about government policies for adult learning, or lifelong learning, or the learning society, if social policy analysis *itself* was made contingent on a wider view of the nature of public provision in what is often described as post-welfare society. We also need to take into account the ways in which the conceptions of the 'social' and the 'public' sphere are changing, and problematising policy analysis yet further by challenging our traditional categories beyond foundationalism and beyond pragmatism.

It has not always been the case that social policies for adult learning have been artificially distinguished from other welfare policies. Several years ago, in the case of Norway, the writing was on the wall for all such policies. Here, as in other countries, the welfare state came and went :

> Whereas [social] commitment had in previous times been predominantly integrated in actions organized by underprivileged people themselves, it now virtually takes the character of externally initiated welfare offers for so-called disadvantaged groups. At the same time there seems to be a clear tendency for the relative amount of adult education involving social commitment to be steadily reduced because of the rapid growth in courses and programmes offered through markets. (Nordhaug 1986: 55)

This provides a policy snapshot of pre-welfare, welfare state, and post welfare provision not unfamiliar in countries other than Norway. It is also about *social* commitment adult education, the fate of which is also typified by the author's claim that "the general tendency has been towards individualization and institutionalization of social commitment". The same writer later returned to discuss the relation of equality and public policy in Norwegian adult education, "confronting ideals with realities" and indicating the problematic paradoxes which social policy analysis so often exposes (Nordhaug 1989)

Policy analysis, therefore, needs to be distinguished from the logic of the foundation disciplines of education. It is contingent upon a concept of a welfare state, upon the possibilities of clearly identifying the 'social' and the 'public' spheres, and upon the perceived scope for action on the part of the historic source of policy, namely, the state. All of these factors have been thrown into ambiguity, by way of market forces, individualisation, and globalisation.

There is a sense in which we are living in a post-policy world, since the public sphere has shrunk with the privatisation of the welfare state. Before the welfare *state*, as well as after, the laissez-faire *society* provided little scope for social policy analysis, however much it provided scope for criticism and opposition. Nevertheless, claims continue to be made for lifelong learning and the learning society which seem to be formulated in terms of traditional social policy analysis. For example, the view that the learning society should be above all a renewal of the social democratic project of the 1960s and 1970s represents precisely the education policy model associated with the welfare state : according to this view, the structure of government as such needs to be reformed in order to make the learning society possible (Ranson 1994: 113) In other words, the learning society itself should be an object of social policy. Behind this particular argument lies a view of education as a precondition of active citizenship, and society as a certain kind of moral and political order : "The creation of a moral and political order that expresses and enables an active citizenship within the public domain is the challenge of the modern era" (Ranson 1994: 105).

This view of lifelong learning and the learning society represents a welfare policy model, with its clear identification of a public domain, together with the government's responsibility to bring about the conditions of social democratic society. Other advocates take similar views of the necessity for lifelong learning, but with a different balance of social and technological arguments (Longworth and Davies 1996). At the same time, the discourse of lifelong learning is replete with the arguments from globalisation (Walters 1997), reflexive modernisation and the risk society (Jansen and van der Veen 1996), and communications technology (Alheit and Kammler 1998: section 4).

But these are precisely the forces which are putting traditional forms of social policy out of business : the challenge to the autonomy of the state in legislating policy, the re-conceptualisation of the lifeworld and the social system, the changing significance of the 'social' and the 'public' domains. The current conditions for lifelong learning are a very long way from those in which policy analysis developed, with its clear role for the state, its unambiguous concept of a public domain, and the kind of social democratic polity envisaged in the form of the welfare state. And yet, evidently, the

same claims about citizenship, justice, equality of opportunity and social inclusion are being made for lifelong learning, even though the role of the state to secure these objects of policy is diminished by precisely the forces which are shaping the context of lifelong learning itself.

Policy analysis is by no means obsolete with regard to lifelong learning, but lifelong learning is not simply an object of policy. The confusion of the *meanings* attributed lifelong learning, which is not the same thing as the philosophical debates about confusions of *definitions*, suggests that we need broader categories of analysis, in which policy is only one. As has been suggested, the concept of social policy itself is contingent on a view of the role of the state in relation to welfare, a role which is now much more problematic than in the days of the welfare state. It has also to be remembered that the origins of the welfare state in Britain can also be traced in policies for the nationalisation of industry, and full employment, as well as for health and national insurance. Lifelong learning itself could be regarded as a form of economic or employment policy, in any case. The arbitrariness and contingency of the so-called foundation disciplines is confronted by the 'facticity' of the postmodernist perspective. In the case of non-foundation disciplines, such as social policy analysis, this holds just as true:

> This implies, in the absence of foundationalist or externally imposed 'legislation', that cultural practices - e.g. in the various scientific disciplines, in the arts - must develop their own rule-boundedness and their own conditions of validity. (Lash 1990: 205)

In exploring the meanings of lifelong learning we are developing precisely this rule-boundedness and conditions of validity in which to locate it *as* policy. In other words, as social policy, economic policy, or cultural practice: the policy discourse makes it possible to attribute any of these meanings to lifelong learning.

Given these paradoxes and ambiguities which have come to characterise a policy analysis perspective on lifelong learning, it is evident that an approach which reflects a range of *meanings*, rather than definitions, is needed to understand the significance of lifelong learning in present-day society. These meanings can, however, be organised around the most central of all criteria for education policy, that is, their implications for the public provision of education, and the possibilities of a public education system.

Lifelong Learning and the Education System

The policy discourse of lifelong learning usually projects it as an expansion of learning opportunities, but not always as the expansion of public provision. Is it, for example, possible to construe lifelong learning as a form of educational privatisation, as nation states adopt a neo-liberal and market-oriented stance towards the provision of all kinds of public services? If this is, indeed, the case, then the consequences for access and equal opportunities in education may be serious, since only governments can redistribute in these directions, and markets reproduce inequality.

The arguments are familiar ones. Neo-liberalism and globalisation are eroding the capacity and will of states to interfere in the economic market place. Communications technology is making teachers redundant to the learning process. Virtual campuses will spell the end of the traditional sites and institutions of education, from schools to universities. Above all, the responsibility of individuals and organisations for their own learning in relation to employability and competition means that public forms of education seem increasingly incapable of meeting the needs of post-industrial, post-welfare and post-modern society.

Already, concern is being voiced by public sector and labour organisations about the consequences of the global market for education systems. The so-called Millenium Round of the World Trade Organisation raised concerns for workers in education and the public sector which were highlighted by Education International :

> Promoted by soaring demand and by the development of a new and increasingly attractive "market", trade in education services is a rapidly expanding phenomenon continually assuming new forms. Its liberalisation therefore raises many questions and has many implications which cannot but concern all those who believe that public education contributes to equal opportunities and is essential to social progress.
>
> (EI 1999 : 21)

If the policy of lifelong learning can be counted among such developments as these, the question arises as to whether or not it is a socially progressive movement, or whether it poses a threat to public education systems and thus to their role in promoting access and equal opportunities. Of course, it could be argued that public education systems have not been successful in promoting these either, which is one of the "postmodern" reactions to the education project of modernity. Nevertheless, since lifelong learning seems so deeply implicated in globalisation, communications technology, neo-liberalism and other challenges to the autonomy of nation states, it seems reasonable to consider whether lifelong learning could do better than public education systems in delivering increased access and equal opportunities. Certainly, the reports from international organisations which resulted from the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996 (EC 1996 ; OECD 1996 ; UNESCO 1996) all reflected the kinds of global trends upon which lifelong learning and the learning society are postulated. The point is, they did not project the view that public education systems were under threat, only that they were unable or unfit to meet the kinds of learning needs which arise in post-modern times. They are, however, replete with the rhetoric of progressivism, of equal opportunities, of universal access and opportunity, and so on, mostly in a context of employment and competition.

What globalisation really means is the liberalisation of trading relations, and the consequent opening up of what have hitherto been the public sector services of member states to competition and privatisation. In terms of the Millenium Round of national signatories of the WTO, this has consequences for education, at least as far as Education International is concerned :

> As regards education, it should be stressed that some 40 countries have given the go-ahead to a partial opening of their markets, thus suggesting the possibility that, in future, education systems become increasingly

> subjected to an entrepreneurial logic...Is it not high time, before proceeding any further along the path of liberalisation, to draw a comprehensive balance sheet of the effects of opening up markets on education which until very recently was still considered a basic public service?
>
> (EI 1999 : 21)

The rhetoric of lifelong learning policy often includes the premise that public education has failed, or at least could not succeed in the future, either in meeting peoples' learning needs or in promoting access and equal opportunity. What research evidence exists for this assumption? Indeed, what research tradition in lifelong learning exists at all, in comparison with that which exists in the case of public education? There is certainly reason to suppose that lifelong learning may form part of a much wider policy for reforming the welfare state itself (Griffin 1999a and 1999b).

Unless lifelong learning is simply another word for adult education, or professional development, or "joined up" systems of provision (which many of its advocates would deny) it will prove difficult to construct as an object of research. It is much vaguer than any of these, and certainly much less identifiable than what has hitherto been understood as the public education system. It has always been clear from research just who was advantaged and who disadvantaged by public education systems, but lifelong learning apparently advantages everyone and disadvantages no-one. The problem about this, in terms of policy analysis, is that in free or market economy societies, no such policy could be implemented.

Lifelong learning, or the learning society, are ideas of such generality that in order to construct it them as objects of research, some kind of conceptual or value judgement about its meaning is entailed. The literature suggests how varied such social, economic, political or philosophical, such judgements and meanings can be (Ranson 1994 ; Longworth and Davies 1996 ; Williamson 1998) There is also a developing critical tradition (Coffield 1997 ; Elliott 1999)

The questions to be posed before any research tradition could be established are therefore :

- What is the nature and scope of policy analysis in relation to lifelong learning?
- In what sense is lifelong learning a system of public educational provision?
- What are the meanings which can be attributed to lifelong learning as an object of research?

The first of these questions raises issues about the meaning of 'policy'. For example, to what extent is policy a function of the state, or is it possible to separate policies for learning or education from policies for human resource development, social integration, and so on?

The second question raises the issue of whether or to what extent lifelong learning is just another name for a public education system having the same researchable

characteristics as have already been explored in a long tradition of educational research? In other words, what's new?

Finally, if we accept that the quest for definitions is a vain one, nevertheless the alternative meanings attributed to lifelong learning seem to put it well beyond the reach of traditional forms of policy analysis. Traditionally, the analysis of public education systems and research into human learning have generated different 'foundationalist' disciplines of both theory and research. As has been argued, the whole idea of a policy approach to lifelong learning needs to be problematised in postmodern conditions.

In other words, we can no longer adopt conventional policy analysis in the case of lifelong learning, not only because of the ambiguities in its meaning but because, in the case of some of these meanings, lifelong learning clearly could not be an object of public policy at all.

An unproblematised account of the policy process in lifelong learning is not far to seek:

> On any interpretation or approach, lifelong learning for all, and the generation and distribution of knowledge, skills and competencies, is an important focus for policy-makers because of their simultaneous impact on economic and labour market performance and fundamental social, political and cultural objectives. (Chapman and Aspin 1997 : 49)

This is certainly, as the authors claim, a true description of the policy *context* of lifelong learning. But there is no basis here for an understanding of lifelong learning *as* policy. For one thing, the sheer scope of the conceptualisation would seem to put it beyond the reach of policy research : social, political, economic and cultural objectives represent a hopeless mixture of ends whose achievement could not be either measured or distinguished one from another. Policy analysis could not capture the scale of these claims for lifelong learning, although policy discourse analysis of the *rhetoric* of lifelong learning has much to contribute : Coffield's 'nine learning fallacies' (Coffield 1997 : 3-7) are a case in point. What the 'policy context' so often lacks in the literature seems to be any awareness of the *critical* policy analysis tradition. After all, as far as Britain is concerned, the earliest policy analysis was concerned precisely with the failures and shortcomings of the welfare state with respect to its original purposes (for example, Abel-Smith and Townsend 1965 ; Titmuss 1968) At the moment, critical policy analysis of lifelong learning focuses upon the gap between rhetoric and reality :

> Much has been written about the society of lifelong learning, and much of this shows an impressive range of imagination. Many authors have expressed their concern about the inability of the calcified existing school system to respond to the challenges of a postmodern world. Nonetheless, once the time comes to move to the implementation of adult education, the flights of fancy in the committee reports and memoranda all too often remain merely ink on paper. There does not appear at the moment to be any serious threat to the existing school institutions of mainstream educational policies. "More of the same",

> more efficiently delivered and better controlled, would be a fair evaluation of current policies in most countries (Rinne 1998 : 119)

It is true that lifelong learning is a more *imaginative* idea than the public system of education and training, but this is just one of the elements of it that makes it so problematic for conventional policy analysis. It raises issues such as whether private learning or cultural transformation *could* be conceived as objects of public policy.

Many of the broad aims of lifelong learning policy statements are of a kind which could only be attempted through public policy, ranging from social order and citizenship to employability and global competition. In the absence public policy, what could be achieved? So the question whether or not lifelong learning is simply a reconceptualisation of the education and training system, or whether it represents something much wider by way of social, economic and cultural transformation, is an important one. Policy analysis and research entails a clear view of what can and what cannot be the object of policy.

As we have seen, there is evidence of the abandonment of the policy function of nation-states in the face of the global market in education and economy. This calls into question some of the expressed aims of lifelong learning such as social justice, equality of opportunity, social inclusion, social progress, and so on. In fact, these are traditional objects of social democratic or welfare policy, as expressed in public education systems amongst other welfare provisions. Policies for lifelong learning are therefore deeply implicated in the fate of welfare provision, the role of the state in respect of policy formation, and in the ways in which meaning is attributed to lifelong learning itself.

In the rest of this paper, three such meanings are analysed in relation to their implications for public education: lifelong learning as policy, strategy and cultural practice.

Lifelong Learning as Policy

If the meaning of lifelong learning is co-extensive with the further development of the public system of education and training, which it clearly is in many respects, then it is subject to policy analysis in the traditional sense. The analytic conditions of policy are formation, implementation and compulsion :

1. The state, or some other ultimate source of political authority and sovereignty over both the means and the ends of policy.
2. A system of bureaucratic institutions, ranging from departments and ministries of state to local administrations, down to individual schools or colleges.
3. Together, these constituted a system of compulsion or sanctions which ensured policy compliance. (Griffin 1999a: 339)

This meant that policy analysis was based on the assumption that it was possible to discover whether or not a policy had been implemented and its objects obtained. This

is how policy analysis emerged as a response to policy research into the welfare state, despite the fact that education has not been generally included in its remit.

But the idea of education as a welfare policy of the state has been recognised from the beginning in the social democratic model of lifelong learning projected by UNESCO and other international agencies. These agencies have also begun to take notice of the ways in which the role of the state in respect of welfare is under threat from global market forces :

> Many countries are also experiencing a crisis in social policies, which is undermining the very foundations of a system of solidarity that had appeared able to reconcile, in a democratic way, the economic, political and social aspects of society under the aegis of the Welfare State. (UNESCO 1996: 56)

The worldwide crisis of the welfare state is a crisis of social democracy with implications for the policy of lifelong learning itself. The role of the state is crucial to the achievement of a social democratic vision of lifelong learning : 'In common with all theories of the welfare state the "state" itself is at the heart of social democratic perspectives' (Lavalette and Pratt 1997: 12)

The role of the state in welfare or social democratic regimes is redistributive and interventionist in favour of those least likely to gain advantage in the market for goods or services such as educational opportunity. An earlier UNESCO report, before the current crisis in welfare and the role of the state, confidently asserted the role of the state in pre-globalisation terms :

> Any educational policy reflects a country's political options, its traditions and values and its conception of its future. Clearly, in the first place, it is a function pertaining to each State's national sovereignty.
> Expounding an educational policy is the end result of a process of thought, which consists in:
> Ensuring that educational objectives comply with over-all objectives.
> Deducing educational objectives - in fact - from aims approved in over-all political policy. Harmonizing educational objectives with those adopted in other sectors of national activity (UNESCO 1972: 170)

In the quarter-century which elapsed between the Faure and the Delors Reports for UNESCO, the role of the state and of social welfare policy have changed with considerable consequences for lifelong learning. It is not as evident as it once was that the overall objectives of post-welfare states are social redistribution and intervention on behalf of groups disadvantaged in the education market.

Nevertheless, lifelong learning remains a policy of government when the meaning of lifelong learning is identical with an expansion of the public education and training system. Wherever it is possible unambiguously to measure the outcomes of policies in relation to aims and objectives, then it seems appropriate to analyse such policies in conventional ways: 'targets' seems to have been widely adopted to describe this process, alongside performance and outcomes. The penalties for missing targets,

usually financial, represent the terms of compliance and the existence of sanctions whereby the government retains control over the *outcomes* of policy with clear and unambiguous mechanisms of compliance. In the compulsory sector, for example, the overriding of local control in favour of direct control of schools by way of funding, audit and inspection, is an example of policy formation, implementation and compliance in its most obvious form.

However, lifelong learning policies are only partly addressed to quantifiable outcomes such as employability, human resource development, technological accreditation and global competition. They are also addressed to outcomes which are by no means measurable in the same way, such as social inclusion, or active citizenship, or even the quality of life itself. There are also the various *sites* of learning associated with lifelong learning, such as the family, the community or the workplace, which clearly lie beyond the scope of policy in the conventional sense. To understand the meaning of lifelong learning in these contexts we have to abandon altogether the conventional categories of policy analysis

Lifelong Learning as Strategy

Just as it is important to make a clear distinction between education (which can be mandated) and learning (which cannot), so it is important to distinguish policy from strategy. This is particularly important because the two terms are often used interchangeably, whereas in relation to the role of the state they are by no means the same thing.

Strategy implies that the government abandons control over the *outcomes* of policy and restricts itself to organising the *means*. The combined effects of globalisation and competition, the onset of worldwide communications systems and embracing the neo-liberalism of the marketplace, have the effect of considerably reducing the scope for redistributive or welfare policies on the part of government. The role of government is seen as creating the conditions in which individuals are most likely to maximise their own learning. But the ultimate responsibility lies with them. This is consistent with the individualism of the competitive market economy, but also with the idea that the state should interfere as little as possible in the lives of individuals. The close integration of lifelong learning with the reform of the welfare state along these lines in Britain (DfEE 1998) suggests that lifelong learning itself is part of a wider government strategy to privatise the welfare system.

Before the term lifelong learning became widely adopted, there was a tradition of regarding adult education, recurrent education, continuing education, paid educational leave and so on as all *strategies* to bring about lifelong learning or a learning society (Houghton and Richardson 1974 ; Flude and Parrott 1979 ; Himmelstrup *et al* 1981 ; Titmus 1981) No doubt the term strategy was not necessarily used in distinction from policy in those days, but nevertheless it does convey some sense that what can be sanctioned or mandated is not learning *per se* but the kinds of conditions in which it might be maximised. This usage has now come to full fruition in the policy discourse of lifelong learning, which itself is a strategy on the part of the government to bring about further ends such as economic competitiveness, social cohesion, social inclusion, citizenship, and so on.

What are the implications of the shift towards a strategic position for public education? On the one hand, there is intense government interest in securing the conditions of economic competitiveness, social cohesion, human resource development and so on, but on the other, the role of the market, of "partners" and "stakeholders" makes policy superfluous :

> The strategy of governments is to create the conditions in which people, families, communities and organisations are most *likely* to learn for themselves, thus obviating the need for education policy in the traditional sense (Griffin 1999b : 440)

It must not be assumed, of course, that the strategic role of government is a passive one. The conditions of learning have to be created in the form of various incentives, mainly financial, such as vouchers or tax-breaks, but also persuasion, veiled threat or even moral bullying. Learning has also been conceived as a kind of cultural commodity, and located not only in the market place but the in the social system of class and status.

Lifelong Learning as Cultural Practice

If the government's retreat to the strategic position has implications for public education, the idea of lifelong learning as some kind of 'learning age' or 'learning revolution' or 'learning culture' has even more. This would seem to remove lifelong learning from the realm of policy entirely.

Although it is sometimes implied that cultural change can be socially engineered or created (NAGCELL 1999) it is more widely accepted that only strategic incentives are more likely, in the short term, to bring about a learning society :

> Lifetime learning is not a Government programme, or the property of one institution. It is a shared goal relating to the attitudes and behaviour of many employers, individuals and organisations. Government has a part to play but governments alone cannot achieve the cultural changes involved in making a reality of lifetime learning (DfEE 1996 : 4)

The abandonment of policy in favour of strategy is taken a step further when lifelong learning is taken to consist of cultural practices in the form of attitudes and behaviour. The idea that learning is sited in everyday experience, and in the social relations of family, community and work, effectively distances it from public education and thus removes it from the realms of both policy and strategy.

A postmodern analysis locates learning in cultural practices and in the culture of production itself (du Gay 1997). But it may also be located in the culture of consumption too :

> Educational practitioners rather than being the source/producers of knowledge/taste become facilitators helping to interpret everybody's knowledge and helping to open up possibilities for

> further experience. They become part of the 'culture' industry, vendors in the educational hypermarket. In a reversal of modernist education, the consumer (the learner) rather than the producer (educator) is articulated as having greater significance and power (Usher *et al* 1997 : 107-108)

Locating learning in patterns of consumption and production, which is certainly entailed by much of the policy discourse of lifelong learning, leads inevitably to a view of learning in terms of leisure and lifestyle practices :

> ...knowledge becomes important: knowledge of new goods, their social and cultural value, and how to use them appropriately. This is particularly the case with aspiring groups who adopt a learning mode towards consumption and the cultivation of a lifestyle. It is for groups such as the new middle class, the new working class and the new rich or upper class, that the consumer-culture magazines, newspapers, books television and radio programmes which stress self-improvement, self-development, personal transformation, how to manage property, relationships and ambitions, how to construct a fulfilling lifestyle, are most relevant (Featherstone 1991 : 19)

The view of learning, or a 'learning mode', as a lifestyle accessory of the new classes of society in a post-welfare society removes it even further from the public domain of policy, so that the government's retreat from policy-making to strategy-formation to 'learning cultures' is complete.

Conclusion

Lifelong learning can only be an object of policy in relation to *some* of its meanings, namely, those which reduce lifelong learning to the expansion of educational and training opportunities. In the case of other meanings of lifelong learning, such as the adoption of a strategic position or a culture of learning, policy analysis is redundant because its object is public policy. Furthermore, the contingency of policy analysis upon a concept of social welfare focuses attention on the consequences for the professed social objectives of lifelong learning, such as social cohesion, equal opportunities and social inclusion. The further the retreat from public education policy towards lifelong learning or the learning society, the less likely such objectives could be achieved.

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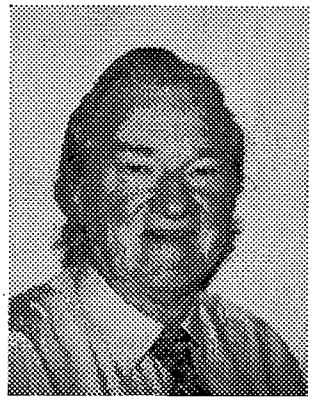

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Colloquium Paper
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Back to Index of Biographies

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