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## LIFELONG LEARNING: RHETORIC AND MEANING

By

HUGH BERNARD BLAIR

A thesis submitted in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

2000



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## **DECLARATION**

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Hugh Bernard Blair

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## **Lifelong Learning: Rhetoric and Meaning**

**Hugh B. Blair**

### **Abstract**

Lifelong Learning is often associated with the concept of a Knowledge or Learning Society and has moved to the forefront of government policy in the United Kingdom, which sees it as having a central role to play in welfare reform. The advantages to be gained through Lifelong Learning are seen to be all-encompassing - from improving national competitiveness to strengthening the family and promoting social cohesion.

Some researchers on Lifelong Learning focus on access to learning and the issues related to participation in Lifelong Learning. Others focus on aspects related to Learning provision and providers. This thesis questions the foundations of Lifelong Learning by analysing the manner in which Lifelong Learning is discoursed. It argues that Lifelong Learning is discoursed in a language of change, centred on the notion of the uniqueness of contemporaneity. This thesis demonstrates that, despite overtures to more humanistic readings, Lifelong Learning can be seen in official documents to be anchored in human capital theory. The thesis attempts to move beyond normative readings of Lifelong Learning by analysing other theories of capital, *viz.* cultural and social capital.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This thesis is dedicated to the love and wisdom of my parents.

*A.M.D.G.*

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## *Chapter I*

### INTRODUCTION

#### I. 1. The Purpose, Aims and Objectives of the Study.

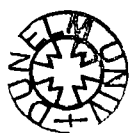
Lifelong learning has been the focus of much recent writing in education, particularly since the declaration of the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996. It is often associated with the concept of a Knowledge or Learning Society and, as such, has also moved to the forefront of government policy in the United Kingdom which sees lifelong learning as having a central role to play in welfare reform. Increasingly, however, the tenets of lifelong learning are being challenged:

The international flurry of papers and conferences on lifelong learning has been replicated in the UK, particularly since the election of a new Labour government in May 1997. Within two years no less than 23 government initiatives in lifelong learning were established .... New posts which include the term 'lifelong learning' in the title have also been created across industry, education and politics, but too often lifelong learning has been used simply to rebrand existing centres, courses and students, without any new thinking, new kinds of students or any new pedagogy. Lifelong learning, in fact, is being widely used to give the outward appearance of change.

(Coffield, 2000b:6-7)

Some researchers are led to question whether indeed lifelong learning can be said to exist as a distinctive autonomous movement within education:

Discourse about lifelong learning, it seems to me, is a decoy, a distraction from the ethical responsibility of the adult



educator. Like its predecessors, andragogy and self-directed learning, discourse on lifelong learning shifts the focus from broader considerations of public good, to narrow personal and/or technical ones.

(Baptiste, 1999:95)

The advantages to be gained through lifelong learning are considered as all-encompassing – from improving national competitiveness to strengthening the family and promoting social cohesion. Access to learning and the issues related to participation (and, hence, non-participation) in lifelong learning are the focus for some researchers. Others focus on aspects related to lifelong learning provision and the providers themselves.

The quality of existing analysis of lifelong learning, however, is increasingly being challenged (Coffield, 2000b: 3). This thesis, prompted by Locke's injunction to thinkers to look 'abroad beyond the smoke of their own chimneys' (Locke, 1993:31) seeks to analyse the ways in which lifelong learning is discoursed:

But *ideas* which, by reason of their obscurity or otherwise, are confused cannot produce any clear or distinct knowledge: because, as far as any *ideas* are confused, so far the mind cannot perceive clearly whether they agree or disagree. Or to express the same thing in a way less apt to be misunderstood: he that hath not determined the *ideas* to the words he uses cannot make propositions of them of whose truth he can be certain.

(*ibid.*:302)

It is, therefore, the purpose of this thesis to move beyond the 'extreme conceptual vagueness' (Coffield, *op cit.*: 3) inherent in the discourses of lifelong

learning to reach a clearer understanding of the mechanisms at play in policy on lifelong learning.

This thesis evaluates:

1. The extent to which the rhetoric of lifelong learning may be seen as a further manifestation of the *marketization* and *commodification* of education. This discussion examines the following issues:

- How can the ideological framework within which the rhetoric of policy on lifelong learning is set be characterised?
- Is there evidence of any theory of learning in official documents on lifelong learning?
- If so, what are its characteristics?

2. The manner in which lifelong learning is discoursed in policy documents and the *claims* made for lifelong learning therein and the potential of these claims being met. This includes an investigation of the following:

- What role does the rhetoric of change play within lifelong learning?
- What is the impact of globalization theory on lifelong learning?

- How can the discourses of change and globalization be seen to exhibit aspects of postmodernity?, and
- What claims to validity can such discourses make?

3. The manner in which the issue of *access* to and *uptake* of lifelong learning is addressed in policy documents and in educational research. This is evaluated through the lens of *Pierre Bourdieu* and his theory of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). It is suggested that Bourdieu's work, even though open to criticism, has heuristic value in understanding the relationship between lifelong learning, society and culture, which are central aspects of governments' policies for lifelong learning. This evaluation consists of:

- The claims of social cohesion made in policy documents in lifelong learning,
- An analysis of research undertaken on the levels of participation in lifelong learning, and
- An investigation of the potential of Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction to serve as a tool of analysis in issues of access and uptake.

4. The *human capital* premises of lifelong learning policy documents. This evaluation consists of:

- An investigation of the major characteristics of human capital,
- An analysis of the value of the concept within lifelong learning,
- A discussion of the wider societal implications of its use within the rhetoric of policy documents on lifelong learning, and
- An examination of the concept of social capital.

5. The characteristics of the *post-Fordist/post-welfare state* and its role in formulations of policy on lifelong learning. This includes an analysis of:

- The potential of lifelong learning to meet the claims it asserts,
- The notion of a 'Learning Society', and
- The role of the state within modernist and post-modernist frameworks in formulations of policy.

## I. 2. The Originality and Significance of the Study.

This thesis sets out to bring serious social science theoretical perspectives to a discussion which has thus far frequently been only a pragmatic, outcomes-oriented discussion (Coffield, 2000b; Bagnall, 2000). It thereby seeks to expose the ideology at work in the rhetoric of official documents on lifelong learning and builds on the work of Coffield (1999 a, b; 2000 a, b); Preston (1999); Field (2000a); Baptiste (1999) and Wilson (1999). It was felt essential, first, to analyse and clarify the ideological framework within which the rhetoric of lifelong learning can be seen rather than embark on any independent empirical study on lifelong learning as such. The study does however, draw on empirical research from other sources (Tuckett and Sargant, 1996; Rees *et al*, 1997; Sargant *et al*, 1997; Campaign for Learning, 1998; Coffield, 1999; 2000b; Schuller and Bamford, 2000). This study seeks to break the mould of the manner in which lifelong learning is frequently discoursed by developing perspectives of analysis which have hitherto been under-represented or neglected.

A theme which runs throughout this thesis is the reference in the literature on lifelong learning to change and the uniqueness of the present, frequently within the context of postmodernism. Official documents proclaim the arrival of a new 'age' (DfEE, 1998). The age we live in is felt to demand and require a *re-think* in the way of doing things, and merely 'standing still is not an option' (DfEE, 1999). The new orthodoxy inherent in lifelong learning is seen to derive from the potentially subversive nature of its character, in that learning

is seen to concern itself not only with learning to remember but also, and in some senses, more importantly, with learning to forget (Giddens, 2000:74). This has given rise to a body of research in education which appears unquestioningly to accept the fundamental reasoning behind the rhetoric in lifelong learning.

Essentially, therefore, official documents on lifelong learning lay claim to the uniqueness of contemporaneity. Time, in lifelong learning policy, is seen to be disorganised - 'Time's arrow is broken', (Sennett, 1998: 98). It is as though history is felt to have stopped. This thesis questions the validity of such a claim. It does so, by drawing on the work of Giddens (1999; 2000; in Cassell, 1993; Harvey (1990); Featherstone (1991) and Sennett (1998).

The originality of this thesis lies in the manner in which it :

1. articulates the difference between *the rhetoric of lifelong learning and its reality*,
2. examines lifelong learning through *the differing lenses of the way in which it is discoursed*,
3. locates the rhetoric of lifelong learning *within the educational discourse on the commodification and marketization of learning*,
4. evaluates *the relations between the individual and the state*, within a postmodernist framework where responsibility is moved increasingly towards the individual, and

5. analyses the claims made for lifelong learning from several lenses:

- *human capital theory,*
- *cultural capital theory,*
- *postmodernism,*
- *policy analysis, and*
- *government legitimization.*

### I. 3. The Parameters of the Study.

Given the word limits imposed on this thesis, it is not possible to develop all the fundamental issues surrounding the development and discussions of lifelong learning and to analyse the effect these have on the elaboration of the rhetoric and reality of lifelong learning. The very term a 'Knowledge Society', which is frequently alluded to in the literature on lifelong learning would require more profound analysis in terms of what is felt to be understood by 'Knowledge' and consequently the relations of power, access and lack of access to such 'knowledge'. In the context of an ever-increasing internationalisation of institutions, the question also of the state's role in policy formation, is one that requires attention. Field has demonstrated that 'Promoting lifelong learning does not simply require new government measures, but rather a new approach to government' (Field, 2000a:259), and much of the discussion in the latter part of this thesis is centred on the role of

the nation state in its formulations of policy. The role of the educator is also an issue which writers in the field of lifelong learning consider worthy urgently of research (Wilson, 1999; Field, *op cit.*).

However, the specific aims and objectives of this study outlined above, allow this thesis to develop and analyse six conceptualisations of lifelong learning where it is discoursed as:

- (a) an issue of individual responsibility,
- (b) an economic imperative,
- (c) a tool in the management of change,
- (d) a means of consensus building ,
- (e) a social 'safety net', and
- (f) a mechanism of what may be called governance apologetics.

All six conceptualisations of lifelong learning are seen to stem from a declared belief in the uniqueness of contemporaneity. While the first three conceptualisations can be seen to be mutually supportive, tensions are shown to exist between these and the fourth and fifth conceptualisations. The final conceptualisation, (f), is developed as a source of understanding the origins of these tensions.

In summary, then, this thesis

1. confines itself to discussions of government policy, its documentation and public statements,
2. uses a comprehensive set of paradigms to analyse the issues of lifelong learning,
3. looks at lifelong learning as a manifestation of certain aspects of postmodernity (*e.g.* the forgetfulness of the past, the indulgence of the present, the move to consumerism, the imperatives of internationalization and marketization, and the globalization of capital),
4. takes coherent, policy-oriented, political, social science and economic perspectives rather than, for example, any psychological, pedagogical or human developmental perspective,
5. clarifies the ideological framework within which the rhetoric of lifelong learning is located. It does not embark on any empirical study of lifelong learning as such, since it

is felt that to undertake empirical research on a given agenda would serve only to reinforce that agenda, and the purpose of this study is precisely to challenge such an agenda.<sup>1</sup>

It is recognized, of course, that this thesis only provides one reading of the discourses of lifelong learning, and that this may be an incomplete analysis of the range of possible readings. That is not considered to be an invalidation of this thesis (*e.g.* by being too selective); rather, this thesis exposes discourses which, it is felt, are useful in amplifying our understanding of lifelong learning.

#### I. 4. The Structure and Argument of the Thesis.

This thesis argues that lifelong learning in official documents is articulated such that:

- it can be understood as a mechanism of social, cultural and economic reproduction, rather than production,
- it reflects another manifestation of the marketization of education,
- it neglects fundamental inequalities - social, cultural and economic - inherent in society,
- it exhibits aspects of postmodernity in its discourses of change and globalization,

---

<sup>1</sup> This thesis does, however, build on empirical research undertaken by Tuckett and Sargant (1996); Rees *et al* (1997); Sargant *et al* (1997); Campaign for Learning (1998); Coffield (1999; 2000b) and Schuller and Bamford (2000).

- the postmodernity, within which the issues of access and participation are discoursed and the human capital premises of lifelong learning are located, is *de facto* **exclusive** rather than *inclusive*, and
- it precludes more liberalist and humanistic readings of lifelong learning.

This thesis is divided into three conceptual parts. The first part, Chapters II and III, concerns itself with the socio-historical setting within which lifelong learning is discoursed. It begins first by analysing the increasing commodification of learning that has taken place over recent years. From the publication of the report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Delors, 1996) education was felt to be under threat by the increasing changes underway in society. Since the choices concerning education are seen to reflect more fundamental readings of what is understood by 'society', the report presents the discourse on lifelong learning as a 'necessary Utopia' (*ibid.*:13-35):

Choices in education thus concern the whole of society and require the establishment of a democratic debate, not only on the resources to be made available to education but also on its ultimate goals ....

The debate must be founded on an accurate evaluation of the education system, which is based on premises acceptable to all and which must not be narrowly economic in character. While it is proper to speak of a market for vocational education inasmuch as some of its services may be evaluated in cost-benefit terms, this is clearly not the case with all educational activities, some of which lie outside the economic order - those, for example, which relate to participation in the life of the community or self-fulfilment. Furthermore, the education system forms a whole in which the parts are so completely interdependent and the integration with society so thorough

that it can be difficult to pinpoint the origin of particular malfunctions.

(*ibid.*:157)

This initial discussion on the commodification of learning suggests that the rhetoric of official documents on lifelong learning fails to acknowledge its pragmatic roots and concludes that this can be interpreted as reflecting the increasing submerging of the *political* into the *economic*, with an accompanying, more narrow, instrumentalist notion of learning.

The thesis then moves on to an analysis of what is understood by *change* and investigates also some claims that the 'new order' established through increasing *globalization* can be said to have brought about a 'total 'institutional paradigm shift" (Reed, 1992:233). Bourdieu, for example, considers globalization as a 'myth' (Bourdieu, 1998:34,36). The chapter pursues the examination of the commodification of learning by investigating, from the viewpoint of economic theory (Boyer and Drache, 1996), the conceptual basis of this rhetoric of change and globalization and of the relationship between policy and the market. It investigates also the claims and counterclaims made for the existence or non-existence of an institutional paradigm shift in the era of postmodernity (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992; Reed, 1992; Field, in Raggatt *et al*, 1996) and demonstrates the lack of firm evidence in the argument of those who sustain that such a paradigm shift has indeed arisen.

The analysis of the accompanying discourse of the need for *flexibility* on the part of the individual that the rhetoric of change and globalization imparts

allows this first part to conclude that what can be said to be particular about the current preoccupation with change is that, unlike other periods in history, change, today, is presented as a factual necessity, not because universal disaster would follow any refusal to implement such change, rather 'it is woven into the everyday practices of a vigorous capitalism. Instability is meant to be normal' (Sennett, *op cit.*:31).

The shift of responsibility, within a postmodern analysis, from society and the state towards the individual raises questions concerning the access to and the uptake of lifelong learning and these questions are examined in the second part of the thesis, Chapter IV. It first analyses the results of research undertaken into the levels of participation and concludes by suggesting that this research indicates that it is precisely those members of society who could be seen to benefit most from any lifelong learning who appear to be absent from the lifelong learning continuum.

Grenfell and James (1998) in their study on Bourdieu and educational research urge the researcher to engage with Bourdieu's theory since, they suggest, it represents a paradigm shift in educational research:

For Bourdieu, aspiring to be 'scientific' does not involve the presentation of hard positivist theories, but an 'understanding and explaining' that is both transformative and liberating. That this science involves a different way of acting and thinking is self evident. However, it results in resistance from established orthodoxies in philosophical, sociological, and educational research. What is promised is a break with the

past, together with its false methodological and epistemological dichotomies.

(Grenfell and James, 1998:178)

The lens of Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction, (Bourdieu, 1994; 1997;1998a; with Passeron, 1977), is thus examined in order to reach an understanding of this research. The analysis of Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *cultural capital* leads to the conclusion that whereas in the first part of the thesis there was a certain determinism to be discerned in official discourse on lifelong learning, so also is one able then to discern a similar determinism at work in Bourdieu's cultural theory.<sup>2</sup> However, while the analysis of access to, and uptake of, lifelong learning through the lens of Bourdieu allows for the issue to be addressed taking into account the inequalities inherent in society - the fact that all learners do not approach lifelong learning with equal cultural, educational or economic capital - it is felt that Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *cultural capital* are more descriptive in nature and as such, taken alone, do not allow firm conclusions to be drawn concerning the processes responsible for such levels of (non) participation in lifelong learning. Moreover some more recent research (Eraut *et al*, in Coffield, 2000b: 231-259) questions the validity of the assumption in the research on access to and uptake of lifelong learning that *non-participant* may be equated with *non-learner*.

It is felt necessary, therefore, to examine the ways in which policy on lifelong learning is articulated through the perspectives of human capital in an attempt

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<sup>2</sup> In Bourdieu's case this determinism is seen to be a *social* determinism, whereas in Chapters II and III official documents are shown to exhibit the characteristics of an *economic* determinism.

to evaluate whether such a reading of lifelong learning discourse may lead to a greater understanding of the ideology at work in official documents on lifelong learning. The third and final part of this thesis, Chapters V and VI, examines the concept of human capital (Becker, 1993) which is shown to be at the root of much of the discourse of official documents on lifelong learning. Human capital, in its focus away from wider social concerns towards the individual, can then be seen to exhibit the characteristics of postmodernism. Learning, in this analysis, is shown to be equated with skill formation. Thus, the declared wider societal goals of much of the discourse of official documents on lifelong learning - to 'unite society', to 'contribute to social cohesion', to 'strengthen the family and the wider community' (DfEE, 1998), 'social integration', combating 'social exclusion' (European Commission, 1996) - are seen to be put beyond the reach of any such policy.

Moreover, the economic determinism inherent in this discourse of lifelong learning is often accompanied by pleas for a more entrepreneurial approach to learning. Such attitudes are seen to depend in great part on appropriate analyses of *risk* (Giddens, 1999). The concept of social capital (Putnam, 1995, 1996; Fukuyama, 1995; Coleman, in Halsey *et al*, 1997; Schuller and Bamford, 2000) is examined and it is suggested that since, to a great extent, the evaluation of risk can be seen to depend on relationships founded on trust (Bellah *et al*, 1985; Etzioni, 1993; Whiteley, 2000), human capital measurements alone would appear to be insufficient in the evaluation of economic growth, and that evaluations of social capital are needed to correct

this.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, even within a more narrow instrumentalist perspective, the claims, excluding all other perspectives and premised on human capital alone, that lifelong learning policy may lead to the achievement of the goals it sets itself, are thus shown to under-represent the reality of economic decision-making. By taking into account other measures of capital - social, cultural, economic, educational *etc.*, lifelong learning policy goals can be seen to achieve a greater discursive coherence. It is suggested, also, that in order for a new 'culture' of learning to be established (DfEE, 1999:6), considerations of social capital must be taken into account.

The shift of responsibility from the state to the individual, reflected in lifelong learning policy, has allowed for the discussion of the rhetoric of lifelong learning to be located within postmodernist analyses of education and society. Questions are then raised as to the validity *per se*, in this perspective, of terms such as a Learning or Knowledge *Society* and indeed the extent to which lifelong learning may be considered as a distinctive element in the field of education. The study then moves on to examine more closely the declared aims of official documents on lifelong learning, relating them to the six formulations of lifelong learning discussed in I. 3.

An examination is made of Giddens's theory of modernity (Giddens, in Cassell, 1993) (Giddens, 1999; 2000) and particularly of his conception of the

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<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in Chapter VI, evidence is presented that shows that far from seeing learning as an investment in human capital, the experience of learning for the sample studied in their research project (Hewison *et al.*, in Coffield, 2000b:167-197) is viewed by the learners themselves more as a 'screening device' (Woodhall in Ialsey *et al.*, 1997:222).

'chronic revision' he considers inherent in the notion of modernity (Giddens, in Cassell, 1993:293). The concept of *revision* in Giddens's theory of modernity is then shown to be reflected in the discourse of the increasing need for *flexibility* within the rhetoric to be found in lifelong learning policy. As with the human capital premises previously discussed, modernist readings of lifelong learning are also shown to under-represent the economic, political, and social processes at work within society such that the wider societal goals of lifelong learning policy, from this perspective, can also be seen to be unrealistic.

The thesis concludes that:

1. The lack of clarity in the rhetoric in lifelong learning allows for lifelong learning to be mediated more as *aspiration* represented as *strategy* rather than as *policy* (Greer and Hoggett, 1999),
2. Much of the discussion of policy within lifelong learning and, indeed the policy itself, is conducted at the level of rhetoric rather than reality,
3. The rhetoric of lifelong learning exhibits the characteristics of a politics of retreat on the part of the state - what Bourdieu (1998) describes as a process of 'involution',<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu explains this process thus: 'I think that the left hand of the state has the sense that the right hand no longer knows, or, worse, no longer really wants to know what the left hand does. In any case, it does not want to pay for it' (Bourdieu, 1998: 2).

4. This rhetoric is unhelpful in understanding the central issues of the locus and use of power and the role of government in the development and formulation of policy in the post-welfare era, and that lifelong learning in official documents is discoursed as:

- an issue of *individual responsibility*,
- an *economic imperative*,
- a tool in the *management of change*,
- a means of *consensus building*,
- a *social 'safety net'*, and
- a mechanism of what may be called *governance apologetics*.

The reading of lifelong learning adopted in this thesis is one of the several possible discourses that could have been adopted. Furthermore, in order to expose the problems inherent in official documents and indeed in lifelong learning policy itself, the argument of this thesis has adopted a generally critical rather than supportive approach towards government documents.

## Chapter II

### AN INHERITANCE FOR SALE

#### II. 1. Introduction.

This chapter sets out the discourse of lifelong learning as an expression of the commodification and marketization of learning. The inspiration for the title of this chapter '*An Inheritance for Sale*' derives from the report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century which drew on one of the fables of La Fontaine for its own title:

For the title of its report, the Commission turned to one of La Fontaine's fables, *The Ploughman and his Children*,

Be sure (the ploughman said), not to sell the inheritance

Our forebears left to us:

A treasure lies concealed therein.

Readapting slightly the words of the poet, who was lauding the virtues of hard work, and referring instead to education - that is, everything that humanity has learned about itself - we could have him say:

But the old man was wise

To show them before he died

That learning is the treasure.

(Delors, 1996:35)

This chapter situates lifelong learning discourse within the wider sphere of recent changes in the field of education. By referring in particular to the increasing commodification of learning these changes brought with them

(which is seen to be in opposition to the notion of learning as a public good)<sup>5</sup>, this chapter uncovers the reasons behind the belief of the Commission that education was in a sense under threat, that education could indeed in some sense be considered as an '*inheritance for sale*'. The field of Lifelong Learning is thereby contextualised in its socio-historical setting.

The discussion centres on the tensions faced by the state brought about by the recent economic restructuring, *e.g.* withdrawing from interventionist positions while at the same time maintaining overall control over the nature of interventions, *i.e.* 'steering at a distance' (Ball, 1994). It is felt that as a result of these tensions, the state has adopted a new *politics of retreat* and that policy on lifelong learning, rather than being inclusive and re-centering the educational debate on notions of equality of opportunity, has in fact retained much of the ideology of the Neo-conservatives and Neo-liberals which had associated learning with the search for employability. Such an ideology, it is felt, neglects fundamental notions of inequality inherent in a society founded on relations of capital.

## II. 2. (i) Education and the Market-place.

Much has been written in recent years about the restructuring taking place in education (Ball, 1990a; 1990b; Bowe *et al*, 1992; Lawton, 1992; Bridges and McLaughlin, 1994; Gewirtz *et al*, 1995; Bridges and Husbands, 1996; Halsey *et al*, 1997), and it is not the intention of this chapter to restate the arguments

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<sup>5</sup> The reading of learning as a 'public good' sees it as non-rival, indivisible and non-excludable.

presented. However, Brown (in Halsey et al, 1997:393-408), drawing on the work of Toffler (1981), encapsulates educational socio-historical developments in Toffler's metaphor of 'waves' and sees three distinct waves in the ideologies surrounding educational reform.

The first wave 'was intended to *confirm* rather than *transcend* existing social divisions' (*ibid.*:394) and is represented in the push for schooling of the masses in the nineteenth century. The second wave, however, moved

from an education determined by an accident of birth (ascription) to one based upon one's age, aptitude and ability (achievement) .... However, the meritocracy never promised equality, only that inequalities would be distributed more fairly.

(*ibid.*:395)

It is an ideology which Brown sees as predominant in the post war years and which was to last until the arrival of a third wave in the mid-1970s. Both Harvey (1990) and Jameson (1991) sustain the idea (although to differing degrees) that capital had reached a turning point in its development. Brown situates the time frame for this around the period of the OPEC oil crisis of the mid 1970s, echoing Harvey (1990) and his notion of 'flexible accumulation'.<sup>6</sup> The state was felt to be lacking in influence over many aspects of socio-economic life:

The crisis of state authority in the 1970's gravely weakened the old political consensus. Social democracy appeared to be failing not only in its ability to deliver continuing economic

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<sup>6</sup> Chapter III, in its discussion of the rhetoric of *change*, covers this in greater detail.

prosperity, but also in its will to preserve the foundations of social order and public authority.

(Gamble, in Loney *et al*, 1991:265)

With particular reference to the field of learning, writers refer to the claimed turning point of 1976 with the speech made at Ruskin College by the then British Prime Minister, James Callaghan, which, it is believed, began to question seriously the tenets of the prevailing consensus on education and launched a new debate on education reform (Lawton, 1992; Ball, 1994).

Twenty years later, just a few months away from taking office as prime Minister himself, Tony Blair delivered a speech at Ruskin College where the focus was precisely on the questions evoked earlier by Callaghan:

Twenty years ago, James Callaghan had the courage to challenge the orthodoxies of his time. He sketched out both his concerns and the outline of a new modernised education service which offered equal opportunity and high standards for all. He questioned the existing set of relationships between government, parents, employers and teachers and pointed the way forward.

Since then, the education service has been reformed by successive Tory governments, but the questions Callaghan posed and the issues he raised remain -remarkably - relevant today.

(Blair, 1996)

For Mr Blair

there is the chance to forge a new consensus on education policy. It will be practical not ideological. And it will put behind us the political and ideological debates that have dominated the last thirty years.

(*ibid.*)

Adam Smith's assertion that, 'I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good' (cited in Loney *et al*, 1991:232) appeared as a corner stone for 'necessary' reform as these 'political and ideological debates' began from 1976 onwards to concern themselves with new interpretations of freedom and democracy. The impression of weakness in existing societal structures begged more serious questions concerning the role of education and indeed the role of state provision in general.

## II. 2. (ii) Of Freedom and Choice.

Brodie describes the process of the state's attempt at a re-invention of itself or restructuring as consisting of three 're-s': *re-privatization*, *re-commodification* and *re-constitution* (Brodie, in Boyer and Drache, 1996: 389). This restructuring is perceived to be necessary as a result of what was considered to be government overload (Loney, Bocoock *et al*, 1991; Ball, 1994). Re-privatizing included such elements as 'freeing' public corporations and the 'liberation' of social provision (health, welfare, education and so on) back to the market. For the New Right it was seen as essential to re-assume the mindset of an enterprise culture, and education in particular had a key role to play in this area.

For Brodie re-commodification '...rests on the unverifiable assertion that services and assets created in the public sphere are better delivered and maintained through market mechanisms' (*op cit.*:389). This fundamental belief

by the New Right in the supremacy of market forces seemed self-evident and therefore unassailable:

The blind, unplanned, uncoordinated wisdom of the market is overwhelmingly superior to the well-researched, rational, systematic, well-meaning, co-operative, science based, forward looking, statistically respectable plans of governments, bureaucracies and international organisations.

(Joseph, cited in Lawton, 1992:6)

Brodie describes re-constitution as the imposition from above (*i.e.* from the state) of claims of the supremacy of certain values over others (*e.g.* of the notion of the family as the cornerstone of society).

Much of the discourse of the New Right's attempts at reform was anchored in the ideology of Public Choice Theory (Boyer and Drache, 1996; Halsey *et al*, 1997) and influenced by the theses of Hayek, Friedman and Nozick (Ball, 1994).<sup>7</sup> Halsey, however, is dismissive of Public Choice Theory. He bases his criticisms on five major objections:

- (a) It is founded on the perception of post-war economic crises as being unique in character,
- (b) It ignores the state as locus of the exercise of power,

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<sup>7</sup> See in this regard Hayek, F. (1976) *Law, Legislation and Liberty, Vol 2: The Mirage of Social Justice*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; and Hayek, F. (1979) *Law, Legislation and Liberty, Vol 3: The Political Order of a Free People*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Also, Friedman, M. and Friedman, R. (1980) *Free to Choose*, London: Secker and Warburg and Nozick, R. (1974), *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, Oxford: Blackwell.

- (c) It ignores also the fact that the different social classes are positioned unequally in the market,
- (d) It is founded on motivations based on a search for wealth, and
- (e) It displays little attention to the concept of democracy (Ball, 1994: 256-257).

The increasing withdrawal by the state from welfare provision advocated by the tenets of Austrian economics is thus felt to represent a *politics of retreat* which is founded on a notion of freedom 'which distinguishes freedom of choice from democratic participation' (*ibid.*:383) such that the individual becomes the *citizen-consumer*. The search for equality of opportunity which had been the prevailing consensus of the 'second wave' was abandoned as was the concept of social justice:

To discover the meaning of what is called 'social justice' has been one of my chief preoccupations for more than ten years. I have failed in this endeavour - or rather, have reached the conclusion that, with reference to a society of free men, the phrase has no meaning whatever.

(Hayek, cited in Lawton, 1992:5)

Leaving aside for one moment the fact that the New Right's reliance on market mechanisms raised serious questions concerning fundamental notions of freedom and equity, the validity of its claims of economic efficiency on the other hand seemed also to be increasingly in doubt:

Modern theoreticians, therefore strongly disagree with the rather optimistic views propagated by the more vocal

advocates of free markets; when the economy becomes complex, the reliance on pure market mechanisms raises as many problems as it solves ...

Even if one supposes that quality is well defined and that a large number of economic agents are pushing towards a competitive equilibrium, the result might be far away from a Pareto optimum if the services derived from the use of a product cannot be totally appropriated by the buyer

(Boyer in Boyer and Drache, 1996: 104)<sup>8</sup>

and, specifically, with respect to the field of education

... it has been shown that education enhances innovation, health, growth and productivity at a society-wide level. If individuals freely decide to both consume and invest in education, the level of aggregate investment will be inferior to the optimal level for the whole economy. Again, the pure market mechanism has to be mitigated or complemented by collective intervention in order to restore more efficient results: through subsidies to schools or students, public funding of the educational system and the participation of associations in delivering the adequate level of education.

(*ibid.*:104-105)

With the arrival of 'Third Way' politics the freedom agenda seemed to have turned full circle, since, while accepting the absence of any discussion on fundamental ethical values in the New Right's over-reliance on the market - 'The citizen is not the same as the consumer, and freedom is not to be equated with the freedom to buy and sell in the marketplace' (Giddens, 2000:164) - 'Third Way' politics at the same time also felt the need to

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<sup>8</sup> The Pareto Optimum is a normative economic concept which is said to be attained when policy, *i.e.* state intervention, can no more succeed in increasing the benefits to one individual without the danger of provoking a loss to another, *cf.* Pareto, V. (1972) *Manuale di Economia Politica*, London: Macmillan.

recognise that

the left needs to drop the idea that markets are a necessary evil. There is no known alternative to the market economy any longer; market competition generates gains that no other system can match. The chance of economic prosperity is only one of these. Markets do not create citizenship, but they can contribute to it and even to the reduction of inequality.

(Giddens, 2000:164-165)

For the 'Third Way' politics of Mr Blair, the changes taking place as a result of globalization were fundamental and could be seen to represent in some way a total shift from all that had gone before.<sup>9</sup> Education and, consequently lifelong learning, were seen as necessary policies in the investment of human capital:

It [human capital] is a guiding theme of welfare reform, as well as of the actions government must take to react to the knowledge economy. An active supply-side policy, placing a premium upon education, is essential. The aim is to create a high-employment economy - recognizing that nowadays many people have to reconcile work with domestic obligations.

(*ibid.*:165-166)

The issue, in terms of this analysis of the discourses of lifelong learning, then becomes that of questioning whether the *education for employment* ethos of the 'second wave' could thus be seen to have been replaced under Third Way politics by that of *education for employability* in a market-driven view of education:

This approach does not imply a downgrading of the needs of those outside the labour market. They should be 'invested in'

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<sup>9</sup> This discourse of *Change* is discussed in detail in Chapter III.

just as much as others. Positive welfare means attacking problems of dependency, isolation and lack of self-fulfilment wherever they arise.

(*ibid.*:166),

and, the crucial debate in terms of lifelong learning, therefore, is then felt to centre on the implications of what 'Third Way' politics understands by 'those outside the labour market' and the consequent targets of development of Lifelong Learning.

## II. 2. (iii) Democracy and Legitimation Crises.

The discourse of the commodification of learning was premised on the notion that change had to be instituted in ways of conceiving the world, economically, politically, ideologically and institutionally, that this change was inescapable, and therefore somehow inevitable, and that commodification was entering several walks of life. The Fordist-Keynesian paradigm (Harvey, 1990:129) held sway throughout much of Brown's 'second wave' (*op cit.*:395-397). However, the New Right's denunciation of the ills of state interventionism (Ball, 1990a:36) brought with it at the same time a legitimation crisis in how exactly the state should be seen to operate. In the Fordist-Keynesian paradigm

Increasingly, the legitimation of state power depended on the ability to spread the benefits of Fordism over all and to find ways to deliver adequate health care, housing and educational services on a massive scale but in a humane and caring way. Qualitative features on that score were the butt of innumerable criticisms, but in the end it was probably the quantitative failure that provoked the most serious dilemmas. The ability to provide collective goods depended upon

continuous acceleration in the productivity of labour in the corporate sector. Only in that way could Keynesian welfare statism be made fiscally viable.

(Harvey, *op cit.*:139)

However, the economic restructuring brought about after the economic crises of the 1970s meant that the state could simply no longer afford to meet the needs of diverse sections of the community; in a sense the monetarist policies put into place to combat the inflation of the 70s and the 'passage to an entirely new regime of accumulation, coupled with a quite different system of political and social regulation' (Harvey, *op cit.*:145), *i.e.* Harvey's notion of 'flexible accumulation' (*ibid.*:147), succeeded also in dampening what could, in the new political climate, be called an inflation of aspirations.

The Fordist-Keynesian paradigm (Harvey, 1990:129) bases itself on a strategy of legitimation which Apple terms 'value legitimation' (Apple in Burbules and Torres, 2000:66-67).<sup>10</sup> In this form of state legitimation, political discourses are based on relations of 'clientism' with the electorate in that governments essentially strive to 'deliver' the policies outlined in manifestos. The notion of 'delivery' itself reflects the mentality of commodification. The New Right's accusation of 'government overload' (Ball, 1990a: 36), questioning

the wisdom of allowing states into areas of our lives where they have no business, where the agencies of civil society can manage very well without them

(Tooley, in Bridges and McLaughlin, 1994:150),

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<sup>10</sup> Here Apple draws on the work of Roger Dale, *The State and Education Policy* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989).

introduced a new strategy of legitimation - 'sense legitimation' - where the role of the state is seen as one where societal needs as expressed by individuals exercising democratic choices are not met by giving 'value' to these needs but instead are themselves *transformed* through a discourse of marketization, 'the task is to change what actually *counts* as democracy' (Apple, in Burbules and Torres, *op cit.*:67).

Much of the focus on this need for change was aimed at education and the field of learning which, as has been demonstrated, is thus seen as a locus of debate and contention:

It [education] serves also as a proxy for larger battles over what our institutions should do, who they should serve, and who should make these decisions. And yet, by itself it is one of the major arenas through which are worked resources, power, and ideology specific to policy, finance, curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation in education. Thus, education is both cause and effect, determining and determined.

(Burbules and Torres, 2000:58)

Moreover, underlying this *politics of retreat* we may conclude that the New Right, by fashioning a notion of democracy linked more to the economy than to politics (Ball, 1990a.; Burbules and Torres, *op cit.*) by the same token has shrouded learning and the production of knowledge in instrumentalist discourses (Ball, *op cit.*; Coffield, 1997, 1999b; Apple, in Halsey *et al*, 1997), for 'As things are shifted from the public to the private they become differently encoded, constructed and regulated' (Brodie, in Boyer and Drache, 1996: 389). Lifelong *learning* is discoursed in isolation from the lifelong *learner* such

that knowledge

is divorced from persons, their commitments, their personal dedications .... Moving knowledge about, or even creating it, should not be more difficult than moving and regulating money. Knowledge, after nearly a thousand years, is divorced from inwardness and literally dehumanized.

(Bernstein, cited in Coffield, 1999b:1-2)

In determining the extent to which these same claims can be made of policy on lifelong learning, it is felt that at this point some distinctions should be drawn between the various wings of the coalition of forces behind the current repositioning of learning in the *knowledge society*.

### II. 3. (i) Lifelong Learning as a '*Necessary Utopia*'.

With the publication in 1996 of the report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, a bid was made to reposition discourses on education and learning away from some of what were considered to be the extremes of prevailing educational thought. The title given to the introduction to the report 'Education: the Necessary Utopia' (Delors, 1996) was itself deliberately provocative:

As it concludes its work, the Commission affirms its belief that education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development ... At a time when educational policies are being sharply criticized or pushed - for economic and financial reasons - down to the bottom of the agenda, the Commission wishes to share this conviction with the widest possible audience, through its analyses, discussions and recommendations.

(*ibid.*:13)

The discussion of section 2 of this chapter shows that, with the rise of the discourses of the New Right, the role of education and learning in encouraging equality of opportunity, was replaced with the notion of learning as an individual responsibility where the 'learner' is equated with the 'citizen consumer' and the process of learning represents the production of 'knowledge'. The discussion appears to be confirmed by the report, and such a development is considered by the report as a cause of some concern. Crucially, in this regard, the Commission portrays the concept of lifelong learning, or 'lifelong education', in a discourse which is meant to represent a break from the discourses of the New Right. Lifelong Learning is seen as a means of overcoming the 'tensions' which the Commission considers to exist in contemporary society, tensions between:

- 'The global and the local',
- 'The universal and the individual',
- 'Tradition and modernity',
- 'Long-term and short-term considerations',
- 'The extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human beings' capacity to assimilate it',
- 'Long-term and short-term considerations',
- 'The spiritual and the material', and

The tension between, on the one hand, the need for competition, and on the other, the concern for equality of opportunity: this is a classic issue, which has been facing both economic and social policy-makers and educational policy-makers since the beginning of the century. Solutions have sometimes been proposed but they have never stood the test of time. Today, the Commission ventures to claim that the pressures of competition have caused many of those in positions of authority to lose sight of their mission, which is to give each human being the means to take full advantage of

every opportunity. This has led us within the terms of reference of this report, to rethink and update the concept of lifelong education so as to reconcile three forces: competition, which provides incentives; co-operation which gives strength; and solidarity, which unites.

(*ibid.*:17-18)

The *politics of retreat* of the New Right is therefore implicitly rebuked and rebutted. Lifelong Learning discourse, for the Commission, should be founded on 'the view that education is a public good' and 'predicated upon the fundamental principle of equality of opportunity' (*ibid.*:32).

Essentially, therefore, the UNESCO Commission sought a new realignment of education policy, away from the extremes of the New Right's vision of a market democracy where knowledge and its production are seen as commodities, back to a notion of knowledge centred on the learner in search both of identification of *self* and an understanding of *other*.

One of education's principal functions is therefore that of fitting humanity to take control of its own development. It must enable all people without exception to take their destiny into their own hands so that they can contribute to the progress of the society in which they live, founding development upon the responsible participation of individuals and communities.

(Delors, *op cit.*:78-79)

In order to analyse the precise impact on the discourses of lifelong learning of New Right policies, this chapter moves on to isolate the varying tendencies within the discourses of the New Right itself so that a certain consistency can be discerned between the recent discourses of lifelong learning and those of the coalition of forces within the New Right.

## II. 3. (ii) A Coalition of Forces: 'Neo-conservatism' and 'Neo-liberalism'.

Both Ball (1990a) and Apple (in Halsey *et al*, 1997) consider the New Right to be a coalition of forces amongst whom the dominant tendencies remain those of Neo-conservatism and Neo-liberalism. For Ball (*op cit*:41), this coalition of forces contains a number of contradictions and one of the principal contradictions lies in the differences between their discourses of freedom and of the role of the state. For the Neo-liberals, their view of the state is minimalist and freedom is seen in the expression of choice by the consumer-citizen in the market place. The Neo-conservatives, in contrast, predicate the notion of a strong state. The notion of freedom, however, although central,

is a concept which is narrowly defined in a careful metonymical relation to a set of other concepts, like nation, authority and human nature. Specifically, freedom is taken to lie in a willing subordination to the nation.

(*ibid*:39)

Ball identifies two distinct strands emerging in the vocationalism engendered by the education policies of the New Right coalition, which he terms the 'industrial trainers' and the 'cultural restorationists':

One is a discourse of competence and inclusion and response to change [the 'Industrial Trainers']; the other is a discourse of sensibility and exclusion and fixed standards and qualities [the 'Cultural Restorationists'].

(*ibid*:113)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Although Ball was primarily concerned here with compulsory education, if one predicates a notion of Lifelong Learning as being precisely that, *i.e. learning throughout life*, as much of the literature would appear to suggest (Delors, 1996; European Commission, 1996; Coffield, 1997), then his comments would apply equally, with some nuances, to the post-compulsory sector.

Apple (*op cit.*:60), on the other hand, underlines the importance of the fact that both discourses are founded on the notion that the learner is viewed as human capital, and his definition of Neo-liberalism is somewhat more nuanced than Ball's in that he sees within it two distinct versions.<sup>12</sup> Although both versions share the minimalist aims outlined by Ball, in one version of Neo-liberalism, the state is willing to increase education expenditure but with the caveat that these increased resources be seen to meet the needs of capital (*op cit.*:62).

For the purposes of this investigation it is felt that, although Ball (*op cit.*) clearly makes the case for an increasing vocationalism in education policies (and this vocationalism is widely present in lifelong learning discourses), Apple's understanding of the principal players in what may be called the *New Coalition* of policy-makers is more useful to the development of this thesis in that, if we accept that the Neo-liberal agenda consisted of either reducing state expenditure on learning or tying it more clearly to the needs of capital, then discourses of lifelong learning in this light can thus be seen as being fundamentally based on the notion of the learner as human capital.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter V for a detailed analysis of the discourse of human capital in lifelong learning.

<sup>13</sup> The term *New Right* evokes the policies of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations of the 1980s. Ball (1990a:23), however, rightly points out that the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and leader of the British Labour Party, had in fact recognised in 1976 a need for change in educational policy of the type some policy advisers of the Right were then advocating. This thesis takes the view that much of the debate on education and lifelong learning of today can be seen to have its origins in the discourses of the *New Right*. The term *New Coalition* is therefore used to attempt to differentiate current discourses from those of earlier periods.

## II. 3. (iii) A 'New Orthodoxy': Learning, Knowledge and Skills.

Chapter IV of this thesis discusses statistics on participation in lifelong learning and concludes that the uptake in lifelong learning by those who would appear to need it most, *e.g.* among the unemployed and those with no formal qualifications, is the least. Although there does not appear to be total agreement on the precise meaning to be attributed to 'learning' and indeed to 'knowledge', exactly why uptake should be so low among certain socio-economic categories is the subject of much debate and research (as will be seen). This lack of precision in terminology is reflected throughout the '*Learning Age*' which espouses the belief that

The most productive investment will be linked to the best educated and best trained workforces, and the most effective way of getting and keeping a job will be to have the skills needed by employers.

(DfEE, 1998:10)

However, an inherent weakness in lifelong learning discourse is precisely that *knowledge* and *learning* seem interchangeable concepts which are frequently seen as being synonymous with the *skills* needed for employment. Such a discourse of learning reflects the 'deposit-making' of the 'banking approach' referred to by Freire (1993) where the learner's 'humanity' is submerged in the notion of learner as mere receptacle of information. The impoverished pedagogy (in Freire's sense) and crises of identity in discourses on learning within the wider field of lifelong learning has been commented upon by a number of writers (*e.g.* Ball, 1999; Coffield, 1999b). Moreover, the suggestion that 'a good

education and training' are keys not only to employment but also to security of employment are dubious in an arena of flexible accumulation (Bienefeld, in Boyer and Drache, 1996; Sennett, 1998).

In his discussion of the validity of the claims of the proponents of a Post-Fordist paradigm, Sennett makes it clear that, in practice, statistics on projections of employment needs show that among these needs 'at least two-thirds are repetitive in ways which Adam Smith would recognise as akin to those in his pin factory' (Sennett, 1998:44), and Apple (in Halsey *et al*, 1997) underlines the fact that the needs of capital in the so-called *knowledge society* require not so much a widening share in the 'ownership' of knowledge throughout the members of society (as is claimed in the UNESCO report referred to earlier) but rather a system of knowledge production which is increasingly hegemonic in nature:

An advanced corporate economy requires the production of high levels of technical/administrative knowledge because of national and international economic competition and to become more sophisticated in the maximization of opportunities for economic expansion, for communicative and cultural control and rationalization and so forth. Within certain limits, what is actually required is *not* the widespread distribution of this kind of high status knowledge to the populace in general. What is needed is to maximise its production.

(Apple, in Halsey *et al*, 1997:600)

What the preceding arguments suggest is that the commodification of learning signifies that the invisible hand of the market dictates therefore, that, on the one hand, the production of knowledge be centred on certain groups

(and one may infer that this is at the expense of others) and, on the other, that access to knowledge is thus *de facto* restricted rather than more widely 'distributed'. In any case, without the introduction of other measures, those in society on lower incomes will undoubtedly continue to remain relatively marginalized. This marginalization thus renders them inefficient citizen-consumers of learning.<sup>14</sup>

The iconisation of current discourses of lifelong learning founded on the notion of a *learning society* thus betrays a notion of participation in learning which, in its foundations,

blames the victims [*i.e.* those with low capital in the learning market-place] by implying that their difficulties are basically due to their personal deficiencies; it obscures the fact that competitiveness and efficiency are primarily socially, not individually, based, so that an efficient plant moved with all of its staff to a remote part of Liberia would soon cease to be competitive; it assumes that the dilution of sovereignty has so undermined the democratic power that could be wielded by the majority to make the latter dependent on the charity of the fortunate few; and because the claim is effectively untestable, it is also irrefutable. After all, both success and failure in the global economy are purely relative, so that any given type or level of education can lead to either outcome at any time.

(Bienefeld, in Boyer and Drache, 1996:429)

Furthermore, for Ball the rhetoric of a '*Learning Society*' is a 'policy condensate' where 'social and educational policies are collapsed into economic and industrial policy' (1999:201). In this respect, then, current discourses of lifelong learning through their human capital premises and their reduction of

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<sup>14</sup> The point concerning poverty is also made by Bienefeld who quotes a World Bank Discussion Paper in evidence (Bienefeld, in Boyer and Drache, 1999:430).

knowledge so that it is equated with skills for employment can be seen in a clear continuation from the market liberalism of the New Right.

#### II. 4. Conclusion.

It is instructive to reiterate certain of the most crucial issues developed in this chapter on the commodification of learning and their impact upon the manner in which lifelong learning is discoursed. Among the most important of these, particular mention is made of the following:

- The increasing withdrawal by the state from welfare provision constitutes the formation of a *politics of retreat*, associated with Public Choice Theory, where the learner is perceived as consumer-citizen,
- Such a notion, with the move away from previously held values of equity and the search for equality of opportunity, fails to recognise the fundamental inequalities inherent in society,
- Lifelong learning discourse, as a *necessary Utopia*, is initially presented in opposition to what were considered the excesses of this politics of retreat,
- Current discourse on lifelong learning, however, in what is called the *New Coalition*, is seen as a clear continuation from this *politics of retreat*,
- Commodification of learning essentially reflects the submerging of the *political* into the *economic*,
- The subordination of politics to the economy is reflected in a move away from '*value legitimisation*' by the state towards '*sense legitimisation*' where lifelong learning policies, rather than giving value to the freely expressed needs of individual learners, seek instead to transform these needs as it sees fit,
- Lifelong learning discourse exhibits a lack of clarity in its vision of learning in that policy documents offer a more narrow, *instrumentalist* notion of learning which is more related to the formation of *skills for employment*.

There are, moreover, much wider societal issues that need to be considered here, among them the appropriation that is made in lifelong learning of interpreting its discourses as a flexible response to contemporary 'needs'. The rise of the forces of 'conservative restoration' (Apple in Burbules and Torres, 2000:59) was met, it is suggested, with a new Post-Fordist age where new technologies and permeating boundaries (cultural and otherwise) had brought about change in the manner in which time and space were perceived in contemporary society. This discourse of change and its impact on lifelong learning is the focus of the next chapter. However, the discourse that seeks to 'sell' lifelong learning in the market place as a response to capital's need for greater flexibility carries with it, as has been seen in this chapter, serious implications both for the individuals within society and for the cohesion of the social fabric.

Although his focus is more on the career portfolios of individuals rather than on their learning histories, Sennett (1998) evokes serious questions concerning capital's requirement for flexibility. He does this by providing the reader with two *vignettes*, of a father and his son, which illustrate to what extent people's lives, along with their expectations and aspirations, have in fact changed. He contrasts the lives of a father, Enrico and his son, Rico. The father, an immigrant to the USA, worked as a janitor near Boston, USA cleaning toilets. After 15 years he was able to buy a house and, at this point,

his wife, Flavia, had then to go out to work in a dry-cleaning plant:

What had most struck me about Enrico and his generation was how linear time was in their lives: year after year of working in jobs which seldom varied from day to day. And along that line of time, achievement was cumulative: Enrico and Flavia checked the increase in their savings every week, measured their domesticity by the various improvements and additions they had made to their ranch house. Finally, the time they lived was predictable .... He [Enrico] carved out a clear story for himself in which his experience accumulated materially and psychically; his life thus made sense to him as a linear narrative .... The janitor felt he became the author of his life, and though he was a man low on the social scale, this narrative provided him a sense of self-respect.

(Sennett, *op cit.*:15-16) <sup>15</sup>

The son's career was quite different. Having finished his university studies in electrical engineering, his first job was as a technology adviser to a company in California. Then came other jobs in Chicago, Missouri, then New York. So many job changes in such a brief period whereas his father stayed in the same job all his life. Although earning much more money than his father probably did in all his lifetime, Rico's flexible life also presented him, however, with a number of drawbacks:

Prosperous as they are, the very acme of an adaptable, mutually supportive couple, both husband and wife often fear they are on the edge of losing control over their lives. This fear is built into their work histories.

In Rico's case, the fear of lacking control is straightforward: it concerns managing time.

(*ibid.*:19)

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<sup>15</sup> Sennett had in fact first interviewed Enrico in *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (with Cobb, J.), (1977), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rico's 'fear' stems from the disappearance from his life of long-term narratives. Adherence to the values of the short-term over the long-term brings with it serious questions concerning loyalty, commitment and trust. Quoting a human resources consultant who worked on a 'downsizing' mission at IBM we learn that 'Detachment and superficial co-operativeness are better armor for dealing with current realities than behavior based on values of loyalty and service' (*ibid.*:25). Sennett's conclusion concerning Rico's fears is that the dilemma for him resides in the fact that

short-term capitalism threatens to corrode his character, particularly those qualities of character which bind human beings to one another and furnishes each with a sense of sustainable self.

*(ibid.*:27)

This thesis is guided in great part by such a preoccupation.

Referring back to the report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, discussed in the introduction to this chapter, lifelong learning, then, can thus be seen to be discoursed as an 'inheritance for sale' in the commodity market place. In the words of the report 'learning is the treasure' (Delors, 1996: 35). Thus, the commodification and marketization discourse of lifelong learning can be seen as the selling off of 'everything that humanity has learned about itself' (*ibid.*: 35).

The rhetoric of commodification and marketization is premised on human capital and fails to recognise not only that significant inequalities inherent in a society founded on relations of capital may compromise the most optimistic

aspirations of that rhetoric, but also that, in confining its discussions to issues of human capital development, lifelong learning is steered away from a broad conception of learning, and is constricted to education for employment and the economy.

## *Chapter III*

### 'RUNAWAY WORLD': CHANGE AND GLOBALIZATION

#### III.1.(i) Introduction.

This chapter focuses on the discourses of change and globalization which are shown to be omni-present and interchangeable in the development of lifelong learning policy. The title of this chapter takes its inspiration from the term used by Giddens (1999) to describe the dynamism of global change. In an attempt to analyse whether such a preoccupation is justified, the chapter moves on to investigate the nature and origins of both, and the nature of these discourses is discussed and analysed. By cross-referencing to the previous chapter, the wider implications of these discourses on the role of the nation state in policy forming on lifelong learning are then drawn.

#### III. 1. (ii) The Rhetoric of Change: Essential Characteristics.

The education debate for a number of years now has pivoted round issues of change, and these discourses of change are seen to be multi-faceted. They are seen to demonstrate four essential characteristics.

Firstly, changes arisen in the *economy*, dating back to the petroleum crisis of the seventies: saturation of internal markets and the need for a global economic outreach, issues of scale and scope bringing about larger multi-national structures as can be seen in the now commonplace use of mergers and take-

overs establishing economic 'giants' in the marketplace (Harvey, 1990), and, in the wider sphere, where there have been institutional innovations such as the creation of wider free trade areas, as can be seen in North America and elsewhere, and the establishment in Europe of the single market.

Jameson's (1991) notion of 'late capitalism' is useful in summarising the features of the ensuing 'new order':

.... the new international division of labour, a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and the stock exchanges (including the enormous Second and Third World debt), new forms of media interrelationship (very much including transportation systems such as containerisation), computers and automation, the flight of production to advanced Third World areas, along with all the more familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labor, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now-global scale.

(Jameson,1991: xix)

The quasi-reification of change in the economic sphere, and the force of arguments offered in its favour (Handy, 1985; Harvey, 1990), has brought in its wake a whole series of management responses surrounding the issues of quality and consumer satisfaction which in turn have underlined the importance of the need for flexibility with respect to the requirements of the marketplace.

Secondly, this flexibility has been aided greatly by innovations in *technology* which have had a profound impact on everyday life.<sup>16</sup> This has allowed for an

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<sup>16</sup> See Harvey (*op cit.*: 338-342) for a discussion on the tendencies of 'flexible postmodernity' contrasted with those of 'Fordist modernity'.

increasing access to sources of information by a greater number of people, the 'information super-highway', and at the same time has allowed employers to implement 'leaner' structures, in terms of their human resources, and more competitive and less costly techniques such as just-in-time production methods (Burnes, 1996). Harvey's notion of 'time-space compression' (*op cit.*:147) is seen as an essential characteristic underpinning these technological changes. Their introduction has brought about a whole new semantics: 'interactivity', 'tele-working', 'tele-conferencing', 'snail-mail', 'near-video-on-demand', 'spam' to mention only a few of the newly-coined expressions. Such a breaking down of the barriers of space and time evokes new horizons in access to information and learning. This debate is fuelled by a discourse which can be summarised thus: the 'crisis ' of recent years (Harvey, *op cit.*) was brought about by the relative inability of the economy to respond quickly to change. From this the burden of responsibility is moved to the individual who is seen not to have possessed the skills necessary to cope with such change (Hart in Raggatt *et al*, 1996), hence the need for the development of a policy on lifelong learning.

Such changes also impact profoundly on social issues related to the well-being of workers at the core and at the periphery, and to questions of marginalisation, since, with the introduction of the concept of the flexible

firm, precarious working conditions rise to the fore for labour employed in such firms:

The universal portrayal of the workers of the future as dismally unprepared for the new demanding jobs can be seen as a way to enlarge the pool of minimally skilled entry-level workers without the intention of absorbing them into the labour market .... all indicators point in the direction of generally stagnant high unemployment with only slight fluctuations, and increasing forms and numbers of underemployment .... this policy is officially legitimised by referring to 'constant change' where no one can predict with certainty what kind of jobs, requiring what kind of skills, will be available in the future.

(*ibid.*: 105)

Thirdly, over the last decades issues of *gender* have risen to the fore with increasing numbers of women taking a more prominent role in diverse areas of social life. Indeed any analysis of working trends clearly demonstrates a high degree of flexibility in the working patterns of women as compared to those of men (Handy, 1985). In periods of high structural unemployment, women's patterns of employment have seemed less subject to fluctuations than men's, although this has often been achieved due to 'the unspecificity of their skills and, consequently, their universal availability for any kind of task' (Raggatt *et al*, *op cit.*: 108). Handy cites as an example of the kind of 'flexilife' needed by workers, the life led by women in the economy, a life which

will not look like heaven to everyone ... moving between work and family, mixing part-time work with home responsibilities, balancing career priorities with a concern for relationships in the home and, in many cases, having to abandon one for the other.

(Handy, *op cit.*: 162)

Fourthly, *ageing* of the population is another important feature of the changes that have taken place in Western countries. It is estimated that, on average, the ratio of retired people in OECD countries represents currently around 20% of the population with this same figure set to rise steeply to 37% by the year 2040 (Coffield, 1997:56).

The social consensus of the post-war years gained largely through the application of Keynesian policies held roughly to the paradigm

EDUCATION → WORK → RETIREMENT.

With the depression and high structural unemployment that followed the oil crisis of the seventies, giving rise to what Harvey (1990) calls 'a new regime of flexible accumulation',<sup>17</sup> this paradigm became invalid. On the one hand education/knowledge took on a new meaning, where having access to the latest technique was equated with one-up-manship on the road to competitive survival and, on the other hand, flexibility and mobility of labour implied a 'cyclical' approach to work where the possibilities of employment were matched by the worker's ability to demonstrate the required skills:

Knowledge itself becomes a key commodity, to be produced and sold to the highest bidder, under conditions that are themselves increasingly organised on a competitive basis .... Control over information flow and over the vehicles for propagation of popular taste and culture have likewise become vital weapons in competitive struggle.

(Harvey, 1990: 159-160)

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<sup>17</sup> I Harvey sees this as being in 'direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism' (Harvey, 1990:147).

Until this time (the mid/late 1970s) the notion of education as 'compulsory', where the state played an active role in preparing the young for a life of employment and 'post-compulsory', any learning undertaken after school was a notion that held. The crisis facing the West in the seventies meant that a new paradigm was needed.

The apparent failure of the *EDUCATION* → *WORK* → *RETIREMENT* model brought with it a questioning of the professionals involved. If young people could not find work after school then it was considered that the school had a large part of the blame - the school and schooling were deemed to have failed. This questioning of the education profession, what Ball (1990a) referred to as 'the discourses of derision' by the government of the UK, is one that can be witnessed in other spheres of government. Higher unemployment meant less revenue and that this meant less money was available to be spent on welfare, education and health services. The 'manager' displaces the 'professional' as an agent of change.

As outlined in the previous chapter, a major change came about with the arrival of the New Right, giving rise to a new *consumer citizenship*, where education and knowledge are seen as commodities. Learning is seen as a

marketplace like any other where the citizen, the consumer of learning, exerts learning choices informed by needs to enhance employability (Ball, 1990b).<sup>18</sup>

In the socio-economic arena hindsight politics steal the education agenda (Cox and Dyson, 1969; Ball, 1990a, b). Providers of learning jostle for funding in order to position themselves more competitively in the learning market. Since ever-increasing numbers of young people begin to swell the ranks of the unemployed, it is considered that in great part their 'unemployability' is due to a failed education system, deemed incapable of equipping young people with the skills necessary for a constantly changing world (Manpower Services Commission, 1984; DES, 1985). Other important changes such as those affecting the notion of the family nucleus, multi-culturalism and issues concerning the environment have also arisen.

### III. 1. (iii) Change and the Role of the State.

The stark realisation of the apparent helplessness of national governments in the management of the economy, faced with the turmoil and upheaval of constant change has brought into play a politics of retreat where:

the legitimate role of government has been redefined as providing the framework within which the market can operate most effectively ... Criticism has been met with assertions of the need for greater competitiveness rather than any questioning of the sustainability of competitiveness as a project.

(Edwards, 1997: 31)

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<sup>18</sup> It is ironic, however, that faced with ever-changing realities, the consumer citizenship thus engendered craves and yearns at the same time for the nostalgia - the romanticism of another age - of past certainties to serve as anchors amidst a time of flux: so-called 'cult' TV programmes of the sixties and early seventies prove increasingly popular, the 'trendy' colours of the young hark back to the past. The examples are many.

The emphasis on the 'empowerment' of the individual is seen as a key element in improving competitiveness and achieving flexibility. Yet another new term is coined: 'careership', which '... gives pride of place to the individual and his or her responsibility for self development in a market environment' (Confederation of British Industry, 1993:13). Self development, then, is identified with the individual exerting responsibility within this environment through learning. Just as the 'manager' displaces the 'professional', so the education agenda moves away from teaching and moves towards learning. In this environment the lifelong learner is discourses as the independent learner and learning is ever more closely discourses in a rhetoric of vocationalism. Such a view of learning is denounced by Lave and Wenger:

The individual aspects of the cognitive focus characteristic of most theories of learning thus only seem to concentrate on the person. Painting a picture of the person as a primarily 'cognitive' entity tends to promote a nonpersonal view of knowledge, skills, tasks, activities and learning. As a consequence, both theoretical analyses and instructional prescriptions tend to be driven by reference to reified 'knowledge domains', and by constraints imposed by the general requirements of universal learning mechanisms and understood in terms of acquisition and assimilation.

(Lave and Wenger, 1991: 52)

The 'back to basics', 'citizen's charter' slogans of the 'cultural restorationists' (Ball, 1990a), give added weight to anchors of certainty during a period of rapid change:

Education is now discourses in very different terms. It is to be made more disciplined (greater state intervention and monitoring and more centralised control) and more efficient

(reallocation of funds and cuts in expenditure). As a result the endemic tensions between the demands made on education by capital, its technical contribution towards ensuring the continued accumulation of capital, and the role that education plays in the maintenance of the conditions of capital accumulation, its ideological contribution, are also made more visible.

(*ibid.*:19)

Policy documents are rife with references to change. In the White Paper from the European Commission on the Learning Society, we read that:

this White Paper stems from the observation that the changes currently in progress have improved everyone's access to information and knowledge, but have at the same time made considerable adjustments necessary in the skills required and in working patterns. It is a trend which has increased uncertainty all round and for some has led to intolerable situations of exclusion.

(European Commission ,1996: 5),

and in a background paper on lifelong learning we learn that

At the end of the 19th century, as industrialised society turned towards mass production, education and training shaped young people into the workers, clerks and technical professions needed for a hierarchical industrial organisation which was the mirror-image of a hierarchical society. The social structure was in turn moulded by the structure of life-time jobs for which people were prepared by the educational system. Now ... the pervasive influence of technology has brought about a need for more flexible and complex job profiles which will evolve over the individual's life-cycle. Initial education and training no longer points the way towards a lifetime occupation. The destinies of individuals are to be forged in new ways.

(Gass, 1996: 7)

More recently the National Advisory Group established by the Secretary of State assert that

The challenges of rapid change are evident all around. They can be seen in radical shifts in the organisation of industry and labour markets. They are apparent in rapid changes in occupations and the demand for skills .... they manifest themselves in new technologies and patterns of communication.

(Fryer, 1997:11)

Lifelong learning is thus assimilated to the search for employability within a discourse grounded on the imperatives of capital. Moreover, in the introduction of the ensuing Green Paper on lifelong learning, the dynamic of change is further posited as fundamental in the movement towards lifelong learning:

We are in a new age - the age of information and of global competition. Familiar certainties and old ways of doing things are disappearing .... we have no choice but to prepare for this new age in which the key to success will be the continuous education and development of the human mind and imagination.

(DfEE, 1998 : 9)

It is, therefore, clear that policy developments in the domain of lifelong are anchored within a rhetoric of change. However, the issue of whether one considers society today as being in a state of cyclical evolution from the past or whether in fact the present moment is intrinsically unrelated to what went before, constituting a severing and break from society as it was, will be considered in the final part of this chapter.<sup>19</sup> Indeed the need for change as an

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<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, this discourse of change is omnipresent in both of the afore-mentioned narratives.

attempt to understand the present is a rhetoric of force in diverse spheres of social life. Change for some is a patent necessity; for others it is obsessive:

the frenzy whereby virtually anything in the present is appealed to for testimony as to the latter's uniqueness and radical difference from earlier moments of human time does indeed strike one sometimes as harboring a pathology distinctively autoreferential, as though our utter forgetfulness of the past exhausted itself in the vacant but mesmerised contemplation of a schizophrenic present that is incomparable virtually by definition.

(Jameson, *op cit.*: xii)

Thus, the marketization of learning, together with the discourse of change which is found in official documents on learning, and particularly lifelong learning, shifts the focus of education policy away from notions of equality of opportunity and situates lifelong learning within a framework of individual responsibility. These discourses are mediated by the state as the basis for a change in the way it conceives its role (Edwards, 1997).

Whether or not one may even go one stage further in asserting that

it is the requirement to increase flexibility and competitiveness which has resulted in the current focus of interest on lifelong learning and its concentration in the realms of economic policy ... Thus, while economic change may have brought greater interest in lifelong learning, the particular directions of change do not necessarily support the interests of all adult learners equally

(Edwards, 1997:41-42)

is the focus of attention in the next part of this chapter.

Change, therefore, has implications not only at a *micro* level in terms of the individuals within society, but also at a *macro* level in terms of the role of the state itself, *e.g.* from social engineering for equality towards exhortations of lifelong learning as an expression of the responsibility which goes hand in hand with rights.

### III. 2. (i) The Concept of Human Capital: Some Initial Considerations.<sup>20</sup>

Dwindling resources available for education and the rhetoric of change which has swept through the debate on education over the last few years has been accompanied at the same time by an increasing reliance on theories related to the concept of human capital where

human beings invest in themselves, by means of education, training or other activities, which raises their future income by increasing their lifetime earnings.

(Woodhall, in Carnoy 1995: 24)

Such a concept lends itself with ease to econometric analyses of the economic returns to education and as such has been the source of much research carried out in education (Schuller, in Coffield, 1997: 116). Although the human capital concept may have achieved much in, for example, validating appropriate investment in education during these years of lowering revenues, the force of its tenets has seemed

to point in one direction only: individuals and societies that did not invest heavily in education and training were

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<sup>20</sup> The concept of *human capital* will be developed in more detail in Chapter V. It is considered useful, however, at this point to present certain features of *human capital* in order to advance the argument from the discussion on the rhetoric of change to the discourse of globalization.

consigning themselves to economic underachievement, or at least increasing the possibilities that they would lose out in the competitive race for position, power or material well-being.

(*ibid.*: 116)<sup>21</sup>

Schuller berates the relative weaknesses of the premises of human capital concept and argues for the notion of 'social capital' to be taken into account as a means of correcting the inadequacies of a purely human capital approach to learning. He draws on the work of Putnam who defines social capital as

the features of social life - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.

(Putnam, cited in Schuller, *ibid.*: 118)

Nevertheless, human capital, with its emphasis on the individual, continues to hold sway in discourses on lifelong learning such that notions of 'the more you learn, the more you earn' and 'learning pays' permeate the entire debate:

The claim that learning pays is obviously an economic statement, but it is not only (or merely) economic. Nonetheless, the value of personal and social benefits can also be expressed in economic terms .... the slogan 'learning pays' implies - not that all learning will prove valuable - but that appropriate learning provides benefits of various kinds, especially economic .... if [learning] fails to provide benefits, then its relevance and/or quality must be questioned. Learning should pay.

(Campaign for Learning, 1996: 2)

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<sup>21</sup> It may be relatively straightforward, by applying the human capital concept, to calculate the rate of return on investment when, for example, an employee enrolls in language classes to perfect foreign language skills when the employer falls into foreign hands (the cost of the classes can be weighed against improvements in productivity gained), but how does one calculate the rate of return, for example, when an individual enrolls in judo classes or in classes on First Aid?

Moreover in '*The Learning Age*' we are informed that 'if people want to get on, their first instinct is to improve their skills and education ' (DfEE 1998: 13).

For Edwards (1997), an important characteristic of the changes that have taken place in society is that these changes have provoked a blurring of the edges in the manner in which education and learning is conceived. He calls this a process of 'de-differentiation'.<sup>22</sup> Differentiation, on the other hand, he argues, allowed for a more rational management of fields of practice, where influence over the drawing-up of these boundaries (as represented in policy)

makes boundaries controversial and subject to debate, linking the world of ideas and practice to the world of politics and policy-making. Traditionally in education and training, this process of boundary-setting conceived post-compulsory education and training involving different sets of institutional arrangements for different groups of learners and different forms of learning. Thus, higher education was for young people to learn academic disciplines and professions, further education was for young people to learn technical skills, and adult education was for adults to undertake general and recreational education - the 'great tradition' of liberal adult education.

(Edwards, *ibid.*: 69-70)

In this environment, attention is focused on *inputs*, on the *providers* of learning, on the *teachers* rather than on the learners.

Edwards's argument is that policy on lifelong learning today is much more influenced by changes in the economy than had been the case in the past and, that calls for flexibility in the economic sphere are being met by de-

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<sup>22</sup> Edwards views de-differentiation as a process which serves essentially to normalise a condition of permeating boundaries.

differentiation in discourses on lifelong learning such that 'the lifelong learner is the flexible self-reflexive subject of the postmodern attitude, able to negotiate the unpredictable changes of the contemporary period' (*ibid.*: 108).

The human capital premises of lifelong learning policy fall within the rhetoric (described earlier) which assimilates learning to responses to the forces of the market. Thus, this discourse of learning reinforces the notion that learning, and more particularly, lifelong learning, is essentially a matter of individual responsibility.

### III. 2. (ii) From *Change* to *Globalization*: a Brave New World?

Globalization bears a clear parallel with the notion of change and much of the discourse of globalization is centred on the issue that the circumstances of the moment, of today, are changed: today's circumstances, today's world is somehow different from what went on before - it is somehow new. The discourse of globalization concerns, moreover, the internationalisation of capital, marketization and commodification and the implications of these for changing jobs throughout life. The argument of the preceding chapter, which centred on the tensions caused by the discourses of retreat by the neo-liberals and neo-conservatives with regard to education, sought to establish that such a discourse was ambivalent. Its ambivalence lay in the fact that while proposing a policy of increasing privatization of learning on the one hand, the neo-liberal, neo-conservative agenda was at the same time, in practice, asserting an increasingly proactive role for the state with respect to education, with an increasing number of legislation and policy documents. Following on

from this notion of change, then, the underlying discourses of globalization in lifelong learning would appear to claim that firstly, the process is unique to the present and, secondly that its sweep and evolution are inevitable and unavoidable - *there is no alternative*. However, globalization theory has serious implications on governance and the role of the nation state in formulations of policy. It is felt, therefore, that the impact of the universalist propositions of the discourse of globalization on the field of lifelong learning requires further analysis (discussed below).

Lingard proposes a thought-provoking aphorism, 'it is and it isn't' (in Burbules and Torres, 2000: 79-103) which sums up succinctly the divergence of opinion that exists with respect to globalization. This divergence of opinion raises a number of issues:

- How is globalization defined and what are its fundamental characteristics?
- What are its origins and to what extent is globalization a 'new' phenomenon?
- What principal conclusions can be drawn from globalization theory and where fundamentally lies the fallout for education and lifelong learning?

The next part of this chapter examines these and other issues.

### III. 2. (iii) Definitions.

A review of the literature on globalization offers us a number of possible

definitions of the term. Marginson offers us this definition:

Put simply, globalization is about *world systems* which have a life of their own that is distinct from local and national life, even while these world systems tend to determine the local and national. This does not mean that the global determines the national and local in a total or one-directional fashion - but it has the potential to affect every part of the world, including educational institutions and programmes, and the subjectivities formed in education. There is no longer any part of the world that is immune from global systems.

(Marginson, 1999:20)

His emphasis on the emergence of an autonomous world system establishing a myriad of intensifying linkages whose consequences affect the lives of individuals and communities throughout the world is shared by McGrew and Lewis (cited in Boyer and Drache, 1996: 64). Robertson, on the other hand, proposes a definition (shared by Waters, 1995: 3) which makes reference to the compression of space and the individual's intensified perception of the process:

Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole .... both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole in the twentieth century.

(Robertson, cited in Waters, 1995: 41)

While Petrella (in Boyer and Drache, 1996: 64) and Marginson (1999:20) both agree on the specificity of globalization, in that the phenomenon would appear to be too complex to be analysed under any one, single branch of social theory, no matter how 'holistic' its scope, Green, despite questioning

the in-built *triadization* assumptions inherent in economic globalization theory, suggests that 'Economic globalization theory is clearly on the safest ground' (Green, 1999: 56).<sup>23</sup>

In any case, whatever definition one accepts, the technological advances of recent years, the development of the internet and of quasi-instantaneous access to and rapid exchange of information through the expansion of media distribution in particular together with this rhetoric of change, have brought about a compression of space and time which has served as a de-stabilizing effect upon capitalism (Harvey, 1990: 239).

Furthermore, Harvey's insistence on the fact that 'Spatial and temporal practices are never neutral in social affairs' (*ibid.*:239) reinforces the necessity to examine the issues raised by globalization theory (as outlined at the end of Section III. 2. (ii) above) and how precisely this impinges on the rhetoric of lifelong learning.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Triadization refines the definition of globalization to refer in particular to the richest industrialized countries of Europe, Japan and North America.

<sup>24</sup> For Bourdieu, however: '[Globalization] is a myth in the strong sense of the word, a powerful discourse, an *idée force*, an idea which has social force, which obtains belief .... which has the functions of justifying a restoration, a return to an unrestrained - but rationalized - and cynical capitalism' (Bourdieu, 1998:34,36). Lifelong learning is located firmly within the realm of the social, in that it deals, essentially, with the rights of the individual to self-development and self-fulfilment. Bourdieu's insistence on the 'social force' of this discourse underlines the need to examine the concept in greater detail.

### III. 2. (iv) The Origins of Globalization.

Situating the precise origins of globalization is a source of much debate (Waters, 1995; Boyer and Drache, 1996; Marginson, 1999; Burbules and Torres, 2000). The disparities between the various visions of globalization are evident and the solidity of the fundamentals behind globalization theory are questionable (Green, *op cit.*:55). For Giddens, discourse on globalization is split between what he calls the 'sceptics' - those who question the existence of the phenomenon - and the 'radicals' who

argue that not only is globalisation very real, but that its consequences can be felt everywhere. The global market-place, they say, is much more developed than even in the 1960s and 1970s and is indifferent to national borders. Nations have lost most of the sovereignty they once had, and politicians have lost most of their capability to influence events. It isn't surprising that no one respects political leaders any more, or has much interest in what they have to say. The era of the nation-state is over.

(Giddens, 1999: 7,8)<sup>25</sup>

Giddens, however, is in no doubt that it is the point of view expressed by the 'radicals' that is correct. Although he does not commit himself to a particular viewpoint on the origins of the phenomenon, Marginson formulates six 'aspects of globalisation':

- Finance and trade;

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<sup>25</sup> Giddens's *either/or* split between 'sceptics' and 'radicals' and Jameson's dismissal of the 'frenzy' to be found among the proponents of the uniqueness of contemporaneity (*op cit.*: xii) reflect Jung's admonition that, 'whoever protects himself against what is new and strange and thereby regresses to the past, falls into the same neurotic condition as the man who identifies himself with the new and runs away from the past. The only difference is that the one has estranged himself from the past, and the other from the future' (Jung, 1933: 117).

- Communications and information technologies;
- International movements of peoples;
- The formation of global societies;
- Linguistic, cultural and ideological convergence; and
- World systems of signs and images,

(Marginson, *op. cit.*: 21)

and, in his discussion of finance and trade, he makes reference to statistics on world trade which seems to suggest that globalization is a fairly recent occurrence:

In 1983, when the Australian foreign exchange was deregulated, the total world trade in commodities and services was about US\$3 trillion. In 1995, foreign exchange transactions in which one currency is traded against another were running at US\$1 trillion *a day*. Between 1983 and 1989, world GDP rose by 7.8% a year, total world exports rose by 9.4% a year, and total world foreign direct investment rose by 28.9% a year.

(*ibid.*:21)

The historical uniqueness of the phenomenon would appear to be confirmed by the fact that these statistics are based on the work carried out by Petrella (in Boyer and Drache, 1996: 62-83), the subtitle of which is patently clear, 'Globalization is a new phenomenon' (*ibid.*:62). In order to demonstrate his thesis that globalization is indeed new, Petrella articulates his central argument by drawing clear distinctions between what he calls 'internationalization', 'multinationalization' and the more recent phenomenon of globalization.

The problematics of the uniqueness of globalization, *i.e.* the question of whether globalization is indeed a 'new' phenomenon or whether it merely

represents an evolutionary process already at work in the world, is seen as crucial, therefore, in questioning the tenets of 'conservative restoration' (Apple, in Burbules and Torres, 2000:59) and the 'cultural restorationists' (Ball, 1990a:6), since their education policies rest firmly on the notion of the learner as a site of human capital in a society of consumer-citizens. If indeed globalization is 'new', then the validity of Marginson's contention that 'There is no doubt that globalization has provided a conjunctural fillip for the market liberal paradigm in government' (Marginson, *op cit.*:23) would appear to be unassailable.

Petrella's claim for the newness of globalization is, however, contested by the economic historian Bairoch (in Boyer and Drache, 1996: 173-192) who presents statistical evidence which appears to indicate similarities between current economic trends and those of the pre-First World War period. When all 'Western developed countries' (Bairoch's terminology) are taken as a whole, then analysis of the total exports of merchandise expressed as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product shows that the figure of 14.3% for 1992 is matched only by the figure of 12.9% for the period of 1913 (Bairoch, in Boyer and Drache, 1996: 179). Moreover, he estimates that the total gross outflows of long-term capital in 1913 represented 3% or more of Gross Domestic Product while the same figure for the period 1989/91 represented 3.3% of Gross Domestic Product. Similarly he estimates that the total of outward stocks of foreign direct investment expressed as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product was at least the same in the early part of the 1990s as it was

in 1913 and further, he suggests that the 1913 figure may never in fact have been surpassed in the twentieth century as a whole. His conclusion firmly refutes the notion of globalization theorists that the phenomenon is in any sense new:

the historical approach contradicts the vision of most economists and politicians who draw their conclusions from the study of shorter periods of time.

International trade has a history of fast internationalization alternating with drawback. This fact gives a different perspective on the thesis of globalization as an irreversible movement.

*(ibid.:190)*

Although the diverse complexities and consequences of the 'radical' discourse of globalization on the field of lifelong learning is the subject of the final part of this chapter, it is important, however, at this stage in the argument to underline the force this discourse has upon the notion of learning. Such a discourse gives rise to a view, therefore, where

Education needs to be redefined to focus on capabilities that individuals will be able to develop through life. Orthodox schools and other educational institutions are likely to be surrounded, and to some extent subverted, by a diversity of other learning frameworks. Internet technology, for instance, might bring educational opportunities to mass audiences. In the old economic order, the basic competencies needed for jobs remained relatively constant. Learning (and forgetting - being able to discard old habits) are integral to work in the knowledge economy. A worker creating a novel multimedia application can't succeed by using long-standing skills - the tasks in question didn't even exist a short while ago.

*(Giddens, 2000:74)*

Implicit in the notion of '*old economic order*' then is the implication of the uniqueness of 'now' and the aggressive, quasi-military metaphors '*surrounded*' and '*subverted*', suggest that the *victory* of the 'radical' agenda in the globalization debate is sure. What exactly an '*orthodox school*' represents, however, remains unclear.

Waters (1995: 38-64) summarises the various differences in approach taken by globalization theorists and instead of the duality of proposals offered by Giddens - the either/or division between the 'sceptics' and 'radicals' - he suggests that there are, in fact, three strands in globalization theory. These may be represented thus:

- Globalization is a process that has always been in evolution, but whose effects are increasing, even more so recently,
- The origins of globalization are to be found in the rise of capitalism and the process of modernization and there has been a recent intensification of its effects,

and

- Globalization belongs to the contemporary and is related to other phenomena such as post-industrialization.

For this reason, then, what does appear to be a common thread in the ongoing debate concerning the origins of globalization, is that there has been an *acceleration* of the process in recent times. Therefore, for the purposes of the development of the argument which follows, it is felt that, in order to override the philosophical, political and ideological difficulties inherent in the diverse debates on the origins of globalization and on its newness or

otherwise, reference should be made hereafter rather to the notion of 'contemporary globalization' (Burbules and Torres, *op cit.*:12).

The preceding argument has served to demonstrate that, before opening up the debate to discuss the consequences of globalization and change on the field of lifelong learning, the tenets of globalization theory itself need careful questioning, as Green (1999) suggests:

Globalization theory itself, though often inspired and challenging, is uneven in its logical rigour and empirical grounding. For a theory pertaining to explain global historical trends in economics, politics and culture, it can sometimes be strikingly parochial (first-worldist), naïvely ahistorical, and crudely reductionist, resembling nothing so much in the latter as the *laissez-faire* internationalism of nineteenth century liberal economists.

(Green, *op cit.*:55-56)<sup>26</sup>

The particular relevance of Petrella's work to the field of lifelong learning policy, however, lies in his questioning of the role of the nation state in a globalized world and in notions of sovereignty generally:

It is not just the economic changes wrought by globalization that are changing our perception of ourselves and the world we live in; we are also witnessing the beginning of the end of the 'national' as the starting and finishing point of strategic relevance for scientific, economic, social and cultural actors .... Put differently, the growing globalization of the economy is eroding one of the basic foundations of the nation-state, *i.e.* the national market. The national space is being replaced as

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<sup>26</sup> Green's suggestion, however, that economic globalization theory 'is clearly on the safest ground' (*ibid.*:56) would appear to have been put into some doubt by the work of Bairoch (in Boyer and Drache, 1996:173-192) .

the most relevant strategic *economic* space by the nascent global space.

(*ibid.*:67)

This is the focus of the next part of this chapter.

Thus, the issue as to whether current globalization can be considered as new is in doubt. However, the conclusion that can be drawn from the economic evidence is that the process of globalization is in a phase of acceleration. The discourse of the imperatives of internationalization and marketization and the globalization of capital within policy on lifelong learning (European Commission, 1996; DfEE, 1998), grounded on the notion of the uniqueness of contemporaneity, are seen, therefore, as manifestations within the rhetoric of lifelong learning of aspects of postmodernity.

### III. 3. (i) Lifelong Learning and the Nation State.

The arguments presented by the various protagonists amongst globalization theorists has brought forth one particular aspect of globalization, *viz.* sovereignty and the role of the nation state, which has a powerful link with the elements developed in the previous chapter. It is here that the commodification of education meets with the 'idée force' which Bourdieu alluded to in his description of globalization as mere 'myth'. Globalization can be seen to represent for the state yet another, if not even stronger alibi in its defence of what may be called 'retreatist' policies:

The worldwide triumph of the market over the state is often proclaimed in the age of globalization. It is often thought that the world economic system has become so complex that no

single government can control the social processes taking place in its jurisdiction. In this view of the world, public intervention is seen as inefficient or ineffective, even in keeping social inequality in check. However, such political determinism overlooks the role the nation-state in fact plays in sustaining the current structures of global capitalism - a role which, paradoxically, cannot be sustained in the long run because ultimately markets require social stability and societies need order and direction. Thus the relationship between economic globalization and nation-state is dynamic and unstable.

(Henry *et al*, 1999:87)

The opening paragraph of the UK government's consultation paper on lifelong learning sets the foundations of its lifelong learning policy firmly in a discourse of change and globalization:

We are in a new age - the age of information and of global competition. Familiar certainties and old ways of doing things are disappearing. The types of jobs we do have changed as have the industries in which we work and the skills they need. At the same time, new opportunities are opening up as we see the potential of new technologies to change our lives for the better. We have no choice but to prepare for this new age in which the key to success will be the continuous education and development of the human mind and imagination.

(DfEE, 1998:9).

The document then proceeds to give a history of events since the 1960s in illustration of this premise - the sharp drop in employment levels in manufacturing, a dramatic increase in employment in the service sector, and different patterns of employment (part time working, male/female ratios). Other writers (*e.g.* Burbules and Torres, 2000) preface their arguments on assumptions based on the development of a 'Post-Fordist' order. At this point in the argument, therefore, it is considered useful to analyse these references

to recent history in an attempt to elucidate whether in fact the case can be made for a world that today resembles little that which preceded it, for it is only by so doing that the accusation of withdrawal levied at the state by Bourdieu can be fully examined (Bourdieu, 1998:2).<sup>27</sup>

### III. 3. (ii) Evidence and Contrasts: from Fordism to Post-Fordism.

A review of the literature allows us to conclude that there is no clear consensus that, in the world of today, we live in a society which represents a well-founded qualitative and quantitative break from the past which could be identified as being post-Fordist in nature. Sennett (1998), while recognising that 'flexible specialization is the antithesis of the system of production embodied in Fordism' (*ibid.*:51), draws our attention at the same time to the fact that 'most labor remains inscribed within the circle of Fordism' (*ibid.*:44), and Garrahan and Stewart (1992), Field (in Raggatt *et al*, 1996), Reed (1992) and, to a lesser extent, Giroux (1994) and Harvey (1990), although recognising that certain fundamental changes in conditions have taken place in recent years, question at the same time the evidence for a supposed post-Fordist era:

novel practices are emerging (whether in manufacturing or service industries, the public sector, the finance sector, and so on), but that these hardly constitute a reformulation of the Fordist system and class antagonism,

(Garrahan and Stewart, *op cit.*: x)

The backlash against the post-Fordist/flexible specialization thesis has gathered pace and momentum over the last two to three years. Criticism has focused on three major areas: first, the lack of firm empirical evidence necessary to substantiate

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<sup>27</sup> See Page 18.

the wide-ranging generalizations preferred by supporters of the former; second, the highly controversial theoretical constructions and interpretations which post-Fordist writers have deployed; finally, the extent to which visible organizational modifications to incorporate a strategy of continuous innovation within advanced capitalist societies can be extrapolated into a total 'institutional paradigm shift' in which one industrial order gives away to another.

(Reed, *op cit.*:233)

Table 1 summarises the claims made about today's changed circumstances and contrasts these conditions with those applicable to Fordism. Harvey (*op cit.*:125) sees Fordism as an extension of the ideas outlined in F. W. Taylor's *Scientific Management*.<sup>28</sup> Underlying Taylorism is a theory of management style which assumes among other things that

Organisations are rational entities - collectivities consistently and effectively pursuing rational goals

People are motivated to work solely by financial reward.

(Burnes, 1996: 40)

For Harvey, however, what ultimately separated Ford from Taylor was

his [*i.e.* Ford's] explicit recognition that mass production meant mass consumption, a new system of the reproduction of labour power, a new politics of labour control and management, a new aesthetics and psychology, in short, a new kind of rationalized, modernist, and populist democratic society.

(*ibid.*:125-126)

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<sup>28</sup> Taylor, F. W. (1911) *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York: Harper (1947 edition).

**FORDISM**

**'POST-FORDISM'**

**SEPARATION** between **MANAGEMENT, CONCEPTION, CONTROL & EXECUTION**

*ECONOMIES* of **SCALE**

**SINGLE TASK**

**RESOURCE-DRIVEN**

**MASS PRODUCTION** (for *MASS CONSUMPTION*)

**MANUFACTURE- ORIENTED**

**QUALITY CONTROL**

**CENTRALIZATION**

**NATIONAL ECONOMY**

*POWER & DECISION-MAKING* seen as a **PYRAMID**

**FORCES** of *PRODUCTION*

**SECURITY of EMPLOYMENT**

**RIGIDITY**

**DIVISIONS** of *CAPITAL/LABOUR, LEFT/RIGHT*

**EQUALITY of OPPORTUNITY**

**COLLECTIVIZATION**

*EDUCATION* as a **PUBLIC GOOD**

**INTEGRATION** of **KNOWLEDGE** into **PRODUCTION & CONSUMPTION**

*ECONOMIES* of **SCOPE**

**MULTIPLE TASK**

**DEMAND-DRIVEN**

**SMALL BATCH, JUST-in-TIME PRODUCTION**

**SERVICE- ORIENTED**

**QUALITY ASSURANCE**

**DIVERSIFICATION**

**GLOBAL ECONOMY**

*POWER & DECISION-MAKING* seen as a **SPIDER'S WEB**

**RELATIONS** of *PRODUCTION*

**MOBILITY**

**FLEXIBILITY**

**BLURRING of DIVISIONS**

**INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY**

**INDIVIDUALIZATION**

*EDUCATION* as **PRODUCT**

**TABLE 1**

**FORDISM Vs 'POST-FORDISM'**

*Characteristics and Contrasts*

[Adapted from Harvey (1990), Boyer & Drache (1996) and Burbules & Torres (2000).]

What Harvey means by 'a new psychology' is that Ford's conception of 'mass consumption' meant that a move was being made beyond the internal preoccupations of management on the completion by the workers of appointed tasks (Taylorism) to a vision of the workers themselves as collaborators in the creation of consumption and hence of capital accumulation.

Thus, such a theory, which has been called the 'Classical Approach' to management (*ibid.*:26), exhibits a perception of society based on relations of power and authority and views the individual as being motivated merely by coercion and immediate need, what McGregor terms 'Theory X' (McGregor, in Hall, 1988:11). Influenced by the work of Mayo (1933) and Maslow (1943), McGregor proposes a new theory, 'Theory Y':

the creation of conditions such that the members of the organization can achieve their own goals *best* by directing their efforts toward the success of the enterprise.

*(op cit.*:22)

One might suggest, then, that in Fordism, 'Theory X' was in a process of transformation but that it was not until the 'Post-Fordist' era that 'Theory Y' ultimately replaced 'Theory X' as the principle of human motivation underlying the relations of capital to labour. With respect to the current discourse of Lifelong Learning, one of the principal suggestions of 'Post-Fordism' is the move to an information- or knowledge-based economy (Harvey, 1990; Boyer and Drache, 1996; Burbules and Torres, 2000). In this discourse knowledge

becomes the principal dynamic in capital accumulation, it is the 'revolution of the twenty-first century' (DfEE, 1998: 9). Indeed the central interest in this discussion on the Fordism/'Post-Fordism' debate is the underlying assumptions that it makes concerning knowledge. For Scientific Management:

The managers assume .... the burden of gathering together all the traditional knowledge which in the past has been possessed by the workman and then of classifying, tabulating and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws and formulae,

(Taylor, cited in Burnes, *op cit.*:28)

while Toffler indicates the clear link existing between the supposed knowledge 'revolution' of today and the notion of human capital:

Knowledge itself, therefore, turns out to be not only the source of the highest-quality power, but also the most important ingredient of force and wealth. Put differently, knowledge has gone from being an adjunct of money power and muscle power, to being their very essence. It is, in fact, the ultimate amplifier. This is the key to the power shift that lies ahead, and it explains why the battle for control of knowledge and the means of communication is heating up all over the world.

(Toffler, cited in, Halsey *et al*, 1997:174)

The difference between the two lies in the fact that knowledge as a means of achieving *equality of opportunity* had been surpassed by knowledge as an *individual responsibility* (Table 1). Furthermore, as the previous chapter sought to demonstrate, the discourse of the 'knowledge society' has been matched at the same time with a profound entrepreneurialization in the field of learning and education. This entrepreneurialism is founded on the notion that the new

*diversification* of consumption and tastes can only be met with the *flexible* response implicit in the contemporary notion of enterprise.

'Post-Fordist' *flexibility* has brought with it new management responses and organizational approaches such as an emphasis on *Team Work*, *Just-in-Time* production processes, *Total Quality Management* and the introduction of management organization paradigms from Japan and elsewhere such as those based on the concept of *Kaizen* or continuous improvement.<sup>29</sup> Table 1 contrasts this *flexibility* with the rigidities of Fordist organization. Contained within the word *flexible* are the dynamic notions of suppleness, malleability and resilience and a lack of any kind of tension. However, the discourse that sets lifelong learning policy within such a framework betrays a number of paradoxes which would appear to question some of the basic assumptions of the 'post-Fordist' agenda.

Harvey has drawn our attention to the fact that the most salient feature of the forces of change currently set loose is that the move away from *centralization* tendencies to *diversification*, rather than allow for a greater loosening of control, has instead brought about a form of organization of capital which is, if anything, even more close-set:

For what is most interesting about the current situation is the way in which capitalism is becoming ever more tightly organized *through* dispersal, geographical mobility, and flexible responses in labour markets, labour processes, and consumer

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<sup>29</sup> See Burnes (1996:73-109) for further discussion on what has been termed 'the Culture-Excellence Approach' and the contrasts with the Japanese approach to management.

markets, all accompanied by hefty doses of institutional, product, and technological innovation.

(*ibid.*:159)

A similar paradox lies in the manner in which many of the management responses outlined previously can be seen to reflect many of the characteristics of Taylorism:

The trend towards teamwork and JIT [Just-in-Time] is Janus faced, looking both ways at once. On the one hand, it appears to benefit employees yet on the other it helps management in the control and appropriation of their knowledge. The process is not only geared to simplifying tasks so workers can pick them up quickly, but also to ensuring that knowledge can be transferred from worker to manager to worker much more easily.

(Garrahan and Stewart, 1992:62)<sup>30</sup>

A further paradox lies in the autonomy and field of influence of the nation state in policy forming in the 'Post-Fordist' deregulated global economy. The suggestion that globalization somehow erodes the nation state's legitimacy is rejected by most of the literature (Boyer and Drache, 1996: 8; Henry *et al*, 1999:87; Marginson, 1999:26; Morrow and Torres, in Burbules and Torres, 2000:36). Indeed Burbules and Torres suggest that despite the increasing encroachment brought about by the free flow of capital, the nation state has striven to exert an increasing influence on education through the

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<sup>30</sup> The Taylorism implicit in many of these management responses is commented upon also by Boyer & Drache, (*op cit.*: 245).

development of policy but that this is not matched by any increase in spending:

At the very moment that nations were losing some control over economic policies and were cutting expenditures, educational policy took on even greater significance. This renewed significance of education as an element of an effective (national) economic policy was reflected in the structure of its production and delivery, but not in expenditure terms.

(Burbules and Torres, 2000:84)

The state's unwillingness to commit spending to the goals it sets in policy illustrates the instrumentalism of official policy discourse on lifelong learning. Although lifelong learning is discoursed in UK policy as being central to welfare reform (DfEE, 1998), it is mediated in practice, however, as being a part of economic policy.<sup>31</sup> In this discourse:

learning signifies 'application', with pedagogy structured around problem-solving and project-based activities. The learner is required to be highly motivated in the direction of a personal change linked to 'reading' the market and continually adapting to the needs of the socio-economic environment .... At the same time, it offers a formula for economic recovery, based on a reconfiguration of human capital theory and a metonymics of blame.

(Usher *et al*, 1997:110)

Thus, current narratives of lifelong learning, rather than being situated in discourses of inclusion and social cohesion (DfEE, 1998; European Commission, 1996) where lifelong learning is seen as the 'heartbeat of society' (Delors, 1996:22), are situated firmly in more instrumentalist *meta*-narratives

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<sup>31</sup> This, then, would confirm Bourdieu's criticism (referred to earlier).

where knowledge and access to it are more increasingly controlled and where a Darwinian approach to learning implies success and gain for some at the expense of exclusion and failure for others (the Pareto optimum referred to in Chapter II).

### III. 4. Conclusion: Lifelong Learning as a *Cargo Cult*.<sup>32</sup>

Running throughout this chapter on the discourse of change and globalization has been the recurrent theme of the uniqueness of contemporaneity and the incisive nature of the discourse of the change and globalization theorists. The preceding arguments have questioned the foundations of the proponents of the thesis of 'a total institutional paradigm shift' (Reed, *op cit.*:233) and indicated certain weaknesses, therefore, in a discourse of lifelong learning which, while founding the rationale for such a policy on notions of a new world order, could rather be said to exhibit the characteristics of economic determinism.

The question is raised as to whether the narrow, economic terms of the discourse of UK lifelong learning policy, despite its claims, however, that such policy is part of the government's welfare programme, can alone help to bring about 'a civilised society' and to promote 'active citizenship' (DfEE, 1998:7).

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<sup>32</sup> The neologism is derived from the work of Bienefeld, who defines it thus: The term stems from several documented instances in which residents of some remote Pacific islands responded to the cessation of air traffic at the end of the Second World War by clearing 'runways' in the bush, hoping that this would bring back the planes on which they had come to depend for many things (in Boyer and Drache, *op cit.*:440, n35).

By questioning the central tenets of the discourses of change and globalization which are so recurrent in lifelong learning policy documents (European Commission, 1996; DfEE, 1998, 1999) the arguments presented thus far have drawn on those of the preceding chapter on the commodification of learning in order to clearly refocus the discourse on lifelong learning into the realms of 'the necessary Utopia' outlined in the Delors Commission report (1996:13) and allow for a more humanistic reading of lifelong learning.

Moreover, for any humanistic reading of lifelong learning to succeed in taking shape, this discussion on the rhetoric of change and globalization and its representation in lifelong learning policy, especially with respect to its premises of the individual as human capital, requires reflection on the possible consequences of such discourses on the individual and on society as a whole.

In this regard Sennett had already drawn attention to the possible consequences on the individual of policies centred on a discourse of flexible specialization:

These then are the forces bending people to change: reinvention of bureaucracy, flexible specialization of production, concentration without centralization. In the revolt against routine, the appearance of a new freedom is deceptive. Time in institutions and for individuals has been unchanged from the iron cage of the past, but subjected to new, top-down controls and surveillance. The time of flexibility is the time of a new power. Flexibility begets disorder, but not freedom from restraint.

Smith's enlightenment version of flexibility imagined that it would enrich people ethically as well as materially; his flexible individual is capable of sudden bursts of sympathy for others. Quite a different character structure appears among those who exercise power within this complicated modern regime. They are free, but it is an amoral freedom.

(Sennett, *op cit.*:59-60)

In conclusion, therefore, the discourses of change and globalization within lifelong learning give force to the narrow instrumentalism of lifelong learning policy, thus precluding more humanistic readings. Moreover, although lifelong learning policy in the UK is discoursed in terms of welfare reform, the feasibility of achieving the objectives of the declared goals of a more inclusive society is effectively put in doubt when there is no commitment in policy of the introduction of precise measures and the resources necessary to combat the origins of exclusion.<sup>33</sup> For this reason, together with its human capital premises, the hopes and aspirations of lifelong learning policy can be considered as a '*Cargo Cult*'.

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<sup>33</sup> Although increasing the allocation of resources, the 1999 White Paper (DfEE, 1999), remains firmly premised on the human capital concept and economic determinism can be seen as the thrust of much of its preoccupation (Coffield, 2000a).

## *Chapter IV*

### PARTICIPATION LEVELS IN LIFELONG LEARNING: LIFELONG LEARNING UNDER THE LENS OF BOURDIEU

#### IV. 1. (i) Introduction.

The discussion of the rhetoric of lifelong learning thus far has illustrated the move away from concerns with equity in lifelong learning policy towards more narrow, economic concerns. This has been accompanied by a shift in responsibility away from the state towards the individual. Within a postmodern analysis, this shift of responsibility fails to recognise fundamental inequalities inherent in society. Moreover, given the human capital premises of lifelong learning policy, and its discourse of lifelong learning as a search for employment and employability, the issues of access and uptake are key elements in the debate on lifelong learning. Therefore, following the discussion of the claims of lifelong learning policy to seek to bring about a more cohesive society, this chapter moves on from the *context* of lifelong learning to analyse the issues of access and uptake of lifelong learning.

This chapter investigates the potential of Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction to serve as a tool of analysis in issues of access and uptake. The chapter demonstrates that the issues of access and participation in lifelong learning are discourses within a framework of postmodernity (if not exclusively) and that this discourse is, *de facto*, *exclusive* rather than *inclusive*.

The chapter begins with an illustration of the claims made by policy makers on lifelong learning (European Commission, 1996; DfEE, 1998) and then moves on to consider recent research undertaken on participation levels in lifelong learning (Sargant *et al*, 1997; Campaign for Learning, 1998) which conclude that those who do least well at school appear to be those most reluctant to engage in any learning after school. The statistics available are, however, limited and some caution is required in the conclusions which can be drawn. A parallel is then drawn between these participation levels and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction (1977; 1988, 1990; 1993; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu *et al*, 1994).

Reference is made to the interest shown in Pierre Bourdieu's theories by educational researchers (Grenfell and James, 1998). However, given the difficulties inherent in Bourdieu's writing, the chapter attempts first to clarify the notion of *habitus* and *cultural capital* before moving thereafter to a critique of Bourdieu's theory and an analysis of its value in discussions of access to and uptake of lifelong learning.

#### IV. 1. (ii) Lifelong Learning Policy.

Policy documents in the field of lifelong learning set ambitious targets for themselves and steep the foundations of such policy in generalisations concerning the benefits, individual and collective, of lifelong learning policy:

Education and training will increasingly become the main vehicles for self-awareness, belonging, advancement and self-fulfilment. Education and training whether acquired in the formal education system, on the job or in a more informal

way, is the key for everyone to controlling their future and their personal development.

(European Commission, 1996: 16)

However, precisely what we are to understand by terms such as 'belonging' or 'self-fulfilment' remains unclear. For the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for Education:

(Learning) helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation,

(DfEE, 1998:7)

whereas for the United Kingdom's Prime Minister (quoted in the same document) 'Education is the best economic policy we have', (*ibid.*: 9). However, as shall be demonstrated in the next part of this chapter, research from different sources into participation in lifelong learning would appear to conclude that those who could benefit most from lifelong learning seem increasingly reluctant to engage themselves in the process. Lifelong learning is thus seen, it is argued, as a reproductive mechanism in society.

It is felt, therefore, that clarity is required in our understanding of the mechanisms underlying the development of policy in this area and this chapter turns now to a consideration of the writing of the philosopher turned anthropologist turned sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (much of whose writing concerns itself with the field of education and cultural production) in an

attempt to elucidate further the underlying concepts in issues of policy in the field of lifelong learning.

#### IV. 1. (iii) Participation in Learning.

A wide-ranging survey on adult participation in education and learning, funded by the DfEE, carried out during the European Year of Lifelong Learning (1996) concluded that 'social class continues to be the key discriminator in understanding participation in learning' (Sargant *et al*, 1997: vi). While on the one hand 53% of recent or current learners came from socio-economic classes A and B, the same percentage (53%) of respondents from socio-economic classes D and E had not participated in any learning since leaving full-time education, (*ibid.*: 12). Comparison with a similar survey carried out in 1990 demonstrates that while participation in current learning by socio-economic classes A, B and C1 remains relatively stable, participation by grades C2, D and E seems to be falling sharply (*ibid.*: 24).<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, the results of the survey indicate that, of those respondents currently or recently engaged in learning, 59% had left school at the age of 18 or more, while 56% of those who had left school before the age of 16 had taken part in no learning since leaving school and, further, 81% of these respondents indicated they had no intention of engaging in learning at a future date (*ibid.*: 14, 27). As the report concludes 'the length of initial education continues to be the best single predictor of participation in adult

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<sup>34</sup> See Appendix for an explanation of socio-economic grades.

learning' (*ibid.*: vii). Indeed, this gap in participation in learning is confirmed in the conclusions of a more recent survey carried out for the Campaign for

Learning:

older respondents, people from social class DE households, the retired and those with no qualifications are less likely to currently be involved in learning or to express a desire to be involved in the future. They are also less likely to feel that learning is important or enjoyable.

These sections of the population are less likely to be employed. The worry is that, rather than take up the challenge of the Learning Age, these groups will become increasingly disenchanted by the pace of change around them.

(Campaign for Learning, 1998: 9)

A survey carried out in 1999 indicates that participation in current learning by social classes A and B had risen from 53% in 1996 to 58% in 1999, while, with respect to those respondents who had not taken part in learning since leaving school, the percentage indicating that they were unlikely to engage in any future learning had risen from 81% in 1996 to 87% in 1999 (Tuckett and Sargant, 1999). Analysis of these statistics on participation would appear to indicate also that those who could be seen potentially to benefit most from lifelong learning effectively rule themselves out, or are ruled out, of the process.

IV. 2. (i) Bourdieu, Participation and *'improbable practices'*.

In *The Logic of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu asserts that:

If a very close correlation is regularly observed between the scientifically constructed objective probabilities (for example,

the chances of access to a particular good) and agents' subjective aspirations ('motivations' and 'needs'), this is not because agents consciously adjust their aspirations to an exact evaluation of their chances of success, like a gambler organizing his stakes on the basis of perfect information about his chances of winning. In reality, the dispositions durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions ... generate dispositions objectively compatible with these conditions and in a sense pre-adapted to their demands. The most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable.

(Bourdieu, 1990: 54)

Thus, if the factors influencing participation in learning and the learning divide can be seen to constitute a 'lex insita' - an in-born law - (Bourdieu, 1977: 81) as Bourdieu's work would appear to suggest, then the need to analyse the issues underlying the phenomenon which would persuade aspiring participants in lifelong learning from certain socio-economic categories to rule themselves out of this process - an 'improbable practice' in Bourdieuan<sup>35</sup> terms - becomes pressing. Moreover, if we take at face value the conclusions of the most recent research on participation available which asserts that 'the Learning Society is still a distant dream' and that 'Social class, age, and the length of initial education all continue to show a powerful effect on adults' participation' (Tuckett and Sargant, *op. cit.*: 5), the question is then raised as to

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<sup>35</sup> The adjective *Bourdieuian* (coined in Grenfell and James 1998), is used throughout this chapter as it is considered less obstructive than the repetition of the possessive *Bourdieu's*.

how realistic it is to claim, thereby, that policy on lifelong learning can serve to:

Bridge the 'learning divide' - between those who have benefited from education and training and those who have not - which blights so many communities and widens income inequality. The results are seen in the second and third generation of the same family being unemployed, and in the potential talent of young people wasted in a vicious circle of under-achievement, self-deprecation, and petty crime. Learning can overcome this by building self-confidence and independence.

(DfEE, 1998: 11)

Bourdieu is widely recognised as having a pervasive influence in the field of Education (Harker *et al*, 1990; Jenkins, 1992; Grenfell and James, 1998), and for Dubet (1998) his theories on education have become so successful as to have reached the status of a 'vulgate'. However, mindful of the conclusions of a recent survey of the state of research in education and its implied criticism of the 'adulation of great thinkers' (Tooley and Darby, 1998: 56), as well as the wider debate evoked by Bourdieu's sociology, it is felt that the key concepts of *habitus* and *cultural capital*, so often alluded to in the field of educational research (but rarely, if ever, explained or clarified as constructs in themselves), need first of all to be understood in Bourdieuan terms before attempting further analysis of policy issues in lifelong learning through the lens of Bourdieu.

#### IV. 2. (ii) Bourdieu on Clarity.

The complexities of Bourdieu's writing have been commented upon by a number of writers (*e.g.* Jenkins, 1992; Grenfell and James, 1998; Verdès-Leroux, 1998) and in response to their criticisms of lack of clarity in Bourdieu, he attacks the so-called virtues of clarity in a robust defence of his own discourse:

I am convinced that, for both scientific and political reasons, you have to accept that discourse can and must be as complicated as the (more or less complicated) problem it is tackling demands .... Furthermore, I don't believe in the virtues of 'common sense' and 'clarity' .... in order to make yourself understood, you have to work at using words in such a way that they say just what you wanted them to say, you can see that the best way of talking clearly consists in talking in a complicated way, in an attempt to transmit simultaneously what you are saying and your relationship to what you are saying, and in avoiding saying, against your will, something more than and different from what you thought you were saying.

(Bourdieu, 1994: 52, 3)

The opaqueness of Bourdieu's writing, and his reluctance to bow to the virtues of clarity of expression requires that any research which makes reference to his writing or which seeks to expand on the notions of *habitus* and *cultural capital* does so having first attempted to clarify the basic notions underlying the use of these terms. Furthermore, the need for clarity is paramount since we are dealing with texts translated from the original French, often published in English a considerable time after the original. As a result, that which is available at any one time to researchers in the English-speaking

world of Bourdieu's output cannot, therefore, represent with total accuracy the evolution of his thinking on *habitus* and *cultural capital*.<sup>36</sup>

#### IV. 2. (iii) *Habitus*, as Disposition.

For Bourdieu, the concept of *habitus* is pivotal in our understanding of the ontological relationship individuals have with the world around them. Any notion of equality of opportunity for all, a notion 'which neutralizes the sense of social realities', is dismissed as being the product merely of fantasy (Bourdieu, 1990: 64). From his earliest writing he utterly repudiates 'the spontaneist Utopia which accords the individual the power to find within himself the principle of his own 'fulfilment' ' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 16). *Habitus* is, essentially, Bourdieu's attempt to understand the interplay between the individual and society. The dynamics of *habitus* are represented in Figure 1. Its nature is threefold and total, putatively covering every aspect of human behaviour.

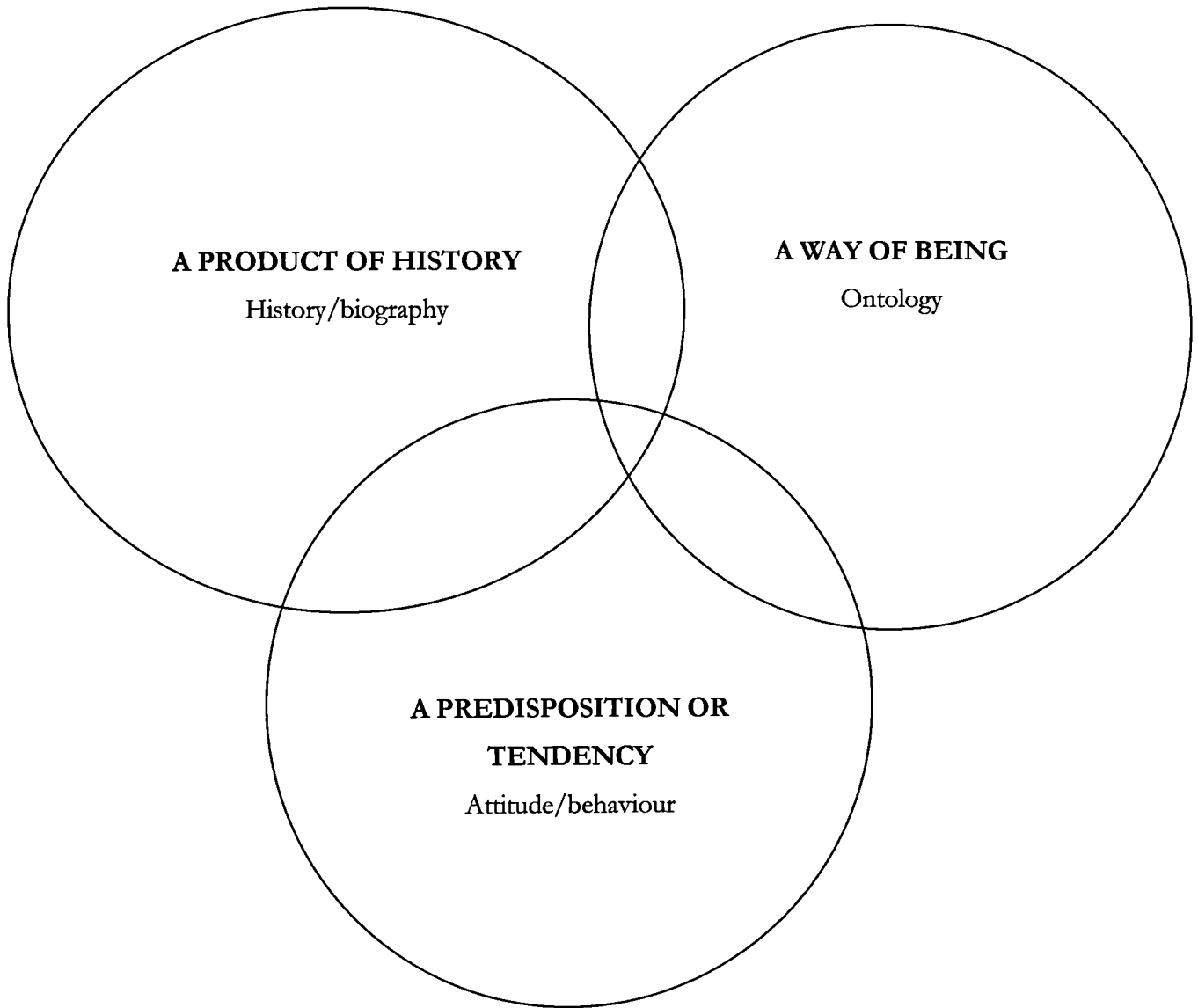
Bourdieu proposes the term 'disposition' as being a useful bridge to our understanding of *habitus*:

it expresses first the *result of an organising action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being, a habitual state ...* and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination*.

(Bourdieu , 1977: 214)

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<sup>36</sup> *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, for example, was first published in English some seven years after the original and *The Logic of Practice* was published ten years after the original, *Le Sens Pratique*.



**Figure.1.**  
**The Threefold Nature of Habitus**

Bourdieu provides us with further illustrations of *habitus* throughout his writing: it is 'the internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu and Passeron, *op cit.*: 39), 'the generative, unifying principle of conducts and opinions which is also their explanatory principle' (*ibid.*: 161), 'the site of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality' (*ibid.*: 205).<sup>37</sup> Later *habitus* becomes 'society written into the body' (*ibid.*: 63), implying 'a sense of one's place' [and] also a 'sense of the place of others' (*ibid.*: 131). It is also 'embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history .... the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product' (Bourdieu, 1990: 56).

Jenkins (1992: 75) rightly illustrates similarities inherent in the original meanings of the Latin *habitus* and the Greek *hexis*.<sup>38</sup> The threefold nature of *habitus* is centred at the level of the body, since:

all the schemes of perception and appreciation in which a group deposits its fundamental structures, and the schemes of expression through which it provides them with the beginnings of objectification and therefore of reinforcement, intervene between the individual and his/her body.

(Bourdieu, 1990: 73)

The inculcation of dispositions contained in the *habitus*, and the engendering of practices which these acquired dispositions bring about, is a process which

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<sup>37</sup> *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, in particular, contains numerous references to *habitus*.

<sup>38</sup> Bourdieu's earlier work in Algeria had encouraged him to focus on explanations of bodily *hexis* in the behaviour of Kabyle society (Bourdieu *et al*, 1963).

is totally unrelated to any idea of memorization and subsequent imitation since:

the process of acquisition .... and the process of reproduction .... tend to take place below the level of consciousness, expression and the reflexive distance which these presuppose.

(*ibid.*: 73)

Furthermore, the ontology of *habitus* is centred in the body itself, since for Bourdieu:

What is 'learned by body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is.

(*ibid.*: 73)

The dynamics of *habitus* are such that, as the individual moves through the different spheres of social life - family, school, work and so on - so the individual's *habitus* adopts a number of varying shells or layers. Moreover *habitus* is not simply confined to the ontological interplay the individual has with the world; it also encompasses any number of individuals belonging to the same class or group, since 'the singular habitus of members of the same class are united in a relationship of homology, that is, of diversity within homogeneity characteristic of their social conditions of production', (Bourdieu, 1990: 60).

In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Bourdieu (with Passeron) seeks to demonstrate the inequities inherent in 'the irreversible process' that education and the 'work of schooling' represent and which fail to take sufficiently into account the 'pre-history' of the individual, *i.e.* the primary

*habitus* gained at home in the family, which, 'forms the basis of the reception and assimilation of the classroom message' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 43), such that failure at the end of the compulsory education cycle by those individuals whose class *habitus* is not reflected in the 'cultural arbitrary' inculcated by schooling becomes inevitable and engenders in these individuals 'an awareness of the cultural unworthiness of their own acquirements', (*ibid.*: 28).

The lens of Bourdieu's theory of cultural production allows, therefore, for readings of lifelong learning which take into account the issues related to the inequalities in society. Figure 1 shows that the dynamics of *habitus* are such that:

(1) the learner's *biography* (e.g. social, family and educational background)

brings into play

(2) a *way of being*, and

(3) a *behaviour*,

which are not only consistent with each other but are also mutually determining. Thus, non-participation in lifelong learning can be seen as an inescapable consequence of the individual's position within society. This analysis argues that *habitus* dictates people's horizons, e.g. educational, which, thereby, become self-excluding or self-including of education. The

discourse of human capital in lifelong learning is thus considered to be reproductive in its nature and impedes understanding of the issues of access and uptake.

#### IV. 2. (iv) *Cultural Capital and Field.*

For Bourdieu the:

fundamental powers are economic capital (in its different forms), cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital, which is the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate,

(Bourdieu, 1994: 127)

and the position the individual is able to adopt in social space is thus determined by the volume of each form of capital possessed or accumulated.

Implicit in the notion of capital are three fundamental characteristics:

- Capital can be accumulated,
- It can be transmitted, and
- It can be exchanged.

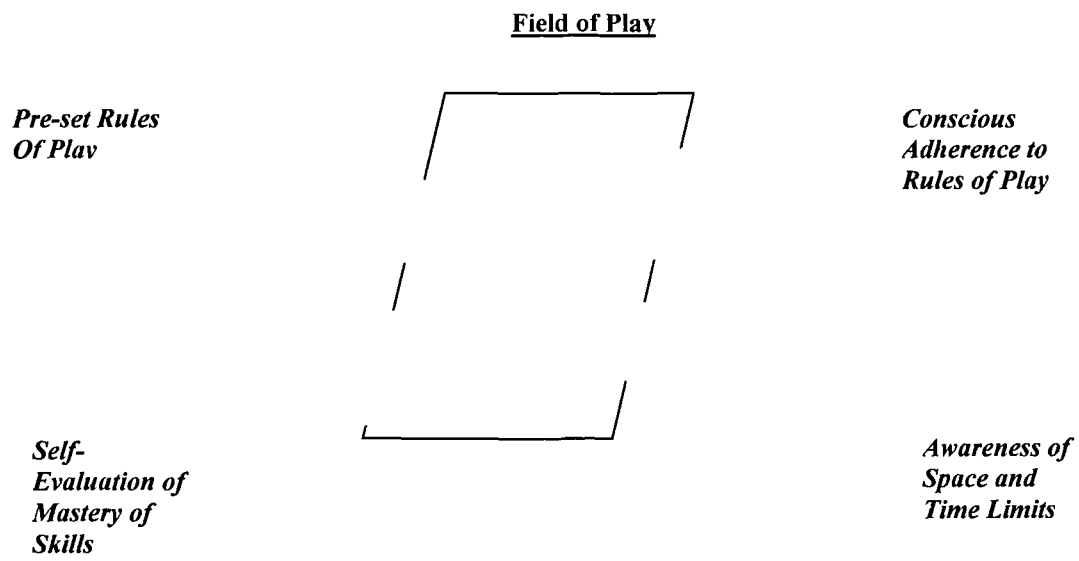
Possession of capital by the individual in our society, whether its nature be economic, cultural or otherwise, is likened by Bourdieu to possession of 'aces in a game of cards' (Bourdieu, 1994: 127), and thus the volume of *cultural capital* accumulated by the individual allows for a jockeying for position within the various social *fields*. Bourdieu repeatedly uses the analogy of the game as

an instrument to define the characteristics of the concept of *field*, (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). The social *fields*, however, are not so much a game 'for themselves' but rather games 'in themselves' (Bourdieu: 1990: 67).

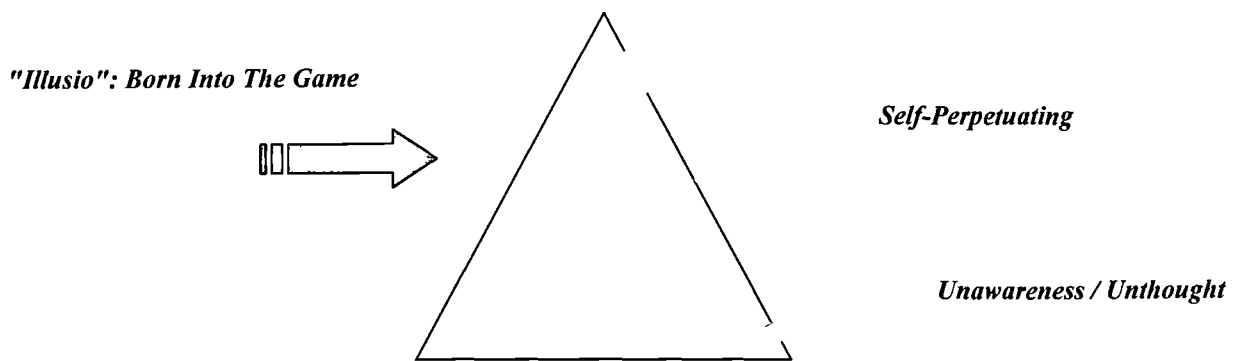
Figure 2 illustrates the characteristics of Bourdieu's concept of *field* and contrasts them with the characteristics of field of play. In a field of play the rules of the game and the physical and temporal limits are pre-set. In choosing to play, the players consciously adhere to the rules and each player is able to evaluate on their own how well their playing skills have been mastered. In Bourdieu's concept of *field*, however, there is a marked unawareness on the part of the player. The player is essentially born into the game and the game itself is an 'illusion'. This *field* has undefined spatial and temporal limits.

The notion of a *scientific, artistic or educational* field presupposes that the *habitus* of the individuals operating within these social spaces is equipped with an appropriate volume of *cultural capital* to allow the individuals concerned to function within those limits. Their *habitus* is, therefore, 'incorporated history', operating within a prism of 'objectified history' (*ibid.*: 66). The affinity and interplay of the *habitus* with the 'objectified history' that is the *field*, Bourdieu calls *doxa*, which he defines thus:

That undisputed, pre-reflexive, naive, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field .... [it] is the relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between a *habitus* and the field to which it is attuned,



**Bourdieu's Notion of Field**



**Figure 2**  
**Bourdieu's 'Field' contrasted with Field of Play**

the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense.

(*ibid.*: 68)

In clearer terms, then, Bourdieu's thesis with respect to education is that, since the primary *habitus* obtained within the family is fundamental in determining the degree 'of reception and assimilation of the classroom message' (Bourdieu and Passeron, *op cit.*: 43), then those individuals whose volume of *cultural capital* is at variant with the demands of the cultural arbitrary inculcated at school are thus inclined to self-exclude themselves from the learning process, since:

the dispositions durably inculcated by objective conditions ... engender aspirations and practices objectively compatible with those objective requirements, the most improbable practices are excluded, either totally without examination, as *unthinkable*, or at the cost of the *double negation* which inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable.

(Bourdieu, 1977: 77)

#### IV. 3. (i) Bourdieu and Research in Education.

It has been suggested that Bourdieu's work may announce the opening of a new paradigm in educational research since such a paradigm, it is claimed, seeks to go beyond the antinomies of the nomothetic and hermeneutic paradigms (Grenfell and James, 1998: 8). It is precisely Bourdieu's formulation of the concepts of *habitus* and *field* which are given in evidence of a push beyond the barriers inherent in conceptions of knowledge burdened (it

is felt) with the obstacles of objectivity and subjectivity, since:

His intent is to find a theory which is robust enough to be objective and generalizable, and yet accounts for individual, subjective thought and action.

(*ibid.*: 10)

Others attribute to Bourdieu a certain 'uniqueness' of approach in claiming that:

On the one hand, his method seeks to dissolve the division between objective and subjective perspectives in social science by the refinement and use of such concepts as habitus, field, the nature of symbolic power, capital and the notion of strategy. On the other hand, his considerable output of empirical work (which is not always apparent in the English translations of his work) emphasises his use of statistical and ethnographic evidence in the creation and use of his theoretical constructs.

(Harker *et al.*, 1990: 21-2)

Whether there is or is not clear evidence in Bourdieu's work of a paradigm shift as is claimed, it is clear, in any case, that the attempt to go beyond the subjectivism/objectivism opposition has been for him a major driving force. He himself even openly claims that his work has in fact bridged such oppositions:

If I have somewhat laboured this opposition [subjectivity/objectivity] .... it is because the most steadfast (and, in my eyes, the most important) intention guiding my work has been to overcome it.

(Bourdieu, 1994: 125)

Bourdieu himself sees his sociology as liberating, even if the experience of freedom is only relative (*ibid.*: 15).

Having thus far outlined the concepts underlying Bourdieuan analysis, the focus of this discussion now returns to the issue of participation in lifelong learning, applying to this issue the 'reflexiveness' which is claimed to be inherent in Bourdieuan methodology, (Harker *et al, op cit.*; Grenfell and James, *op cit.*; Fowler, 1998).

#### IV. 3. (ii) Lifelong Learning: Terminology and Semantic Variance.

Firstly, before pursuing this Bourdieuan analysis further, it is important to note that in any consideration of lifelong learning some caution is required in our use of language. Earlier in this chapter reference was made to the difficulties inherent in Bourdieu's writing and to a reluctance on his part to bow to any notion of clarity. It was also shown that researchers in education utilizing Bourdieuan concepts of *habitus* and *cultural capital* fail to make explicit the fundamental nature of these terms. In the field of lifelong learning there appears also to be a similar variance in meaning with respect to what is understood by 'lifelong' and 'learning'. In the available sources of statistics in participation in lifelong learning we note, for example, in Sargant *et al* (1997) and in Tuckett and Sargant (1999), that the definition of learning used in their studies reads as:

Learning can mean practising, studying, or reading about something. It can also mean being taught, instructed or coached. This is so you can develop skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something. Learning can also be called education or training. You can do it regularly (each day or month) or you can do it for a short period of time. It can be

full time or part time, done at home, at work, or in another place like college. Learning does not have to lead to a qualification,

(Sargant *et al*, *op cit*: 119)

whereas, the definition used by the Campaign for Learning in their study is:

Learning can involve either formal, taught learning or informal, non-taught learning. Taught learning, for example, includes training sessions at work, driving lessons, evening classes and teaching yourself using distance learning materials. Non-taught learning, for example, includes studying and developing your skills on your own without being enrolled on a course, learning on the job at work and keeping up to date with your own interests by reading books *etc*.

(Campaign for Learning, 1998: 6)

For the DfEE, however, learning is defined thus :

Learning encompasses basic literacy to advanced scholarship. We learn in many different ways through formal study, reading, watching television, going on a training course, taking an evening class, at work, and from family and friends .... we use the word 'learning' for all of these.

(DfEE, 1998: 10)

Moreover, it is essential to note that, in policy documents on lifelong learning, the word *lifelong* appears to denote meanings which at times come closer to the notion of *post-compulsory*, rather than connotations of the meaning of the word *lifelong* in the sense of that which starts from birth and lasts or continues throughout life.<sup>39</sup> Whether, in Bourdieuan terms, it is feasible to conceive a

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<sup>39</sup> In this respect Coffield pleads instead for lifelong learning to be discussed more as 'post partum' learning (Coffield, 1997: 13).



policy aimed at developing participation levels in lifelong learning, thereby limiting alienation and social exclusion, or even to suggest that lifelong learning policy alone might possess such a scope of action, becomes now the central focus of our concern in this chapter.

IV. 3. (iii) Bourdieu, Lifelong Learning and '*the necessity immanent in the way of the world*'.

A Bourdieuan analysis of the foregoing statistics on participation in lifelong learning would conclude that, if there is such a thing as a 'learning divide', then it constitutes merely a reflection of social reality, where those who fail to see themselves participating further in any learning are excluded from a process which for them is, in any case, an 'improbable practice' (Bourdieu, 1990: 54). The 'durability' of *habitus* can be likened to a shell which enshrouds the individual such that, it is argued, this allows a tentative explanation of the reasons why 'Social class continues to be the key discriminator in understanding participation in learning' (Sargant *et al*, *op cit.*: vi). If Bourdieu's analogy which states that 'Education .... is the equivalent, in the cultural order, of the transmission of genetic capital in the biological order' (Bourdieu and Passeron, *op cit.*: 32) is valid, then their *habitus* - and here reference is made in particular to those individuals in social groups D and E - inculcated in the family and reinforced through school, has not endowed them with a *cultural capital* that would be appropriate currency in any transactional exchange in the field of lifelong learning.

The discourse of lifelong learning is, *de facto*, exclusive. Its rhetoric can be understood as a mechanism of social, cultural and economic reproduction rather than production, such that non-participation in the field of lifelong learning mirrors an anticipation of 'the necessity immanent in the way of the world' (Bourdieu, 1994: 11). Non-participation is, essentially, an 'immediate submission to order', (Bourdieu, 1990: 54). Hence, attempts to anchor lifelong learning within a rhetoric of combating social exclusion with discourses of 'uniting society', 'strengthening the family' and 'social cohesion' (DfEE, *op cit.*: 10-11) essentially falls on deaf ears.<sup>40</sup>

However, is one to accept that nothing can be done to bring about a change in participation levels in lifelong learning? Is it reasonable to maintain that participation levels, particularly from individuals in groups D and E, cannot be anything other than minimal and doomed ever more to decrease further in the longer term? Such questions and the charges of determinism levelled at Bourdieu (Jenkins, 1992; Dubet, 1998; Grignon, 1998; Verdès-Leroux, 1998) require that the argument of this chapter moves now to focus on the validity or otherwise of such criticisms.

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<sup>40</sup> This rhetoric in lifelong learning policy documents displays the characteristics of the conceptualisation of lifelong learning as a form of *governance apologetics*. This conceptualisation, and others, are discussed in Chapter VI.

#### IV. 4. (i) Bourdieu and History.

As can be seen, then, an analysis of access to and uptake of lifelong learning through the lens of Bourdieu, refocuses the discussion on lifelong learning by taking into account the inequalities inherent in society. Indeed in a recent work on Bourdieu it is claimed that:

We know that some unique insights are fostered by working with his 'tools',<sup>41</sup> but, as yet, we cannot be sure that this should justifiably be termed a paradigm shift. Perhaps, what is more important than whether or not such a shift is taking place, is that an engagement with the ideas be made in the first place. When researchers think in these terms and work in these ways, they by definition transform the structure of the research field itself. New structures and activities give rise to new 'scientific' products, both theoretical and practical. The nature of these products cannot be foreseen in advance. Once they become available, however, they provide new ways of thinking and acting to guide educationalists and researchers. It is in these thoughts and acts, and the ways they act upon us, that our understanding of education is enhanced and our consequent action transformed.

(Grenfell and James, *op cit.*: 181)

Even one of Bourdieu's most vociferous critics accepts, however, that 'Bourdieu is enormously stimulating, he is 'good to think with' ' (Jenkins, 1992: 176).

Bourdieu's antagonists (Jenkins, 1992; Dubet, 1998; Grignon, 1998; Verdès-Leroux, 1998), however, essentially consider his sociology to be deterministic. Indeed, the threefold nature of *habitus*, illustrated in Figure 1, would appear to

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<sup>41</sup> By the term Bourdieuan 'tools' we may infer that the authors are referring to the concepts of *habitus*, *cultural capital* and *field*.

betray an hermetic process which is overwhelmingly *re*productive in nature, thereby eliminating any notion of transformation in its wake. *Habitus* brings into being practices which are both *cause* and *effect*.

In short, the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history. The system of dispositions - a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles, an internal law relating the continuous exercise of the law of external necessities (irreducible to immediate conjunctural constraints) - is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism discerns in the social world without being able to give them a rational basis.

(Bourdieu, 1977: 82)

Furthermore, such a representation of reality appears to underscore a notion of time which is two-dimensional. It is as if the present is understood only in relation to the past which, in turn, reproduces itself in a never-ending cycle - *eram ergo sum* supplants *cogito ergo sum*.<sup>42</sup>

From this point of view, then, it would appear that under the lens of Bourdieu, any aspiring lifelong learner from social classes D and E plods along the field of lifelong learning rather like Sisyphus trying to make his way up the mountain, only (inevitably) to fall back down again, the burden of structure and 'structuring structure' too great to be overcome.

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<sup>42</sup> *i.e.* *I was therefore I am* supplants *I think therefore I am*.

The hermetic nature of *habitus* is illustrated in Figure 3.

For Bourdieu:

History is an ongoing set of likely outcomes (probabilities). These are, however, the product of what people do (practices). In turn, practices are the product of the habitus, as well as serving to reproduce it or confirm it as 'true'. And the habitus, of course, is the ongoing culmination of history.

(1994: 80)

Such a model is denounced by Bourdieu's critics as illustrating a certain determinism with the actors reduced to the level of passive receptacles of socialisation:

The notion of habitus replaces the idea of development with that of latency ... it doesn't matter what happens, because, in fact, nothing happens – events become mere actualisations.

(Grignon, 1998: 62)

Other critics go even so far as to denounce the fact that, despite claims to the contrary, Bourdieu's sociology, in its 'catastrophic vision of social relations', amounts to nothing less than 'sociological terrorism', (Verdès-Leroux, 1998: 10). Bourdieu, however, dismisses such criticisms by indicating that his work is founded on empirical studies and that his critics:

invariably apply to them [his analyses] the very modes of thought, and especially distinctions, alternatives and oppositions, which my analyses are aimed at destroying and overcoming.

(Bourdieu, 1994:107)

***History***  
***(set of likely***  
***probabilities)***

***Likely***  
***Probabilities***

**A Product of History**

**A Way of Being**

**A Predisposition or Tendency**

**Figure 3.**

**The Hermetic Nature of Habitus**

Despite the criticisms raised, the value of analysing the issues of access to and uptake of, lifelong learning through the lens of Bourdieu is that it brings to the analysis an explanatory potential which is overlooked in human capital theory. Essentially, therefore, this thesis argues that by using Bourdieu's 'tools' (Grenfell and James, 1998) the description of reality obtained is more accurate in that the embrace is wider and fuller than is possible in analyses founded on human capital theory.

#### IV. 4. (ii) Conclusion.

*Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* - a 'citation classic'- (Grenfell and James, *op cit.*: 27), ends with the admonition that:

in a society in which the obtaining of social privileges depends more and more closely on possession of academic credentials, the School does not only have the function of ensuring discreet succession to a bourgeois estate which can no longer be transmitted directly and openly. This privileged instrument of the bourgeois sociodicy which confers on the privileged the supreme privilege of not seeing themselves as privileged manages the more easily to convince the disinherited that they owe their scholastic and social destiny to their lack of gifts or merits, because in matters of culture absolute dispossession excludes awareness of being dispossessed.

(Bourdieu and Passeron, *op cit.*: 210)

Such an assertion, however, is ideological, in a Marxist sense, in that it maintains differentials of power and privilege against equality. Nevertheless, confronting this vision of the 'privileged instrument' with statistics on participation in lifelong learning, which conclude that 'the more initial education and training people receive, the greater the likelihood of their

learning later on', (Sargant *et al, op cit.:* vii), would appear to confirm that Bourdieu is indeed 'good to think with' in this respect.

This chapter has shown that the issues of access to and uptake of lifelong learning are discoursed within an analysis of postmodernity and are, *de facto*, exclusive. The lens of Bourdieu's theory of cultural production, despite the criticisms raised, allows for the taking into account in the rhetoric of lifelong learning of the inequalities inherent in society. Lifelong learning is thus seen to serve as a mechanism of economic, social and cultural reproduction in society.

## *Chapter V*

### HUMAN CAPITAL

#### V. 1. (i) Introduction.

This chapter analyses in greater detail the human capital premises of lifelong learning initially referred to in Chapter III. The fundamental basis of human capital theory is that, by investing in self, *e.g.* through lifelong learning, the life chances of individuals are improved, thereby bringing wider benefits to society as a whole. However, the discourse of human capital in lifelong learning, in its focus away from wider social concerns towards the individual, exhibits aspects of postmodernism and is shown to be, *de facto*, exclusive of other possible readings of lifelong learning. Since the publication of Becker's original work on human capital in 1964, there have been two further editions and, in the most recent of them, the author alludes to the fact that the leading candidates in the US presidential election campaign had, throughout the campaign, freely referred to 'investing in human capital' in speeches on education policy.<sup>43</sup> Becker is drawn, therefore, to express a certain irony in the recognition of the fact that in the thirty years since the publication of his work

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<sup>43</sup> Schultz had begun to publish his work on education as a form of investment at the beginning of the 1960s. See Schultz, T. W. (ed.) (1961) *Investment in Human Beings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

the term *human capital* had attained wide acceptance in the literature despite even his own earlier misgivings:

It may seem odd now, but I hesitated before deciding to call my book *Human Capital* - and even hedged the risk by using a long subtitle. In the early days, many people were criticizing this term and the underlying analysis because they believed it treated people like slaves or machines. My, how the world has changed!

(Becker, 1993:16)

A review of the literature allows us to conclude that there does indeed appear to be a wide dissemination of the term both among policy-makers (Halsey *et al*, 1997; DfEE, 1998, 1999; UNESCO, 1999a, 1999b) and among researchers (Putnam, 1995, 1996; Coffield, 1997; 1999b; 2000b; Schuller and Bamford, 2000) although with varying degrees of agreement.

This chapter, building on the arguments of the preceding chapters, sets out to investigate definitions of the term, the value of the concept within lifelong learning, the wider societal implications of its use and attempts to offer complementary and/or alternative measures.

#### V.1.(ii) Characteristics of Human Capital.

For Woodhall

The concept of human capital refers to the fact that human beings invest in themselves, by means of education, training, or other activities, which raises their future income by increasing their lifetime earnings

(Woodhall, in Halsey *et al*, 1997:219)

and for Hartog

*Human capital* is essentially a supply side characteristic: it is an envelope concept, a valuation of people's skills. A simple definition specifies it as the value of a person's productive, marketable skills. Employing a worker is like setting an engine in motion.

(Hartog, 2000: 7)

It is 'a household concept' (*ibid.*:7) which centres the discourses of lifelong learning firmly on the level of the individual: it is a matter of individual responsibility. It views the process of learning as a commodity to be invested in, *i.e. bought*, through the exercise of choice by the individual (and here we return to the view, outlined in Chapter II, of the learner as *citizen-consumer*) in the learning marketplace. By investing in learning, then, the lifelong learner is seen to be making calculated risks designed to bring about a certain measured rate of return. The focus in this discourse is moreover firmly anchored in the quantifiable.

The discourse of human capital is powerful (Becker, 1993; Hartog, 2000; Bagnall, 2000; Coffield, 2000b). The impact of its force is reflected in current policy documents on learning where, by embedding lifelong learning in discourses of societal *change*, the demands of a new 'post-industrial' society are thus said to require new 'learning' responses and hence the need for new lifelong learning policies:

The challenge we face to equip individuals, employers and the country to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is immense and immediate. In the information and knowledge based

economy, investment in human capital - in the intellect and creativity of people - is replacing past patterns of investment in plant, machinery and physical labour. To continue to compete, we must equip ourselves for this new world with new and better skills. We must improve levels of knowledge and understanding and develop the adaptability to respond to change.

(DfEE, 1999:12)

From this, it would appear that society has indeed reached a 'post-industrial' age with industry on the point of de-investing in plant and machinery. On more careful analysis, however, the claims made by the proponents of the necessary new paradigm (reflected in the previous citation from the UK government White Paper on post-16 learning) have to be treated with a certain scepticism, as Coffield has demonstrated:

It may come as a surprise to the manufacturers of cars, computers and clothes that investment in plant, machinery and physical labour are considered by the British government to be outdated and wasteful practices.

(Coffield, 2000a:240)

Moreover, the inconsistency of such discourses is further illustrated in the omission of lifelong learning from the list of the principal research priorities of the United Kingdom Department for Education and Employment drawn up by the Department in 1999 (*ibid.*:244), the same year as the publication of the White Paper which had, however, insisted on the urgent need for lifelong learning policy since 'standing still [was] not an option' (DfEE, *op cit.*:15).

A further difficulty with the discourse of human capital in lifelong learning is related to the arguments presented in Chapter IV of this thesis which seemed

to point to a possible correlation between participation in lifelong learning and performance in compulsory education, *i.e.* the better the performance in compulsory education, the higher the participation in lifelong learning. Further, if we accept the evidence of studies done on rates of return to education by the proponents of human capital theory, then the rate of return on lifelong learning would appear to be minimal in comparison to those of compulsory education.<sup>44</sup> These studies are summarised into the three great 'laws' of human capital theory:

- 1 private rates of return are higher than social rates of return. Private returns relate the person's after-tax earnings gain from education to the person's cost, social returns relate gross earnings gains to true social cost, and hence, consider the real cost of schooling, without subtracting subsidies by the government,
- 2 the rate of return diminishes by level of education. The highest returns relate to primary education: learning to read, write and do arithmetic are the most profitable investments. There are some signs that the relation for private returns could in fact be U-shaped, with a somewhat lower return for intermediate schooling levels,
- 3 the rate of return diminishes by level of development of the nation: highest rates are found in developing countries.

(Hartog, *op cit.*:11).<sup>45</sup>

From this it would appear that the most efficient investment a lifelong learner can make, therefore, is in the early stages of the learning cycle. The rates of

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<sup>44</sup> See Psacharopoulos, G. (1994) Returns to investment in education: a global update, *World Development*, 22, 1325-1343. See also Woodhall (in Halsey *et al*, 1997: 219-223).

<sup>45</sup> Hartog's 'laws' were based on the conclusions drawn up by Psacharopoulos (1994).

return are higher and one might deduce from this that any subsequent improvement in achievement in compulsory education would consequently bring about a higher participation rate in lifelong learning. Thus, Coffield's rejection of interpretations of lifelong learning discourse which assimilate the process to post-compulsory learning in favour instead of a discourse which views lifelong learning as being precisely what it claims to be - learning throughout life or '*post partum*' learning (Coffield, 1997:13) as he terms it - would appear to be validated.

Although to differing degrees, both Schuller (in Coffield, 1997:116) and Woodhall (in Halsey *et al*, 1997:220) outline the attraction human capital represents for quantifiable econometric analyses of rates of return to learning. Becker, for his part, had openly recognised that it is much easier to quantify the economic gains to education than to evaluate all other possible gains (Becker, *op cit*:21). The usefulness of the notion of human capital for Becker lay in the fact that he considered that the economic effects of education had been neglected and that human capital served to correct this imbalance. It is instructive to note in this regard, however, that even among the proponents of the human capital discourse in learning, there is both the recognition that the effects of education other than purely economic ones are also important and therefore, one may assume equally worthy of analysis (Becker, *op cit*:13), and also that the attraction of human capital to economists is overwhelming

to the point, perhaps, of over-reliance:

Human capital is a fascinating concept, and economists are drawn to it like a moth to a flame. But it is intangible, cannot be directly observed, is not sold and priced on the market and hence can only be inferred: in fact, it is like a secret lover. And why do economists love it? Because it is fruitful, because it fits basic economic concepts so well, and perhaps above all, because it is susceptible to all kinds of calculations.

(Hartog, *op cit.*:17)

#### V.2.(i) Human Capital: an Investment in Employability.

Applying the preceding discussion on the characteristics of human capital to discussions on earlier chapters, we are led to conclude, then, that discourses of lifelong learning anchored in human capital theory have succeeded in moving the focus away from the 'collective' towards the 'individual', such that, in practice, investment in lifelong learning is presented more as a question of individual responsibility or economic necessity than as one of choice. Moreover, this reorientation can be seen to be consistent with the characteristics of Post-Fordist flexible specialization outlined in Chapter III.

Further, when one considers a definition of capital such as that offered by Bourdieu:

It is what makes the games of society - not least, the economic game - something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle,

(Bourdieu, in Halsey *et al.*, 1997:46)

and confronts this definition with Becker's assertion that

The principal characteristic that distinguishes human from other kinds of capital is that, by definition, the former is embedded or embodied in the person investing. This embodiment of human capital is the most important reason why marginal benefits decline as additional capital is accumulated,

(Becker, *op cit.*:112)

then human capital's focus on the individual and its expression in individual *embodiment* leads the discussion on human capital firmly back to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*.

The habitus as the feel for the game is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature .... The habitus, as society written into the body, into the biological individual, enables the infinite number of acts of the game - written into the game as possibilities and objective demands - to be produced; the constraints and demands of the game, although they are not restricted to a code of rules, *impose themselves* on those people - and those people alone - who, because they have a feel for the game, a feel, that is, for the immanent necessity of the game, are prepared to perceive them and carry them out.

(Bourdieu, 1994:63)

Thus both *habitus* and *cultural capital* may be seen to influence human capital and, therefore, measurements made solely in terms of human capital and neglecting other forms of capital - social, cultural, economic *etc.*, are inadequate. Moreover, the inadequacy of human capital measures has been raised by a number of writers (Woodhall, in Halsey *et al*, 1997:220; Hartog, 2000:19; Schuller and Bamford, 2000:8). While the proponents of the theory

may recognise that

No discussion of human capital can omit the influence of families on the knowledge, skills, values and habits of their children .... Large differences among young children grow over time with age and schooling because children learn more easily when they are better prepared. Therefore, even small differences among children in the preparation provided by their families are frequently multiplied over time into large differences when they are teenagers. This is why the labor market cannot do much for school dropouts who can hardly read and never developed good work habits, and why it is so difficult to devise policies to help these groups,

(Becker, *op cit.*:21)

the methodology employed in its measurement lacks precision and fails to take this consideration sufficiently into account. Woodhall (*op cit.*:222) alludes to criticisms of human capital theory which perceive its scope as being that of a kind of 'screening device' or filter which allows employers to be better able to identify the individuals with the appropriate attributes and characteristics they are seen to need. Learning discourses founded on human capital theory, therefore, can be seen to neglect the more fundamental notions of equality and engagement in the democratic process, since

The issues [*i.e.* measurements of human capital] are intimately related to the issue of equity. Developing people's skills to the full increases inequalities between people. In fact, this is how the school system works, as we showed for the Netherlands<sup>46</sup> .... We predicted for a sample of Dutch people the earnings they could have obtained for any education they might complete. Had everyone completed university education, the earnings differentials would be much greater than if they had only completed basic education. Giving most education to

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<sup>46</sup> See Hartog, J., Pfann, G. and Ridder, G. (1989) (Non-)graduation and the earnings function, an inquiry on self-selection. *European Economic Review*, 33, 1373-1395.

those with the greatest abilities further increases the differences between them. And this is just what the school system does.

(Hartog, *op cit.*:19)

When the UNESCO commission's report highlighted the 'tension' apparent between 'the need for competition' and 'the concern for equality of opportunity' (Delors, 1996:17), it was an attempt, as was discussed in Chapter II, to refocus the debate on lifelong learning in much wider terms:

The debate must be founded on an accurate evaluation of the education system, which is based on premises acceptable to all and which must not be narrowly economic in character. While it is proper to speak of a market for vocational education inasmuch as some of its services may be evaluated in cost-benefit terms, this is clearly not the case with all educational activities, some of which lie outside the economic order - those, for example, which relate to participation in the life of the community or self-fulfilment. Furthermore, the education system forms a whole in which the parts are so completely interdependent and the integration with society so thorough that it can be difficult to pinpoint the origin of particular malfunctions. The evaluation of education should be understood in the broad sense .... It brings in such concepts as the right to education, equity, efficiency, quality and the overall allocation of resources, and it is largely a matter for the public authorities.

(*ibid.*:157)

However, an analysis of more recent documents emanating from UNESCO would appear to show a *volte face* and a return to a much more instrumentalist rhetoric, premised on a discourse of globalization:

The basic challenge of the globalized economy is therefore the requirement to adjust and compete in a rapidly changing environment. Central to the effort to compete in the twenty-first century is the preparation of a productive flexible

workforce. Every country will be obliged to enable its citizens to acquire the skills necessary to survive and to improve their quality of life because the demands of the workplace are likely to leave people without skills unemployed and unemployable .... The realization is growing that that individuals will have to be prepared for a range of employment options, including self-employment. Many may have to hold down two or more jobs simultaneously in order to maintain a reasonable quality of life,

(UNESCO, 1999a:4)

and

Globalization is compelling the lead sectors of national economies to compete in rapidly changing scenarios and to achieve international standards of quality and productivity. Every country will therefore be obliged to enable its citizens to acquire the education and skills necessary to survive and to improve their quality of life. In the world of tomorrow, every individual will need to update his or her knowledge and skills constantly.

(UNESCO, 1999b:2)

The tenets of human capital theory, as evidenced in the above quotations from these recent UNESCO documents, is to be found also in other recent policy documents on lifelong learning (OECD, 1997; DfEE, 1998; 1999). This return to discourses of lifelong learning centred on economic determinism, linking the goals of learning clearly with the economic needs of the market, would explain the precise attraction that human capital theory represents for the field of lifelong learning (Hartog, *op cit.*:17). In this respect Woodhall (in Halsey *et al*, 1997:220) had already outlined the similarity between the cost-benefit analysis applied to measurements of physical capital with measurements of human capital.

In the discourse of lifelong learning as a 'necessary Utopia', the UNESCO Commission had sought to identify the cornerstones of knowledge as consisting of 'learning to learn', 'learning to do', 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together' (*ibid.*:22-23, 157). Leaving aside for one moment the misgivings a number of writers have expressed concerning the value and accuracy of its measurements (Woodhall, *op cit.*:219; Hartog, *op cit.*:18; Schuller and Bamford, *op cit.*:8;), it would, nevertheless, be difficult to assess exactly how the econometrics of human capital could possibly evaluate with any degree of accuracy how well individuals and societies had been able to achieve pre-set goals such as these since they emanate from a notion of learning which goes beyond narrow economic concerns.

Chapter III of this thesis elucidated the arguments surrounding the notion of change and globalization which, as has been seen, are so often present in current discourses of lifelong learning. The discussion of whether the proposition of the existence of a new post-industrial or post-Fordist paradigm was substantiated by the evidence, brought forth important underlying issues in vocationalist theories of lifelong learning in the move away from a focus on learning for *employment* towards learning for *employability*, *i.e.* changing jobs throughout life. It is instructive to observe that the UK Government's 1999 White Paper on post-16 learning contains more than fifteen references to *employability*, almost as many as there are in the document to *employment*. The nuance between the two terms is, moreover, considerable in its scope since

employ-*ability* would appear to represent a skill in itself, *i.e.* something which can be *learned*:

A key element of the proposed new arrangements will be a shared responsibility in the new century for achieving a lifelong learning culture between the Government, individuals, employers, providers and communities. Each must accept the challenges of promoting and participating in learning and working towards common goals. All will benefit from this investment of time, energy and resources. Learning will make a reality of self-reliance, self-confidence, employability and adaptability both for business and individuals and the communities in which they live. Together we will need to ensure that the new arrangements meet the skills needs of localities, regions and the nation for the years ahead.

(DfEE, 1999:14)

Learning, and more particularly lifelong learning, therefore, is viewed as a responsibility - 'a shared responsibility' - reflecting one of the fundamental tenets of 'Third Way Politics': 'a new social contract based on the theorem 'no rights without responsibilities' ' (Giddens, 2000:52).

The 'Third Way Politics' of Mr. Blair was an attempt at a re-definition of social democracy:

Third-way politics looks to rediscover a role for active government. Social democrats in the past have been keen to expand the scope of government; free marketeers to shrink it. The third way argues that it needs to be reconstructed ...Third-way politics seeks to restructure the welfare state to bring it into line with changes in the wider world. The reformed welfare state will establish a new relationship between risk and security on the one hand and individual and collective responsibility on the other,

(Giddens, in Times Higher Education Supplement, September 18 1998)

and the translation of this discourse into education and, more particularly, into lifelong learning policy, is the point of convergence between the values of the market and those of social democracy (O'Brien, 1998:4). The investment in human capital for 'Third Way' politics - 'an active supply-side policy, placing a premium upon education' - is seen as a fundamental doctrine in the construction of this 'new social contract' connecting the three 'spheres' of 'government, markets and the civil order' (Giddens, 2000:165).

This convergence of values within 'Third Way' politics as reflected in recent policy documents on lifelong learning (DfEE, 1998; 1999) is seen, therefore, to portray learning as a 'right', but a 'right' that brings with it 'responsibilities'. Essentially, then, in this discourse the role of the state is that of facilitator '... providing resources for citizens to assume responsibility for the consequences of what they do' (Giddens, 2000:165), and 'citizens' who assume their individual responsibilities by investing in their own education allow their human capital to accumulate. However, the arguments presented thus far in this chapter have highlighted the inherent weaknesses in measurements of human capital and so, by attempting to establish clear correlations between investments in human capital and economic success (Schuller, in Coffield, 1997:116; Hartog, *op cit.*:18), discourses of lifelong learning centred on human capital theory are seen to be restrictive, narrow and potentially unworkable (Coffield, 2000a, b). Moreover, a further difficulty of this discourse of lifelong

learning is that it assumes that people's learning needs are related to the needs of the marketplace, *i.e.* that learning is equated with a search for employability.

Despite the claim that

It [lifelong learning] can and must nurture a love for learning. This will ensure the means by which our economy can make a successful transition from the industries and services of the past, to the knowledge and information economy of the future. It also contributes to sustaining a civilised and cohesive society, in which people develop as active citizens and in which generational disadvantage can be overcome,

(DfEE, 1999:3)

it is difficult to see, in practice, how policies such as these allow for the rights of individuals, such as the rights of retired or unemployed people, for example, to choose the kind of learning they wish by, for example, following courses in foreign languages for tourism or in mechanics for car maintenance:

Creating a genuine culture of lifelong learning with a broad, liberal definition of learning is certainly part of the vision, but this goal disappears from sight in the details of policy, when the central, over-riding concern becomes meeting the skill needs of business in order to improve the economy.

(Coffield, 2000a:240)

Notwithstanding the assertion that

This approach does not imply a downgrading of the needs of those outside the labour market. They should be 'invested in' just as much as others. Positive welfare means attacking problems of dependency, isolation and lack of self-fulfilment wherever they arise,

(Giddens, 2000:166)

discourses of lifelong learning centred on human capital theory such as those inspired by 'Third Way' politics would, by their funding arrangements, seek to exclude the possibility for individuals of following the types of courses they chose. Furthermore, it is indicative of human capital theorists to associate notions of 'lack of self-fulfilment' and 'dependency' with those citizens considered as being outwith the labour market. For lifelong learning policies centred on human capital theory to be considered unambiguous when they assert that:

Learning also brings broader benefits. It encourages and supports active citizenship, helps communities help themselves, and opens up new opportunities such as the chance to explore art, music and literature. It helps strengthen families and encourages independence. That means that everyone must have access to high quality, relevant learning at a time and pace, and in places that suit them. Not only do individuals, families and communities benefit, learning throughout life also delivers tangible results for business - improved productivity and competitiveness,

(DfEE, *op cit.*:55)

it is clear, then, that other measurements beyond simple measurements of rates of return, even if they were possible (which the preceding discussion has questioned), expressed in terms merely of earnings distribution or in industrial productivity, must be taken into account.

Becker (*op cit.*:21), by referring to the embodied nature of human capital and by drawing attention to the influence that family background exerts on human capital, can be seen, in a sense, as anticipating Bourdieu's notion of the importance of primary *habitus* (see Chapter IV). Discourses of lifelong

learning centred on human capital theory which do not take all aspects of social life into its spheres of analysis could thus be seen to fall foul of Balogh and Streeten's 'Coefficient of Ignorance':

Aggregation of all 'investment in human capital' and its separation from 'investment in physical capital' not only obscures the complementary nature of the two, but also serves as an intellectual and moral escape mechanism from unpleasant social and political difficulties.

(Balogh and Streeten, cited in Coffield, 1997:117)

#### V.2.(ii) Economic Determinism and Tools of Analysis.

It has been suggested that lifelong learning discourse anchored in human capital theory exhibits many of the characteristics of a policy on learning which is clearly founded on the principles of economic determinism.<sup>47</sup> The evidence for this is manifest in the following features of lifelong learning policy as evidenced in current policy documents (DfEE, 1998, 1999; UNESCO, 1999a, 1999b)

- a clear focus on outcomes and an increasing preoccupation with accreditation,

leading to:

- concerns for evaluation of investments in learning, which is then calculated in terms of the financial and economic benefits accrued,

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<sup>47</sup> The relation between human capital theory and lifelong learning policy is viewed as correlational. This does not, however, imply causality.

- individualization of responsibilities for learning,

and with this:

- a heightened privatization which is seen in the transformation of learning from a public to a private good, and
- a reductionist focus, with a general vocationalization of education, where learning is assimilated to training (Ball, 1999; Bagnall, 2000; Coffield, 2000b).

This has led a number of writers in the field of lifelong learning to suggest that, far from framing a discourse of lifelong learning in the manner of a 'necessary Utopia', the impact of current lifelong learning discourse, rather than being a force of liberation for the individual, serves more to equip the individual with the mind-set of characteristics considered necessary for survival in a construction of reality based on the ideologies of economic determinism (Coffield, 1999, 2000b; Bagnall, *op cit.*):

This hard, technocratic version of society is likely to foster conformity, compliance and control rather than emancipation, empowerment or the enhancement of learning.

(Coffield, 2000a: 244)

Human capital theory is thus seen as the manifestation of only one aspect of the 'two broad streams' that Coleman depicts as being the tools available to

the researcher in the depiction and understanding of social action. Its scope

sees the actor as having goals independently arrived at, as acting independently, and as wholly self-interested. Its principal virtue lies in having a principle of action, that of maximising utility.

(Coleman, in Halsey *et al*, *op cit*:80)

For lifelong learning policy to achieve coherence and consistency with the goals it sets - goals such as not only learning 'to know' and 'to do' but also learning 'to live together' and learning 'to be' (Delors, 1996:97), or goals such as supporting 'active citizenship' and helping communities to 'help themselves' (DfEE, 1999:55) - then it is evident that, given the limitations of human capital theory, some form of 'correction' has to be added to human capital econometrics. This would then take into account the fact that not all individuals approaching the market place of learning do so with equal amounts of capital to invest (Becker, *op cit*; Bourdieu, 1994; Hartog, *op cit*).

### V.3.(i) Civic Engagement and Social Capital.

Policy on lifelong learning is grounded in human capital theory and the references to it are many.<sup>48</sup> In *The Learning Age*, for example, we are told that 'if people want to get on, their first instinct is to improve their skills and education' (DfEE, 1998:13) and 'Individuals should invest in their own

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<sup>48</sup> Some references to human capital in policy documents were already discussed earlier in Chapter III.

learning to improve their employability, professional competence, and earning potential or for leisure' (*ibid.*:26). *Learning to Succeed* (DfEE, 1999) is premised on the notion that individuals

take responsibility for their own future assisted by intensive advice and support, to seek opportunities to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills; and to make their own investment in personal success.

(DfEE, 1999: 15)

However, an over-reliance by policy-makers on human capital theory in their discourses of lifelong learning can be seen also as evidence by the state of non-compliance with Offe's definition of 'civility':

*i.e.* the ability and willingness of citizens to come to terms with, through open and peaceful deliberation as well as the use of the institutional methods of carrying out social and political conflict that the democratic regime form affords, the dilemmas posed by the fact that we live beyond the age that could (if only seemingly) be mastered by the clean and simple pronouncements of some "correct line", "ruling doctrine", "one best way", or "Washington consensus".

(Offe, 1998:6)

Offe designs 'social order' around a triangle, or pyramid, of foundations comprising all three of the following:

- '*social democratic statism*',
- '*libertarianism*', and
- '*communitarian positions*',

and the mark of 'civility' is seen in an engagement with all three, since

The problem of designing appropriate institutions can thus be formulated as keeping appropriate distance from the extremes of “pure” solutions while at the same time avoiding making “too little” use of any of them.

(*ibid.*:6)

Any failure to engage with such a 'civic mix' can then be seen as exhibiting the characteristics of one or a combination of Offe's six 'fallacies':

- '*excessive statism*',
- '*"too little" governing capacity*',
- '*excessive reliance on market mechanisms*',
- '*excessive limitation of market forces*',
- '*excessive communitarianism*', and
- '*neglecting communities and identities*' (*ibid.*:7-11).

The *correction* to the inadequacies of human capital theory offered by Offe is that of 'social capital':

The ongoing fine-tuning and critical, flexible, as well as imaginative recombination of the three disparate components of the institutional order is driven by the “social capital”, available within civil society, widely referred to in contemporary social science as the source of energy that “makes democracy work”. By the term “social capital” we refer to a syndrome of cognitive and moral dispositions of citizens that lead them to extend trust to anonymous fellow citizens (as well as the political authorities that, after all, “my” fellow citizens have endowed with political power), to practise the “art of association”, and to be attentive to public (as opposed to their own narrowly circumscribed group-specific) affairs and problems. Fair and transparent patterns of government, the prosperity that carefully regulated markets can generate, and the life of communities restrained by the principle of toleration can all contribute to (and in turn benefit from) the formation and accumulation of social capital within civil society, the associational forces of which are better

capable of defining and constantly refining the “right mix” of institutional patterns than any self-declared “experts” or intellectual protagonists of “pure” doctrines of social order.

(*ibid.*:12-13)<sup>49</sup>

Putnam had defined social capital as the 'features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated action' (Putnam *et al*, 1993:167). Putnam's original work sought to establish links between socio-economic development, civic culture and political health and his later work attempted to provide evidence for his thesis that civic engagement (*i.e.* 'people's connections with the life of their communities, not only with politics' (Putnam, 1996:1) was in decline. Schuller and Bamford view social capital as, potentially, playing the role of a 'methodological deflator' (*op cit.*: 9) in measurements of human capital, in other words of improving their validity.

Coleman defines social capital thus:

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors - whether persons or corporate actors - within the structure ....Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of

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<sup>49</sup> Giddens, too, recognises the importance of social capital for 'the knowledge economy', but he differs somewhat by his insistence that 'The 'new individualism' that goes along with globalization is not refractory to cooperation and collaboration - cooperation (rather than hierarchy) is positively stimulated by it' (Giddens, 2000: 78).

relations between actors and among actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or in physical implements of production,

(Coleman, in Halsey *et al*, *op cit*:81-82)

and he breaks social capital down into three distinct typologies:

1. where the level of social capital is seen as being dependent on the extent of obligations and the level of trust existing in social structures,
2. where social capital is equated with 'the potential for information that inheres in social relations', and finally
3. where social capital is related to the existence of 'effective norms' of behaviour

(adapted from Coleman, in Halsey *et al*, *op cit*:84-86).

For Fukuyama (1995), social capital differs from other forms of capital in that it is not acquired as such but rather is constituted in the dominance of social over individual virtues. This definition of social capital (*op cit*:26) correlates with those of Putnam and Coleman in the author's insistence on the existence of relationships founded on *trust* (for civic involvement). All three authors, Putnam, Fukuyama and Coleman, question the validity of human capital measurements which fail to take into account measures of social capital. Putnam's early interest in notions of social capital had focussed on its use in measurements of economic prosperity, although he moved on, however, in later work to investigate social capital in measurements of civic involvement. Fukuyama's concerns clearly lay in the value of social capital as explaining differences in economic outcomes. Coleman's work, however - especially in his concern for the role the family exerts in the creation of social capital -

more directly affects the discussion of social capital within the discourses of lifelong learning. In Bourdieuan terms, Coleman's discussion of 'family background', essentially takes into account the primary *habitus* gained in the family and its role in the formation of *cultural capital*.

Coleman points out the inadequacies of measures of educational achievement, particularly regarding family background, which fail to distinguish between the differing forms that capital exhibits within the family itself, *i.e.*:

- the family's *financial capital* (*i.e.* the money available for investment in education and learning),
- the family's *human capital* (*i.e.* the level of the parents' education), and
- the family's *social capital* (*i.e.* the amount of time and effort the parents invest into the education of their offspring) (Coleman, *op cit.*:88).

The difficulty with the concept of social capital, however, is that, whereas human capital econometrics have been shown to be 'crude' (Hartog, *op cit.*:19) necessitating the introduction of a correction (Schuller in Coffield, 1997:115-124), defining the parameters of social capital to allow for valid measurements appears itself rather uncertain (Schuller and Bamford, *op cit.*; Schuller, in Coffield, 1997;1999b).

### V.3. (ii) Conclusion.

The argument of this chapter has demonstrated that discourses of lifelong learning founded on human capital theory exhibit the features of economic determinism such that the concept of *learning* is narrowed down to the point of *skill* formation. This discourse is shown to originate in a theory of social action which fails to take sufficiently into account identities of the individual which are seen to operate in relation with other social forces. Thus, the rhetoric of human capital within lifelong learning policy is characterised by an excessive reliance on the mechanisms of the market and, *ipso facto*, can therefore be understood as failing to contribute to more democratic ideals, thereby negating the *inclusive* intentionalities contained within it.

## Chapter VI

### LIFELONG LEARNING IN A LEARNING AGE

#### VI. 1. (i) Introduction.

Much of this thesis has been devoted to an analysis of some of the principal ideas to be found in current use within the field of lifelong learning in an attempt to clarify the underlying issues - definitions of *knowledge* and *learning* (Chapters II and IV), *globalization* (Chapter III), *human* and *social capital* (Chapter V) and from this analysis a number of varying conceptualisations of lifelong learning can be discerned.

These conceptualisations of lifelong learning emanate from the notion of the uniqueness of contemporaneity (Chapter III) and contain perceptions of lifelong learning which may be summarised as being :

- (1) an issue of individual responsibility (Chapter II),
- (2) an economic imperative (Chapters II, III and V),
- (3) a tool in the management of change (Chapter III),
- (4) a means of consensus building (*passim*), and, in this chapter
- (5) a social 'safety net', (where lifelong learning is assimilated to training aimed at *e.g.* the young unemployed (DfEE, 1999) ), and
- (6) a mechanism of what may be called governance apologetics (where policy is mediated as aspiration).

It is only when one approaches the related term of The Knowledge or Learning *Society* that it becomes apparent that the focus becomes much wider

and moves beyond that of the individual to encompass societal issues. This chapter turns its attention now to the last two of the aforementioned conceptualisations, *viz.* those related to the role of government, notably concerning the formulation of policy and, more generally, in abstractions of society.

First, an appraisal is made of the self-declared aims contained in lifelong learning policy documents as a means of consolidating understanding of these six conceptualisations of lifelong learning. The chapter then situates lifelong learning policy within wider angles of consideration, investigating the relation between lifelong learning and training, and whether lifelong learning, in fact, can be considered as a distinctive and autonomous element (or 'movement') within education. Parallels are drawn between Giddens' conception of the 'chronic revision' inherent in modernity (Giddens, in Cassell, 1993: 293) and dominant discourses of flexibility which are to be found within lifelong learning policy documents. The discussion of this chapter then considers the implications of the preceding argument on the validity of any policy on lifelong *learning* as such through a discussion of governance and of conceptions of power and the use of power.

#### VI. 1. (ii) The Treasure Within.

The claims made for the benefits of a policy of lifelong learning range from emphasising its importance for employability through to other wider benefits such as those concerning social cohesion (Delors, 1996; European

Commission, 1996; DfEE, 1998, 1999). Indeed Preston (1999) considers the very lack of clarity inherent in the term lifelong learning as being precisely one of its strengths:

The attractive term can therefore be applied differently in different contexts, accepted as a universally good thing, without encouraging people to ask the usual critical questions of who exactly has access to it, in what form, under what conditions and who gains what from it.

(Preston, *op cit.*:565)

The seemingly unending benefits to be gained from a policy on lifelong learning have been commented on by a number of writers (*e.g.* Tight, 1998; Coffield, 1999b). The UK government's Green Paper on lifelong learning explains the urgency for a policy on lifelong learning by enumerating a vast number of advantages to be gained. Amongst these it asserts that lifelong learning:

- aids personal independence,
- develops intellectual capital, (conceptualisation of lifelong learning (1), *i.e.* as an issue of individual responsibility)
- improves employability,
- increases earnings,
- adds value to businesses,
- brings about a strong economy and an inclusive society (conceptualisation of lifelong learning (2), *i.e.* as an economic imperative, although reference to 'an inclusive society' contains also elements of conceptualisation (5), *i.e.* as a social 'safety net')
- provides tools to manage change, (conceptualisation of lifelong learning (3))
- strengthens the family and the wider community,
- unites society,
- contributes to social cohesion,

■ fosters a sense of belonging, responsibility and identity, (conceptualisation of lifelong learning (4), *i.e.* as a means of consensus building, with elements of conceptualisation (5), *i.e.* as a 'social safety net'),

and five other claims which are difficult to classify:

- helps older people stay healthy,
- stimulates the mind,
- encourages creativity and innovation,
- nourishes the soul, and
- creates and sustains culture.

(DfEE, 1998: *passim*)

In a number of ways these formulations of the advantages felt to derive from lifelong learning can be seen to have their roots in the report of the UNESCO Commission (Delors, 1996). The report sought to outline 'a broad encompassing view of learning' founded on what the report terms the 'four fundamental types of learning': 'learning to know', 'learning to do', 'learning to live together' and 'learning to be' (*ibid.*:86).<sup>50</sup> While, on the one hand, the report attempts to reach beyond a purely normative reading of learning (what the report describes as 'learning to know', and/or 'learning to do'):

A broad, encompassing view of learning should aim to enable each individual to discover, unearth and enrich his or her creative potential, to reveal the treasure within each of us. This means going beyond an instrumental view of education, as a process one submits to in order to achieve specific aims (in terms of skills, capacities or economic potential), to one

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<sup>50</sup> The report of the Commission drew much of its inspiration from the work of Edgar Faure in a previous UNESCO report (UNESCO, 1972).

that emphasises the development of the complete person, in short *learning to be*,

(*ibid.*:86)

there is evidence in the report, nevertheless, of a certain lack of precision in that *learning* is often confused with *knowledge*, and *education* is frequently assimilated to the acquisition or 'development' (*ibid.*:56) of *knowledge* (*c.f.*, Coffield, 1999b:1-2, 2000b:20).

In a similar vein, the European Commission's White Paper on the 'Learning Society' sought to establish the need for 'common action at European level' on training and education (European Commission, 1996:3) and is equally ambiguous in its use of terminology. The White paper sets its foundations in the belief that society is in the process of being totally transformed as a result of 'three factors of upheavals', *viz.* as a result of:

1. the 'information society',
2. 'internationalization', and
3. 'scientific and technical knowledge'.

(*ibid.*:22-26)

The Commission's formulation of a learning society would centre on 'the forceful return of a broad knowledge base' (which is defined as 'the ability to grasp the meaning of things, to comprehend and make judgements' (*ibid.*:27) )

and 'developing everyone's employability and capacity for economic life'

(*ibid.*:30). The first objective of the White Paper is described as:

Enhancing knowledge - by which we mean individuals' general level of knowledge - [which in this respect] ought to be the top priority ...

One general and universally acknowledged principle must be observed: the advent of the learning society involves encouraging the acquisition of new knowledge.

A multitude of incentives to learn must be provided.

(*ibid.*:53)

The discrepancies in definitions of learning to be found in writing on lifelong learning (where indeed any definition of terminology is offered) were already referred to in Chapter IV. The argument of this thesis contends that such lack of clarity allows discourse in lifelong learning to cloak itself in discussions concerning attributes (such as the last five in the preceding list from the Learning Age Green Paper) which appear unclassifiable. This is supported also in the findings of the UK's Economic and Social Research Council's programme of research into the learning society (Coffield, 2000b:167-197).

In their study of skill development in higher education and employment,

Dunne *et al* conclude that

Improving the nature and quality of discourse, of training, and of institutional policy making are all essential, but all require an ingredient which to date has been sadly lacking - the utilisation of a defensible theory of learning. Simply put, theories provide the rudder for effective policy implementation. Without it, policy direction is unplanned, random or likely to end on the rocks .... Yet consideration of

any kind of theory is non-existent in any of the literature on policy formulation or enactment.

(Dunne *et al*, in Coffield, 2000b:133)

Thus, in all the rhetoric surrounding lifelong learning and the learning society, while policy documents may agree on the question of '*what is learning for?*', there is, significantly, a failure in official documents to address the fundamental questions of '*what constitutes learning?*' and '*whose learning matters?*'.

Moreover this lack of clarity is to be found also in much of the literature on lifelong learning. For Longworth, one reads among his eight 'Learning Beatitudes' that 'learning liberates' since it 'frees the mind to explore the universe of knowledge' (Longworth,1999:11). Any attempt at defining any theory of learning is swept away as being an impossible task:

How on earth can one convey the richness and diversity of the whole world's need to embrace a new approach to learning and the fundamental psychological approach to the development of one's human potential in one short sentence? And the question [*i.e.* what *is* lifelong learning?] is often asked in such a way that a short answer is exactly the requirement.

(*ibid.*:1)<sup>51</sup>

This absence of clarity, however, does not preclude the writer from formulating other manifestations of lifelong learning: learning *cities*, learning *communities*, learning *organizations*, learning *nations*, learning *festivals*, learning *days* and the learning *century* amongst others. Lifelong learning is differentiated

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<sup>51</sup> These 'learning beatitudes' are countered in Coffield's development of what he calls the 'learning fallacies' (Coffield, 1997).

from education and training in that, in lifelong learning, the 'Learner is empowered and mentally enabled to decide where, why, when and how' and learning is seen as '.... fun, participative and involving, and as **perceived wisdom**' (*ibid.*:105, author's emphasis). Indeed, by means of defence against any attack of vagueness, the writer, without presenting any evidence for the claim, accuses professionals in education of a conservative stance since, according to him:

Paradoxically, resistance to educational change based on new knowledge tends to be at its highest in the educational sector which is responsible for producing this new knowledge.

(*ibid.*:26)

Smith and Spurling recognise that the debate on lifelong learning has suffered from a lack of precision in that 'Although the phrase has been much used in the last few years it is seldom defined, and its meaning is contested' (Smith and Spurling, 1999:3). Their conclusion is, however, stark and uncompromising:

So we come to the final question. It is the most important of all - *should we now commit to the lifelong learning project?* Taking a broad judgement, the project looks a sound investment ....

There is no point therefore in pretending that the UK has many choices in. There is only one ride available: lifelong learning. When you feel the tiger's breath in your face, it is neither plausible nor prudent to stop and tie the laces of present learning arrangements. The best hope is to jump on, hang on tight, and steer towards something really worthwhile. Have we courage enough to take the ride?

(*ibid.*:225)

What precisely the authors mean by 'the present social, economic and spiritual context' is undefined and remains, however, unclear. Thus, for them lifelong learning is seen as a necessary enterprise, a ticket to somewhere, a journey towards 'something really worthwhile'.

Nevertheless, their writing on the debate initiates its discussion by endeavouring to elaborate definitions in an attempt to clarify thought in the lifelong learning debate. They present us with a number of definitions of terms. *Learning*, for example, is presented as a process carried out by the individual or groups of individuals and is differentiated from *education* in that the latter 'refers to teacher-led learning processes at an individual or group level' (*ibid.*:8). From this the authors are led to conclude, therefore, that 'Working for *lifelong education* is very different from working for *lifelong learning*' (*ibid.*:8). It is questionable, however, whether such definitions do indeed carry the debate forward.

Moreover the lifelong *learner* is defined by the authors in relation to the output of the learning 'process' itself, which is in turn equated with 'knowledge or skill' (*ibid.*:4). Furthermore, having established what they consider to be such a 'straightforward' definition of what constitutes the lifelong learner, their argument then moves quickly on to considering, much in the same way as Longworth (*op cit.*), the concepts of learning organizations, learning cities, learning valleys and so on (*op cit.*:7).

Knowledge, for the writers, is by extension knowledge-capital (Smith and Spurling, *op cit.*:7), and is defined thus:

At any given moment, there is a stock of knowledge and skill stored by each individual and, by extension, by each learning organization. Not all such knowledge and skill remains at the conscious level, and some of it is essentially unique and private to individual learners. But the vast bulk of a person's knowledge and skill can be shared with, and learnt by, others. Where it can be passed on it becomes intellectual property, and may pick up a market value ....

In the world of business, accountants have ways to write off the value of lost assets and to charge for depreciation. But they have failed to establish any way to account for knowledge-capital and its accumulation and decay.

(*ibid.*:7-8)

Such a view confirms criticism levelled by Preston that

In most cases contemporary usage of the term lifelong learning refers to the process of allowing ourselves to be exposed to pre-packaged gobbits of knowledge, allowing ourselves to be assessed on the mastery of that knowledge, accepting the implications of the resulting indicators of our performance for access to the labour market and our resultant positioning within it. Lifelong in some contexts lives up to its promise: the presentation of a variety of opportunities from the cradle to the grave. In other contexts it more narrowly refers to work-related education and training.

(Preston, 1999:562)

Thus, a reading of lifelong *learning* such as that present in Smith and Spurling corresponds to only two of the four 'fundamental' types of learning referred to earlier, *i.e.* *learning to know* and *learning to do*. Such a view of the learner, despite claims by the authors 'that a way towards a more humane and civilized society can be found through lifelong learning, centred on ethical and

democratic principles' (Smith and Spurling, 1999: 3), fails to satisfy, through its neglect of the individual learner as a rational, autonomous member of society whose decision to engage or not in learning may be based on considerations other than any measured analysis of the outcomes to be gained. For Smith and Spurling 'to look more closely at the learner' reveals that 'The learner is the individual who gains the knowledge or skill. That is straightforward' (*ibid.*: 7). This view of learning is dictated by considerations of the individual as human capital, a discourse of lifelong learning which was analysed in Chapter V. Moreover, this is sustained in their conclusion which insists on the need for a change in attitudes to learning, a change which they describe as 'a cultural shift':

A major culture shift is required to change all this. It means getting it across to people that the old model - where *learning is for the young, and the prizes are for the academic strand* - has to give way to a new approach where *all people learn habitually and continuously throughout their lives*. This will keep the nation 'learning fit'. This is the best defence against the perils of global competition, fast growing social exclusion, and the loss of social cohesion which afflicts large parts of society.

(*ibid.*:213, the authors' emphasis)

In spite of their attempt, therefore, to present a 'two-faceted definition of lifelong learning' (*ibid.*:10), which aims at a conception of lifelong learning which is both 'empirical', *i.e.* where learning is

1. 'from cradle to the grave',
2. and includes all types of learning (formal, informal *etc.*),
3. and is 'continuous', and
4. is intended and planned

and 'moral', *i.e.* where learning involves

1. 'personal commitment',
2. 'social commitment',
3. 'respect for others' learning', and
4. 'respect for truth',

(*ibid.*:10)

their approach to lifelong learning, by its focus on outcomes, remains trapped in a costs/benefits vision of learning, focusing on *learning to do* and *learning to know*, with little attention in practice paid to *learning to be* and *learning to live together*. It is an approach, moreover, which contains within its scope five out of the six conceptualisations outlined in the introduction to this chapter.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, while their attempt to raise the debate on lifelong learning beyond normative readings may be hailed as welcome, it is difficult, in practice, to see any evidence in their writing of an approach to lifelong learning which does, in fact, come near to the principles the authors predicate in their introduction.

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<sup>52</sup> The last conceptualisation of lifelong learning (developed in more detail later in this chapter) as a mechanism of governance apologetics (reflecting the *politics of retreat* referred to earlier in Chapter II) may be *inferred* from such a view as that espoused by the authors, but it cannot as such be directly deduced from their arguments.

## VI. 1. (iii) A Learning Age in a Learning Society.

The increasing perception of the uniqueness of the present, which was discussed in Chapter III, is mirrored in the notion that social change, notably that brought into place through technological advances, has engendered a 'new age' of learning and with this 'new age' is born a new *Knowledge* or *Learning Society*.<sup>53</sup> However, reference has already been made in this chapter to the change of focus that the term Learning Society brings to the debate on lifelong learning, *i.e.* an attempt is made to move beyond the individual to encompass all members of society. Jarvis, however, draws our attention to the incongruity inherent in the very term:

One of the fundamental issues in the concept of the learning society is the concept of 'learning' which is so frequently confused with 'education' ... yet the idea of a society undertaking an individual, and indeed individuating, act is rather strange, since society is more than the sum of its individual members and learning is always individual.

(Jarvis in Holford *et al*, 1998:59)

Chapter III of this thesis demonstrated that, as evidence of this 'new age', a predominant discourse in lifelong learning was that of *globalization* and the need for *change*. It was felt that, in spite of its avowed aims of achieving a cohesive society, lifelong learning policy, in its preoccupation with the perceived desire for greater *flexibility* in order to respond to the wider needs of

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<sup>53</sup> In the literature on Lifelong Learning the two terms *Knowledge* and *Learning* appear to be almost interchangeable. The word-count limitations of this thesis prevent a detailed discussion on this but for the present discussion it may suffice to note that in the notion *Learning* there is a clearer focus on the agent than is present in the notion *Knowledge*. It is only when one adds to Knowledge the notion of a *Knowledge Society* that the focus is re-centred on the agent. ( See Coffield, 1999b: 1; 2000b: 6).

the market, exhibited signs instead of economic determinism. The argument of Chapter III showed that this point of view is shared to various degrees by a number of writers on lifelong learning (Edwards, 1997; Usher *et al*, 1997; Tight, 1998; Coffield, 1999a, 2000b).

Indeed the conceptualisations of lifelong learning referred to in the introduction to this chapter are mirrored in the findings of the UK's Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) research programme entitled 'The Learning Society: knowledge and skills for employment' (Coffield, 2000b) which discerned ten 'models' or 'contrasting ways' in which the term the 'Learning Society' is used. The models are presented as a means of establishing greater clarity in the debate on lifelong learning and the learning society. These findings are illustrated in Table 2.

Both Tight (1998) and Baptiste (1999) consider lifelong learning as a truism, 'Learning is as integral an aspect of living as breathing. People are lifelong learners whether they wish to or not' (Baptiste, *op cit.*:95). Thus, fundamental questions are raised as to the evidence for the very existence of a lifelong learning movement as such. Likewise, if indeed it is accepted that people learn just as they breathe then a further question is raised as to how exactly government, and more specifically government in its formulation of policy, can have any useful role in lifelong learning: after all one can *oblige* people (by law) to attend school but one cannot necessarily *oblige* them to learn. Coffield (1997) argues against conceptualisations of lifelong learning which frame it in

## **Ten Models of a Learning Society**<sup>54</sup>

**Skills Growth:** Where the aim of improved labour skills is seen as being decisive in achieving economic competitiveness.

**Structural Change:** Where lifelong learning acts as a catalyst in bringing about structural change.

**Social Control:** Where societal issues such as the contrasting interests of employers and employees and the socially included and excluded are concealed.

**Centrality of Learning:** Where an attempt is made at the development of a theory or theories of learning and the term 'Learning' itself is clearly defined.

**Social Learning:** Where the notion of collaboration is seen to be just as important as competition, in other words where attention is moved from the development of individual skills to the relationships formed between individuals and institutions.

**Personal development:** Where greater participation in all forms of learning is fostered.

**Self-evaluation:** Where the concept is valued as an evaluative tool.

**A Learning Market:** Where learning provision is likened to the provision of goods and services in the marketplace.

**A Reformed Education System:** Where it is felt that increasing reform is necessary in the education system.

**Local Learning Societies:** Where provision and participation in opportunities for lifelong learning are felt to be determined by regional or local characteristics.

### **TABLE 2**

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<sup>54</sup> Adapted from Coffield, 2000b: 7-27.

a compulsory/post-compulsory dichotomy and proposes instead a more 'inclusive' view of lifelong learning, which he terms '*post partum*' i.e. from the cradle to the grave:

If a strategy for Lifelong Learning is to be widely supported and to mean spreading opportunities more evenly over the lifecourse and between different groups, it needs to embrace *all* age groups and *all* sections of the population and not just those experiencing difficult transitions from school to work or those in full-time employment whose skills need updating. With an increasingly ageing population and the growth of part-time, temporary and casual jobs, the rationale for Lifelong Learning must move beyond a proper concern for social justice and social cohesion to include the quality of life, health and well-being of all citizens.

(Coffield, *op cit.*:13)

However, other researchers have sought to demonstrate that readings of lifelong learning which view it as pertaining essentially to adult learning and post-compulsory education are no longer valid, not necessarily because such readings betray evidence of the compulsory/post-compulsory dichotomy alluded to by Coffield, but rather that to, some extent, current findings appear to indicate that in certain cases lifelong learning itself can be seen to be increasingly 'compulsory':

recent years have seen a quiet explosion in compulsory education and training for adults .... Without anyone much noticing, a great deal of professional development and skills updating is carried out not because anyone wants to learn or is ready to learn, but because they are required to learn. Contract compliance, regulatory frameworks and statutory requirements are three of the main culprits.

(Field, cited in Coffield, 2000b:18)

Holden (1999) also shares this point of view but Tight (1998) goes even further by suggesting that lifelong learning is increasingly presented in a rhetoric which sees it either as in some way an appendix to work or indeed as constituting a 'new form of work in its own right':

The 'front-end' model which saw childhood as being about education, and adulthood as being about work, is being replaced. While learning in adult life can rarely be full-time, because of the requirement to work, it is, nevertheless, becoming compulsory, and the simplest way of making it compulsory is to embed it within work.

(*ibid.*:262)

Moreover, other writers in lifelong learning, notably the Director of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), suggest that an element of compulsion (*propulsion* is the term used) in lifelong learning may be in the interests of some members of the community if social exclusion is to be reduced (Coffield, 2000b:17). This is reflected also in a recent report by the Social Exclusion Unit where the UK Prime Minister states that

The best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience.

But every year some 161,000 young people between 16 and 18 are not involved in any education, training or employment. For the majority these are wasted and frustrating years that lead, inexorably, to lower pay and worse job prospects in later life ....

A few decades ago only a minority stayed in education until 18 or 21. But as we move into an economy based more on knowledge, there will be ever fewer unskilled jobs. For this

generation, and for young people in the future, staying at school or in training until 18 is no longer a luxury. It is becoming a necessity.

(Social Exclusion Unit, 1999:6)

One of the report's recommendations is that, since

the variety of learning routes for 16-18s carried with it a lack of a clear unifying theme, and resulted in a strongly perceived status for different routes,<sup>55</sup>

(*ibid.*:67)

it felt the need for the establishment of a new 'graduation certificate' which is described as:

a common objective obtainable by all young people, which encourages participation in learning beyond 16 and achievement to at least Level 2 standard. It would need to be flexible enough to recognise different styles and levels of learning, but credible to young people, 19-plus learning providers and employers as recognition for what has been achieved.

(*ibid.*:67)

Lifelong learning is thus seen as being synonymous with having 'a good education' and having 'a good education' is itself perceived as being related to the search for certification.

Ball *et al*, in their study of post-16 education markets in South West London emphasise that policy documents (and notably DfEE, 1998) have a tendency to presuppose a wide homogeneity among learners in terms of their cultural,

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<sup>55</sup> Here, the report refers specifically to the academic/vocational divide. In chapter Five of the report we read: 'The Unit found plenty of evidence in its consultations of young people who did not see the relevance of academic learning to their future lives. Many believed qualifications were unimportant either because they would not need them to succeed, in their terms, or because they did not believe they would succeed anyway' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999:39).

economic and social status, neglecting issues related to the primary habitus of the learners themselves (see Chapter IV). In their findings they conclude that

The political and educational emphases on credentialising have a powerful impact on the thinking of many of our young people [*i.e.* in the sample studied],

(Ball *et al*, in Coffield, 2000b:40)

or, in the words of one of their interviewees:

If you haven't got an education, it isn't very good because there aren't many jobs around. So you need to stay in education.

(*ibid.*:39-40)

The findings lead the researchers to conclude that, despite the inclusive rhetoric of policy documents on lifelong learning, all the claims made would appear, at least in the sample that they studied, to be as none:

Neither the 'hidden hand' of market order nor the vague exhortations of policy texts, the main constituents of *The Learning Society*, appear to understand or appreciate the risks, fears or desires of youth. Neither the rational economism of this learning society nor the vague, abstract, desocialised figures conjured up in policy texts bear much resemblance to the complex, struggling, diverse and uncertain young people in our study and the lives they are leading. They are, in a very real sense, 'worlds apart'.

(*ibid.*:63-64)

This outcomes-based conceptualisation of lifelong learning is to be found also in the study of the continuing education of health service employees within

the British National Health Service, carried out by Hewison *et al.* This research team concluded that, for the learners in their study:

For individuals, in terms of motivations, continuing education seemed to be less to do with updating and developing work-related studies, and more to do with gaining academic credit .... They did not explicitly express a desire to do their jobs better. In this sense, they did not see their participation as an investment in their productive capacity; they simply wanted a qualification.

(Hewison *et al.*, in Coffield, 2000b:191-192)

Indeed their research shows that, for many of the sample studied, lifelong learning was perceived as more of a threat than a promise (*ibid.*:193) in that the terms of provision of learning were felt to be detrimental, *e.g.* only 42% of the sample reacted positively to the effects their learning was having on their family and home lives. Moreover, their analysis of motivations for participation in learning showed evidence of what could be called a 'carrot and stick' approach (McGregor's Theory X: see Chapter III):

While the stick would operate from behind, would be perceived in a negative light and would act as a *push* to encourage participation, the carrot would be held in front (the future), would be perceived positively (for example as an investment) and would thus act as a *pull* to participation.

(*ibid.*:183)

Hewison *et al.* show that the adults in their study engaged in learning opportunities not because they saw it as an investment, producing possible returns directly to them in the form of increased earnings, but, rather, because their take-up of the learning opportunity provision may be seen to represent more the signs of what has been called a 'screening device' (Woodhall in

Halsey *et al*, 1997:222) than as an investment in their human capital (see Chapter V). Thus, the claims made as evidence for the need for national policies on lifelong learning whereby

Our vision of the Learning Age is to build a new culture of learning and aspiration which will underpin national competitiveness and personal prosperity, encourage creativity and innovation and help build a more cohesive society. We want everyone to benefit from the opportunities that learning brings both in personal growth and the enrichment of communities

(DfEE, 1999:13)

and other economically deterministic readings of lifelong learning which are founded on the assumption that lifelong learning leads to higher productivity and a more competitive economy (European Commission, 1996; DfEE, 1998; UNESCO, 1999a, b) are misleading in premising their arguments on the idea that take-up of learning opportunities can be equated with investment in human capital:

choices with respect to participation in learning opportunities may be rational, without conforming to the preferences presumed in human capital theory. It is recognition of this simple point that, at least in part, explains well documented reluctance to take up opportunities (as, for instance, in the case of Youth Training). More generally there is no reason to expect a simple consensus over the implications of education and training programmes: opportunities provided by the state or by employers may well not be construed as such by potential trainees or employees, for example.

(Rees *et al*, 1997:18)

This chapter has thus far demonstrated that the concept of the Learning Society is, like its progeny, lifelong learning and the learning organisation,<sup>56</sup> sketched and interpreted in manifold ways (*e.g.* Jarvis, in Holford *et al*, 1998; Coffield, 2000b). However, the predominance of economically deterministic readings of lifelong learning has led some researchers to suggest that lifelong learning:

is really manpower planning with an added twist, the requirement of continuous retraining brought on, apparently, by the 'imperatives' of the new order technology, the information revolution, globalization and demographic shifts,

(Baptiste, 1999:95)

or, as Field (drawing on the work of Boshier, in Holford *et al*, 1998) puts it, the criticism is that 'lifelong learning is little but 'human resource development (HRD) in drag' ', (Field, 2000a:251). Despite these claims, it would be misleading for the researcher merely to thereby dismiss any further reading of lifelong learning as such. The claims made for lifelong learning outlined in the early part of this chapter (the Treasure Within) and avowed attempts in Government policy to achieve a more cohesive society precisely through policy on lifelong learning can be seen as an endeavour to clothe lifelong learning in a more humanistic reading - the 'social safety net' which was alluded to in the introduction to this chapter.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Tight describes these three concepts as a 'trinity' (Tight, 1998:254).

<sup>57</sup> In this connection see Coffield, 2000a, for his comments on the positive features of government policy outlined in the White Paper, *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning* (DfEE, 1999).

However, given the ambiguities inherent in the terminology and the pluralistic nature of the various manifestations of lifelong learning, the question is thus raised as to how precisely the state, in its formulation of policy, can be considered as having any practical role to play in the process of learning throughout life. This is now the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

#### VI. 2. (i) Lifelong Learning and Modernity's 'Radical Doubt'.

This chapter has demonstrated so far that the rhetoric of lifelong learning, although setting objectives for itself which encompass values which go far beyond economic competitiveness and the values of the marketplace to embrace the very expression of the human soul and appeal to values which are democratic and inclusive (DfEE, 1998), nevertheless, is set in foundations which merely *presume* the existence of a theory of change and of a theory of learning (Coffield, 2000b). It is felt, however, that such rhetoric, in practice, fails to expound and elaborate any recognisably valid theory of change and/or of learning.

Chapter III of this thesis considered the themes of globalization and change which were seen to be omnipresent in lifelong learning discourse. The argument of this chapter now turns to a consideration of the role of the nation state in formulations of policy. The discussion first develops the themes outlined by Giddens in his vision of 'modernity' as a backdrop to a wider discussion on how the rhetoric of lifelong learning fits with 'modernist' notions of the nation state, before moving on to discuss the validity or

otherwise within such a 'modernist' framework of any *policy* as such on lifelong learning.

For Giddens, what differentiates the modernity of the 'runaway world' from previous conditions is the pace, scope and profoundness inherent in social change. The dynamism of this change is to be found in three elements:

- Separation of time and space,
- Disembedding of social institutions, and
- Reflexivity.

(Giddens, in Cassell, 1993: 290)

The phenomenon of space-time 'distanciation' outlined by Giddens means, in more simple terms, that the *when* and *where* of social conduct is no longer inherently connected to *place*. Harvey's concept of 'time-space compression' goes further than Giddens by insisting that not only has time separated from space but this separation has brought about a 'shrinking' in the conceptualisation of the world:

I use the word 'compression' because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us.

(Harvey, 1990:240)

Although Harvey's notion of 'time-space compression' more aptly underscores the speed with which this compression is realised than is apparent in Giddens's term, this 'distanciation' is seen by Giddens as giving rise to an uprooting of social institutions - 'the 'lifting-out' of social relations

from local contexts and their rearticulation across indefinite tracts of time-space' (Giddens, in Cassell, 1993:291). Giddens postulates that 'The sociologist's 'society', applied to the period of modernity at any rate, is a nation-state' (*ibid.*: 289) and the nation-state is seen not so much as *structure* but rather as a 'reflexive' organisation:

Who says modernity says not just organisations, but organisation - the regularised control of social relations across indefinite time-space distances.

(*ibid.*: 289)

The brave new world this new order has brought into being means that knowledge moves from being considered as 'incidental' to social institutions to the point where knowledge *inheres* within them. Moreover, the 'reflexivity' of Giddens's 'runaway world' refers not to 'the reflexive monitoring of action intrinsic to all human activity', rather this reflexivity concerns the notion that social activity is subject to 'chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge' (*ibid.*:293). Further

the reflexivity of modernity actually undermines the certainty of knowledge, even in the core domains of natural science .... The integral relation between modernity and radical doubt is an issue which once exposed to view, is not only disturbing to philosophers but is *existentially troubling* for ordinary individuals.

(*ibid.*:294)

It is felt that policy in lifelong learning, framed as a crucial element in the acquisition of the 'new' knowledge necessary for survival in the new world order (European Commission, 1996; DfEE, 1998; 1999; UNESCO, 1999a;

1999b) positions itself within the discourse of necessary 'chronic revision' outlined by Giddens. Thus, one is led to postulate lifelong learning as the response of modernity (in Giddens's sense of the term) to the new 'radical doubt' outlined by Giddens.<sup>58</sup>

However, while it may be sustained, on the one hand, that lifelong learning policy can be considered as playing an active role in the reflexivity required by modernity (Giddens, *op cit.*:290), on the other hand, the 'flexible specialization' discussed in Chapter III may itself also be seen to represent a response mechanism to modernity's 'radical doubt'. Hence, in discourses where policy on lifelong learning is situated such that

It [lifelong learning] can and must nurture a love for learning. This will ensure the means by which our economy can make a successful transition from the industries and services of the past, to the knowledge and information economy of the future. It also contributes to sustaining a civilised and cohesive society, in which people develop as active citizens and in which generational disadvantage can be overcome,

(DfEE, 1999:3)

what may then be regarded as both 'disturbing' and 'troubling' is the extent to which lifelong learning policy, in such a climate of 'reflexivity', feeds more into the mechanisms of flexible specialization. The question, therefore, is raised as to how feasible it is for lifelong learning policy to achieve its avowed

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<sup>58</sup> There are those, however, who consider that the lifelong learning 'agenda' is about something other than learning throughout life. For Coffield (1999a), for example, lifelong learning is a mechanism of social control. See also Baptiste (*op cit.*) and Wilson (1999). This will be the focus of discussion in the final part of this chapter.

aims of a more 'cohesive' society or develop in individuals a wider grasp of 'citizenship'.

VI. 2. (ii) 'Davos Man' (*sic*).<sup>59</sup>

It has been demonstrated throughout this thesis that the rhetoric of lifelong learning frequently calls for the need for flexibility on the part of society's members as an appropriate response to 'meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (DfEE, 1999:12).<sup>60</sup> Sennett (1998) prefaces his discussion on the notion of flexibility by noting that in its semantic origins the word referred to the movement which a tree makes in the wind, *i.e.* the bending of its branches and their recovery to their original position. He goes on to suggest, however, that the interest in the concept today is not so much on the individual's ability to recover in times of stress and change but is centred rather on 'the forces bending people' (*ibid.*:46).

The argument of this chapter leads to the affirmation that the 'emptying of space and time', and the 'disembedding' of social institutions (Giddens, *op cit.*:291) in the modernity project, evoke questions of power and control in that these mechanisms both reposition and at the same time refashion the locus of power:

These, then, are the forces bending people to change:  
reinvention of bureaucracy, flexible specialization of  
production, concentration without specialization. In the revolt

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<sup>59</sup> Sennett (1998:61) uses the term to indicate the *flexible* man brought into being by the requirements of capital. He developed the term after having attended a meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

<sup>60</sup> 'Adaptability' is the term sometimes preferred, *cf.* DfEE, 1999.

against routine, the appearance of new freedom is deceptive. Time in institutions and for individuals has been unchained from the iron cage of the past, but subjected to new, top-down controls and surveillance. The time of flexibility is the time of a new power. Flexibility begets disorder, but not freedom from restraint.

(Sennett, *op cit.*:59)

Thus, any appeal to the need for a policy on lifelong learning based on the grounds of the perceived necessity of increasing flexibility, therefore, poses serious questions concerning the issues of power and control. For Sennett

The system of power which lurks in modern forms of flexibility consists of three elements: discontinuous reinvention of institutions; flexible specialization of production; and concentration of without centralization of power.

(Sennett, 1998: 47)<sup>61</sup>

Wilson (1999), too, considers that the fundamental issues in lifelong learning concern power and control and the exercise of individual freedom. Furthermore, he affirms that such issues, by their very nature, should evoke serious ethical consideration on the part of researchers and other professionals within the field of lifelong learning since

the rhetoric of lifelong learning and the learning society is really a disguise for the construction and exercise of power, power that sustains relations of domination and maintains systems of exclusion. Adult educators in creating dependency through the exercise of knowledge-power regimes contribute directly to forming cultural identities that support these dominant relations of power, power that operates in favor of those already advantaged. In a multinational, post-Fordist economy, adult educators' collusion in helping to produce

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<sup>61</sup> Sennett's formulation of the 'discontinuous reinvention of institutions' (Sennett, 1998:47) can thus be seen to mirror Giddens's concept of 'disembedding', referred to earlier in this chapter.

lifelong learning, learning societies, and learning organization by contributing to producing adults as 'flexible', 'adaptable', and 'docile' learners not only directly disempowers adult learners but may also hasten their own dependency and enthrallment to [the] very powers they now enthusiastically serve.

(Wilson, 1999:92)

Chapter III of this thesis contrasted the characteristics of Fordism with those of Post-Fordism and in its discussion introduced questions concerning the use of power (Chapter III.3.(ii)). Specifically, Garrahan and Stewart (1992) raised questions as to the use of power in one of the processes of the new flexibility, *viz.* teamwork. Sennett considers the sports metaphor totally inappropriate in that he considers that in the 'flexible workplace' the 'team' players simply 'make up the rules as they go along' (*op cit.*:110). It would be misguided, however, to conclude from this that in teamwork the individual is empowered such that the exercise of authority moves from an arena that is top-down to one that is bottom-up. The issue at stake is that the exercise of authority is *unseen* and

power without authority permits leaders of a team to dominate employees by denying legitimacy to employees' needs and desires ... Fictions of teamwork, because of their very superficiality of content and focus on the immediate moment, their avoidance of resistance and deflection of confrontation, are thus useful in the exercise of domination.

(Sennett, *op cit.*:115)

The evidence provided earlier in this chapter (VI.1.(iii)) and this discussion on the exercise of power seen through the parallel with teamwork, lead us now to consider whether the ambiguities inherent in lifelong learning, referred to

earlier, may lead to the conclusion that the rhetoric of lifelong learning underlines the issue of the 'construction and exercise of power' by the state, raised by Wilson, where the role of the state as policy-maker in Giddens's modernity becomes more that of a facilitator of possibilities, *i.e.* the politics of retreat referred to in Chapter II of this thesis is a withdrawal by the state from the commitment to the allocation of resources but not from asserting control.

Indeed, chapters II, III and V had outlined the importance given to the notion of lifelong learning as being a question of individual responsibility where the role of government as policy-maker is one of *facilitator* and the role of policy itself is one of *empowering* the individual. Thus, while, the UK government may claim that lifelong learning policy is central to their welfare reform (DfEE, 1998), lifelong learning policy, in its very insistence on individual responsibility, can be seen to be 'Janus-faced' (Preston, 1999:562) in that it is shown to represent at the same time both a societal aspiration and an economic necessity:

Unlike most goals that were characteristic of welfarism, lifelong learning is typical of the new policy objectives in requiring action by civil society rather than by agencies of the state.

(Field, 2000a:249)

From the title of Sennett's book, one may infer that for 'Davos man' 'the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism' is a 'corrosion of character' (Sennett,1998). Thus the question is raised as to what extent it may be considered valid to portray policy as aspiration.

## VI. 2. (iii) Governance and Policy as Aspiration.

The dilemma for any policy maker on lifelong learning is summed up by

Jarvis:

the apparent current endeavours to 'create' a learning society seem to centre round efforts to control more learning opportunities through institutionalising them in a redefined educational institution - learning! For as the learning society is a metaphor, and some of its exponents are introducing a new educational discourse focused on learning - they are trying to make a private phenomenon public.

(Jarvis in Holford *et al*, 1998:65)

Learning focuses clearly on the individual (what Jarvis meant by 'a private phenomenon') and the root of this 'dilemma' focuses on the validity or otherwise of a policy on learning, *i.e.* just how can policy makers compel individuals to *learn*?

Field (2000a), having premised his arguments on the idea that lifelong learning 'has in several European nations become a convenient political shorthand for the modernizing of education and training systems' (*ibid.*:250), describes lifelong learning as an 'amorphous policy goal, delivery of which lies beyond government's capacities' (*ibid.*:252). In this he echoes Jarvis' point that learning is a 'private' phenomenon. Nevertheless, for the UK government:

Learning is essential to a strong economy and an inclusive society. In offering a way out of dependency and low expectation, it lies at the heart of the Government's welfare reform programme.

(DfEE, 1998:11)

Lifelong learning is thus associated with other aspects of welfare like health, pensions and so on.

Holden, however, rejects such a claim, asserting that

The government's emphasis on education and training is not so much an alternative to the low-wage, flexible labour market, but a supplement which imposes the discipline of the market not only more forcefully onto the unemployed, but earlier and earlier into the class-room.

(Holden, 1999:537)

He qualifies his argument with reference to Offe (1984) and Offe's insistence on the inherent contradictions in policy on welfare within capitalist societies between the search for profitability, on the one hand, and human needs on the other. Holden's point is that, for him, the evidence seems to suggest that lifelong learning relates more to a search for profitability than anything else.

However, the dilemma for lifelong learning policy-makers goes beyond the question of how it is reasonable to attempt to make a 'private phenomenon public'. The report of the Social Exclusion Unit into young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who are unemployed and not undertaking any form of education or training concluded that

Research commissioned for this study suggests that the two main sets of factors associated with non-participation at 16-18 are:

- educational underachievement and educational disaffection; and

- family disadvantage and poverty.

(Social Exclusion Unit, 1999:24)<sup>62</sup>

However, Ball *et al* (2000) in their research findings concerning provision of post- compulsory learning, note that

all our providers are driven by reason of expediency, by the need to recruit in general terms, and the need to recruit 'good' students who will maintain, if not enhance, the institution's reputation and market position. However, some providers have to manage with 'less desirable' school leavers ....The links between class, education and work are significantly reworked - as they were at other moments of rapid economic restructuring - but not dissolved. They are reassembled differently, perhaps more loosely ...there is the emergence of a more fuzzy, more complex hierarchy with new markers of differentiation.

(Ball *et al*, in Coffield, 2000b: 57-8)

From this one is led to suggest that perhaps the 'best' policy on lifelong learning would be one which sought to eradicate poverty and disadvantage and improve educational achievement, thereby improving participation , *i.e.* to go wider than learning, to address structural issues (relating to Bourdieu's analysis earlier).

The fact that the evidence suggests that the rhetoric of lifelong learning leans more heavily on the side of economic determinism than on any all-encompassing theory of learning of the type described in VI.1(ii) (above), in spite of more recent government documents which indicate heterogeneity on the part of learners, in terms of their social capital and social position (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) allows for the formulation in this thesis of the sixth

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<sup>62</sup> Lifelong learning may again be seen in Bourdieuan terms as an 'improbable practice' (Chapter IV).

conceptualisation of lifelong learning referred to in the introduction of this chapter, *viz.* as a mechanism of *governance apologetics*. The term 'governance' is borrowed from Rhodes (1996) and is preferred to 'government' in that it is felt to take a more satisfactory account of the types of 'partnerships' taking place today at the level of service provision. Lifelong learning, then, can be seen as a form of apologia in that, while recognising the inequalities in society and their role in non-participation in learning, by adopting a Darwinian approach (with attention paid more to 'steering' than 'rowing', (Field, 2000a:255) ), the rhetoric of lifelong learning is seen to both recognise, or at least, refer to the risks of increasing exclusion in society and fails at the same time to attempt to grapple with the underlying causes (Holden, 1999; Coffield, 2000b; Field, 2000a). The rhetoric of lifelong learning thus becomes a debate over *means* rather than one over the *ends* of policy (Griffin, 1999a:329).

### VI. 3. Conclusion.

This chapter argues that lifelong learning policy is mediated more as aspiration (and in this respect can be seen more to represent an expressed *strategy* than *policy* (Greer and Hoggett, 1999) ) with the role of the state reduced to that of a facilitator of possibilities. Lifelong learning exhibits features of what Bourdieu (1998) refers to as 'involution' (a 'politics of retreat', Chapter II.1.) on the part of the state. This is a condition which some writers feel is, in any case, inherent in the Post-Fordist or post-welfare state:

the strategic role of post-welfare states is one of managing markets, choice and autonomy, and they do not formulate policies in relation to lifelong learning in the way some of the

adult participation models, and many other lifelong learning discourses seem to suggest. The reason why they do not is not only because of the impossibility of formulating learning as an object of public policy, but because the political choice is not to do so. The strategy of governments is to create the conditions in which people, families, communities and organizations are most likely to learn for themselves, thus obviating the need for education policy in the traditional sense. This is a characteristic function of governments in post-welfare conditions.

(Griffin, 1999b:439-440)

The 'fuzziness' of distinctions in the field of lifelong learning - education/learning, knowledge/skill, policy/strategy etc. - is matched by a similar lack of clarity in the writing on the 'Learning Society'. In this 'new age', disadvantage, which, as has been seen, is shown by the UK government's own researchers to be one of the principal causes of non-participation in learning, is to be redefined as 'capability failure' (Giddens, 2000:88).<sup>63</sup>

However, this 'fuzziness' in the era of 'modernity' should not be allowed to overshadow the underlying issue as outlined by Sennett:

There is a mainland of power in the archipelago of flexible power; someone on the mainland decides that "Barbados" can do the jobs once done on "Trinidad" and "Guadeloupe"; "Barbados" seldom chooses to add its own burdens.

(Sennett, 1998:55)

The locus and use of power demands that research and the debate on lifelong

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<sup>63</sup> Giddens draws here on the work of Sen (1992).

learning be enlarged to cover the professionals involved in this process (Wilson, 1999) and to include the wider issues of the role of government itself in the development and formulation of policy (Griffin, 1999a, b):

Promoting lifelong learning does not simply require new government measures, but rather a new approach to government. This requires the development of a broad range of new capabilities not only on the part of the wider population 'out there', but also of policy makers and providers. It also requires a new concept of government that is rooted in a recognition of interdependence and interrelationships between state (and its different arms), market and civil society, where values are made explicit and contested openly and widely through democratic processes across an expanded public space.

(Field, 2000a)

Thus, this chapter has shown that the discourse of lifelong learning in policy documents is grounded in theories of economic determinism such that its rhetoric can be seen as a mechanism of flexible specialization. The discourse of lifelong learning is mediated as a search for profitability rather than one of satisfying human needs. Within a postmodern analysis, the discourse of lifelong learning both repositions and refashions the locus of power within society. Its rhetoric is one of *means* rather than *ends*.

Further, this chapter has summarised the conceptualisations of lifelong learning developed throughout this thesis. These are seen to emanate from the uniqueness of contemporaneity and contain readings of lifelong learning where it is seen as:

- (1) an issue of individual responsibility,
- (2) an economic imperative,

- (3) a tool in the management of change,
- (4) a means of consensus building,
- (5) a social 'safety net', and
- (6) a mechanism of what may be called governance apologetics.

The first three of these conceptualisations are seen to be mutually supportive. However, this chapter has shown the tensions that exist between these and the fourth and fifth conceptualisations. This chapter has developed the final conceptualisation as a means of understanding the origins of these tensions.

Together these reflect the conceptual breadth - or looseness - of the notion of lifelong learning, which, it has been suggested here, is a problem rather than a benefit. When this is combined with the neglect, even, of clarification of the notion of learning, this chapter and thesis have suggested that, under the mantle of an all-embracing terminology, the discourses of lifelong learning enable governments to advocate it forcefully whilst doing little else to ensure its achievement in a rounded, all-embracing way. In this respect lifelong learning is socially reproductive.

## Chapter VII

### CONCLUSION

#### VII. 1. Summary and Conclusion.

The inspiration for the title given to this study lay in the fact that it was felt that much of current research undertaken in the field of lifelong learning fails sufficiently to question the basic fundamental tenets of official discourse within lifelong learning. However, an increasing number of writers in the field of lifelong learning have begun to criticise the validity of the claims made on lifelong learning and the rhetoric in which it is discoursed (Coffield, 1997;1999b;2000b; Butler, in Holford *et al*, 1998; Baptiste, 1999; Preston, 1999; Wilson,1999; Wain, 2000; Aspin and Chapman, 2000; Bagnall,2000; Field,2000a). Indeed a similar impetus is apparent in the UK's Economic and Social Research Council's programme of research into the learning society (Coffield, 2000b) and for this reason it can also be seen as an attempt at reaching an understanding of the processes at work within lifelong learning:

the political and educational discourse surrounding a learning society and lifelong learning was shot through not only by extreme conceptual vagueness but also by 'factual' assumptions and assertions which were unsupported by any hard evidence .... For too long lifelong learning has remained an evidence-free zone, under-researched, under-theorised, unencumbered by doubt and unmoved by criticism.

*(ibid.:3-4)*

The originality of this thesis is that, by examining lifelong learning through the differing lenses of human capital theory, cultural capital theory, postmodernism, policy analysis, and government legitimation, this study has been able to show that:

- the rhetoric of lifelong learning may be seen as a further manifestation of the marketization of education;
- change and globalization are dominant discourses within the rhetoric of lifelong learning and as such are seen to exhibit aspects of postmodernity;
- the rhetoric of policy documents on lifelong learning is premised on the notion of human capital;
- these premises preclude other readings of lifelong learning and place the aims of lifelong learning as a policy of social cohesion beyond reach;
- such a discourse under-represents or neglects the issues of access to and uptake of lifelong learning.

The thesis concludes that the lack of clarity in the rhetoric in lifelong learning allows for lifelong learning to be mediated more as aspiration and political sophistry represented as strategy rather than as policy. Further, much of the discussion of policy within lifelong learning and, indeed the policy itself, is conducted at the level of rhetoric rather than reality and this rhetoric is seen to exhibit the characteristics of a *politics of retreat* on the part of the state. Moreover, this rhetoric is unhelpful in understanding the central issues of the locus and use of power and the role of government in the development and

formulation of policy in the post-welfare era. In summary, then, this thesis concludes that lifelong learning in official documents is discoursed as:

1. an issue of *individual responsibility*,
2. an *economic imperative*,
3. a tool in the *management of change*,
4. a means of *consensus building*,
5. a *social 'safety net'*, and
6. a mechanism of what may be called *governance apologetics*.

This analysis of the rhetoric of lifelong learning has thus allowed for the research questions outlined in chapter I of this thesis to be answered. It has shown that:

- (1) The rhetoric of lifelong learning may be seen as a further manifestation of the marketization and commodification of education in which:

- the ideological framework of lifelong learning policy is seen to shift the burden of responsibility from the state to the individual;
- its rhetoric, despite its often optimistic aspirations, neglects the significant inequalities inherent in a society founded on relations of capital;

- the discourse of lifelong learning in official documents is characterised by vagueness and lack of clarity;
- learning is frequently reduced to the formation of skills considered necessary for the needs of the market;
- learning is mediated as a search for employability, and
- the rhetoric of lifelong learning in policy documents can thus be seen as a mechanism of flexible specialization.

(2) Lifelong learning is discoursed in policy documents as an economic imperative grounded on the notion of the uniqueness of contemporaneity and as such:

- the rhetoric of lifelong learning is seen to manifest aspects of postmodernity;
- lifelong learning is discoursed in narrow, instrumentalist terms as a response to change, internationalization and the tendencies of globalization, and
- the discourse of lifelong learning as an economic imperative precludes other, more humanistic readings.

(3) The issues of access to and uptake of lifelong learning are discoursed within a framework of postmodernism and are, *de facto*, **exclusive** and reproductive. Moreover:

- research presented shows a correlation between performance in compulsory education and participation or otherwise in lifelong learning;
- despite the optimistic and *inclusive* aspirations of its rhetoric, the narrow, economic terms of the discourse of lifelong learning is seen as a manifestation of a move away from concerns of equity;
- the lens of Bourdieu's theory of cultural production allows for the rhetoric of lifelong learning to take into account the inequalities inherent in society such that the description of reality obtained is more accurate given that the embrace is wider and fuller than is possible in analyses founded on human capital theory alone, and
- lifelong learning is thus seen to serve as a mechanism of *reproduction* in society.

(4) Lifelong learning in policy documents is premised on the notion of the individual as human capital and as such this discourse:

- is seen to originate in a theory of social action which fails to take into account identities of the individual as operating in relation with other social forces, institutions and contexts;

- is a further manifestation of the economic determinism of the rhetoric of lifelong learning;
- demonstrates the *exclusive* nature of the rhetoric of lifelong learning, and
- neglects the notion of equality in society and of engagement in the democratic process.

(5) The characteristics of the post-welfare state allow for:

- lifelong learning in policy documents to be mediated more as generalized and, in a strict sense, atheoretical or unprincipled, aspiration;
- (within a postmodern analysis) the discourse of lifelong learning to both reposition and refashion the locus of power within society;
- the role of the state in its formulations of lifelong learning policy to be discoursed more as a facilitator of possibilities;
- lifelong learning, within this analysis, to be discoursed more as rhetoric than reality.

## VII. 2. A Critique of the Study.

The word count limitations meant that the scope of this study was tightly fixed. It was felt that to embark on any empirical study in the field would only have served to reinforce the agenda of official discourses on lifelong learning, precisely what this study sought to challenge. The strength of the arguments here lies in the manner in which this thesis has sought to break the mould of much of the literature on lifelong learning by examining its discourse through a range of differing perspectives and how it has thus been able to outline areas of inconsistency between reality and the way in which the discussion of lifelong learning and indeed lifelong learning policy itself is discoursed. It has, therefore, established a greater conceptual clarity in the discussion on lifelong learning. Despite the fact that, as has been indicated, Bourdieu's theory of cultural production, taken to its extremes, can be seen to manifest in the hermetic nature of *habitus* a certain degree of social determinism, the lens of Bourdieu's theory has, nevertheless, shown to be of heuristic value in that it represents an explanatory potential which is overlooked in readings of lifelong learning premised on human capital theory alone, *i.e.* the lens of Bourdieu's theory draws attention to the fact that learners do not approach lifelong learning on an equal footing.

The validity of other perspectives on the issue is, nevertheless, not in question. The dominant discourse in official documents on lifelong learning of learning as an individual responsibility needs further analysis. It would have been instructive in this respect to have been able to analyse the rhetoric of

lifelong learning through other lenses, for example, the discussion of the discourses of flexibility could have benefited from an analysis of the issue through human developmental and psychological perspectives. Moreover, the issue of the locus and use of power referred to in the final part of this study could have been elaborated through the lens of Foucault which would have allowed the study to pursue this discussion on the role of the professionals involved in lifelong learning and indeed on the role of the providers themselves. Also the issue of government legitimation was limited to the rhetoric of official documents from Europe and the United Kingdom and could have benefited from a wider global focus which took into account the perspective of international co-operation and issues of development. The inferences to be made from this study are thus limited to the discussion of lifelong learning within the United Kingdom and the position it occupies within the European Union.

### VII. 3. Implications of this Thesis.

For all involved in the discussion on lifelong learning, greater conceptual clarity is required. The implications to be drawn from this thesis for policy makers are that they should recognise more fully that some of the declared goals of lifelong learning policy (for example, greater social cohesion, strengthening the family, fostering a sense of identity or sustaining culture) can only be achieved when accompanied by measures aimed precisely at combating the social, cultural and economic inequalities inherent in society. Moreover, governments have to recognise the lack of consistency in

portraying lifelong learning policy *alone* as being able to achieve such goals or to suggest that lifelong learning policy can achieve these ends without, at the same time, introducing measures aimed precisely at correcting the imbalances in equality inherent in society. Greater conceptual clarity implies for policy makers, however, greater accountability. It could be argued that, by discoursing lifelong learning at the level of rhetoric, governments deliberately avoid this issue.

Researchers in lifelong learning, too, should be aware that without first establishing a clear theoretical basis for the validity of their claims in the discussion on lifelong learning, they may be at risk of reinforcing an agenda which views lifelong learning from purely instrumentalist, economic perspectives and thus their research may in fact serve as an obstacle in the development and establishment of potentially more holistic and humanistic readings of lifelong learning.

Through its approach, this thesis has exposed the ideology at work in the rhetoric of lifelong learning. This study has thus succeeded in raising a number of serious implications both for policy makers and for researchers:

- The shift of responsibility from the state towards the individual and capital's requirements of *flexibility* and *employability* on the part of labour ignore issues of inequality in society and beg serious questions concerning the actual freedom of the individual and engagement with the

democratic process. The discourse of lifelong learning must address these issues if lifelong learning, and indeed the professionals within it, are not to be accused of reinforcing such an agenda.

- The validity, *per se*, of policy documents expressed merely in terms of aspiration, without any commitment of adequate spending, resources and vision or principles to address the issues that policy evokes, has to be questioned.
  
- The commodification and marketization rhetoric of lifelong learning has to be countered with a more reinvigorating discussion on education. Such a discussion could then be seen to be taking into account more fully the precise nature of the relationship between policy, education, economics and democratic engagement.

#### VII. 4. Closing Remarks.

Finally, this study on the rhetoric of lifelong learning has been undertaken not only from the perspective of achieving a greater conceptual clarity in the discussion on lifelong learning but also as an exercise by the author in lifelong learning itself. The experience has been stimulating and exciting, much as the

poem which, to a great extent, was the impetus for the research had anticipated:

This great purple butterfly,  
In the prison of my hands,  
Has a learning in his eye  
Not a poor fool understands.

(Yeats, 1990:219)<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> From 'Another Song of a Fool', written 1918 and published in 'The Wild Swans at Coole', 1919.

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## APPENDIX

### Socio-Economic Grades<sup>1</sup>

#### Grade 'A' Households

The upper middle class. About 3% of total informants. The head of this household is a successful business or professional person or has considerable private means.

#### Grade 'B' Households

About 10% of total informants. The middle class. Quite senior people but not at the top of their profession or business. They have a respectable rather than a rich lifestyle.

#### Grade 'C1' Households

The lower middle class. About 24% of informants. The families of small tradespeople and non-manual workers - what are sometimes referred to as 'white-collar workers'.

#### Grade 'C2' Households

Skilled manual workers and their families.

#### Grade 'D' Households

Mainly semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers. About 25% of informants. It also includes non-earners, e.g. pensioners with supplementary pensions or private means

#### Grade 'E' Households

8% of informants. Pensioners, widows and their families and casual workers and those dependent on social security.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Sargant *et al*, 1997.

