

edited by
peter jarvis

age of

The age of LEARNING

education and the knowledge society

LEARNING

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Preface

Learning has come to the forefront of the educational agenda in many countries of the world – the knowledge society, the learning society, the learning organization and so forth are now all common terms. The terms appear in policy and strategy papers of the European Union and of many countries in and beyond the European community. Traditional views about education appear to be threatened as it becomes a commodity in the learning market. Learning has itself become a contested concept and the discourse about it is being captured by the world of work.

The learning society is one of the products of globalization and knowledge, learning and education are inextricably intertwined with global capitalism. Education is regarded as a servant to global capitalism, enabling transnational companies to function more effectively in the knowledge society. Learning has become a central plank in governmental education policy in many countries and it is being treated as an investment, adding value to human and social capital, resulting in employability and then in work, which makes an even greater contribution to the economy, rather than being treated as a natural human process that results in the development of people as human beings.

The title of the UK government's *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) captures something of this ethos and we have adapted the title for this book, but our adaptation also illustrates that our agenda is different. In this book we have tried to step back a little and to analyse some of the key features of this age in relation to education and learning, such as its social and political processes, and also to question its ethics. We have done so from a variety of different academic positions and from a variety of interests and concerns. In it we present different and even critical perspectives on this era, recognizing, however, that profound changes are taking place as a result of the processes of globalization that are affecting the whole of the educational institution.

The book provides a multi-disciplinary analysis of lifelong learning and the learning society in its broadest sense. It contains five main sections and:

- examines the way that these phenomena have emerged;
- analyses the concepts themselves;
- discusses some of the ways in which the learning society actually functions;

- assesses the implications of the learning society for other sectors of the educational institution;
- reflects on the age of learning.

The issues that we examine are relevant to most societies in the world and this book is written for an international audience, although many of the illustrations we use are taken from the UK, since in many ways it has been at the forefront of these changes. The book has been written for practitioners and students of lifelong learning and the learning society and it is relevant to:

- students of lifelong learning, whether they are teachers or post-graduates, in all branches of education;
- educators in the professions and human resource developers;
- managers and administrators;
- policy makers at both local and national level;
- social scientists interested in the learning society.

The authors are members of the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning in the School of Educational Studies at the University of Surrey. The School is a comparatively large one and has a wide range of interests in post-compulsory education and training. The Centre was established within it as the Lifelong Learning Group in 1996, but was subsequently reconstituted as the Centre in 1998. Its aims are:

- to focus on scholarly research, both theoretical and empirical, national and international in the field of lifelong learning;
- to provide a strong foundation for advanced studies of lifelong learning in the University of Surrey;
- to analyse and advise on developments in policy and practice in lifelong learning in the UK and overseas, and their impact.

Members of the Centre are actively involved in teaching, research and consultancy in the UK and abroad. They also hold positions in professional and other associations involved in lifelong education in the UK, Europe and the United States.

Among the Centre's previous publications are *Towards the Learning City* (Jarvis *et al*, 1997), *Theory and Practice of Learning* (Jarvis, Holford and Griffin, 1998) and *International Perspectives of Lifelong Learning* (Holford, Jarvis and Griffin, 1998). Centre members are also working on a further book on the learning society which will also be published by Kogan Page. The first of these publications emerged from a research project that the Centre undertook in the City of London and currently the Centre is leading a Framework 5 research project of learning governance and citizenship in Europe, under the leadership of John Holford, with partners from the

universities of Barcelona, Helsinki, Leuven and Nijmegen and from the Andragogical Centre in Ljubljana.

Members of the Centre also constitute the main teaching team for the distance learning MSc course offered by the School which has three strands:

- Lifelong Learning;
- Applied Professional Studies in Education and Training;
- Information Technology.

They also supervise doctorate students, both face-to-face and at a distance, in all aspects of lifelong learning.

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PART ONE

THE EMERGENCE OF THE LEARNING SOCIETY

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Chapter 1

The emerging idea

Linda Merricks

This chapter aims to describe the main developments of adult and vocational education in the 20th century and how, in conjunction with this, the linked concepts of the learning society, lifelong learning and the learning age have developed.

During the 20th century there has been growing interest in adult education. A number of different bodies have been involved in the provision of this education and various policy decisions have affected funding and the development of classes. However, throughout the period there have also been constants, one of which has been the tension between vocational and non-vocational education. For example, the 1902 Education Act gave responsibility for adult education to the newly created LEAs, but this was seen very clearly as scientific and technical, or largely vocational education. A year later, the Workers Educational Association (WEA) was founded, aiming to make university education, that is non-vocational education, available to the working classes.

This distinction also underlay many of the conclusions of the *Final Report of the Adult Education Committee*, produced by the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1919, which dominated thinking on adult education provision in Britain for decades. Its overall assumption was that 'adult education' was non-vocational and this was clearly spelt out in the terms of reference, which were 'To consider the provision for, and possibilities of, Adult Education (other than technical and vocational) in Great Britain, and to make recommendations' (Ministry of Reconstruction, 1919, Letter from the Chairman to the Prime Minister: 1). Its conclusions were, not surprisingly, therefore, that adult education should be based on non-vocational subjects. 'The scope of adult education' was, for instance to include, 'citizenship', seen as one of

the most popular aspects of adult courses, but more importantly ‘music and languages’, ‘literature and drama’ and ‘natural science’ (Ministry of Reconstruction, 1919: 169). Technical and vocational subjects, although briefly considered, were excluded.

Technical education, though it must be an integral part of our educational system, is not an alternative to non-vocational education. The latter is a universal need, but whether the former is necessary or not depends upon the character of the employment. Even where technical education was available:

it should be liberalised as far as possible by the inclusion in the curriculum of pure science and of studies which will enable the student to relate his own occupation to the industry of which he is a part, to appreciate the place of that industry in the economic life of the nation and the world, and to interpret the economic life of the community in terms of social values. (Ministry of Reconstruction, 1919: 174–75)

Even the chapter on ‘Technical Education and Humane Studies’ called for ‘the development of opportunities for personal development and for the realisation of a higher standard of citizenship’ through the broadening of vocational training to incorporate ‘the intellectual and spiritual treasures of the race’ (Ministry of Reconstruction, 1919: 153).

Against this ‘liberal and humane’ ideal of learning for learning’s sake stood an equally well-established tradition of working-class self-education for vocational reasons. The four London polytechnics founded in the late 19th century drew heavily on working men and women who sought to improve their position in life through a lifelong commitment to improving their working skills. At the moment Albert Mansbridge founded the WEA, Battersea Polytechnic had 2,513 students at evening classes largely drawn from the poorest areas of South London – and nearly a third of them were women. Nor was it only the polys. By the 1900s both the City & Guilds and the Royal Society of Arts offered nationally recognized qualifications in technical and vocational skills. By 1914 upwards of 22,000 students took City & Guilds examinations. These examinations provided a ladder at different levels through which a working man or woman could ‘rise’ through their trade or profession (see Merricks, 2000).

The extent to which adult education can be split in two illustrates one of the fundamental questions about adult education, and its history. Simply and crudely: what is its purpose? There are many different answers, which are not always mutually exclusive and which tend to reflect changes in the wider economic and cultural society. Two of them reflect the differences described here. Liberal adult education is related to education for citizenship. It is seen primarily as a way of learning how society works and how the individual fits that society. Its benefits tend not, at least immediately, to be economic and are

to both the individual and to the society. In contrast, vocational education, or training as it is usually described, is directly related to economic improvement, seen by the student as primarily for individual gain, although companies and the wider society can see more general benefits. These differences explain the divergent student bodies attracted to the kinds of course offered. Throughout the 20th century, the appeal of vocational education has been great to a large number of students, the majority of whom have been young working people (Merricks, 2000). On the other hand, with some notable exceptions, liberal adult education has appealed generally only to the middle class, to women, and to the elderly (Merricks, 2001).

The differences also explain, if rather crudely, the issues that have dictated the direction in which adult education has been pushed by policy makers. The 1919 Report was written against a background of social unrest, both military and civilian. In this situation 'citizenship' was seen as a moral and civic virtue, but also as a means of social control. This is clear in the lecture notes prepared by the Army Education Service in 1918 and distributed to regimental officers. These stressed the 'duties' (sic) of citizenship, the need for education to enable the citizen to make up 'his' mind about the facts of an argument and, significantly, lectures on the evils of Bolshevism (MacKenzie, 1992: 21–24). In this perspective the 1919 Report, with its emphasis on similar ideas of citizenship, can be seen as one tool in the processes of constructing a peaceful society.

However, from the early 1920s growing unemployment began to reveal that the problems of reconstruction were primarily economic. As a result, adult education policy shifted rapidly to training for employment, first for those finding themselves out of work through their war-time activities, like women and ex-servicemen, but then for those hit by shifts in manufacturing (Field, 1996). However, the extent to which the only training offered to women, many of whom had spent the war working in factories, was in domestic work shows that the economic and cultural can never be clearly split.

Mass unemployment from the late 1920s to the outbreak of war in 1939 quickened and widened the demand for a politically informed, and usually left-wing, adult education. This was particularly obvious in areas like South Wales and parts of the North where there were strong existing traditions of working-class education. The central point for much of this education was the National Council of Labour Colleges, which organized classes at local level until the 1960s as well as having a 'permanent' residential base, first in Oxford then in London (Craik, 1964). There were also other 'residential' adult education colleges, especially Ruskin College, founded in 1898 and closely associated with the trade union movement. These democratic and non-vocational aspects of education were strengthened during the war by

the classes run in the army by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA). ABCA's classes were aimed centrally at 'current affairs and citizenship education' (MacKenzie, 1992: 190).

Since World War II, different theories of adult education and learning have developed, which attempt to bridge this divide and to make adult learning a worthwhile experience for students and a sensible investment for funding bodies. Although these developments are in part educational, additional impetus has been given by the economic downturn, or series of downturns since the 1970s, in the USA, Europe and Britain. As in the inter-war period, the recession led to a consideration of what has been seen as the failure of education and training that has allowed our competitors, especially along the Pacific Rim, to overtake the Western world in manufacturing production. Much has been made of the excellence of the education systems in these countries, which is seen as the most significant factor in their success. None the less, the possibility of a lessening of their growth might lead to a reconsideration of the theory.

Until or unless this takes place, the link between learning and economic success is seen to be firmly made and so the intention has clearly been to improve the learning of the less successful countries by attempting to instil the ideal of lifelong learning. This notion has a long history, probably beginning in the USA in 1916 when Dewey wrote: 'the inclination to learn from life itself and to make the condition of life such that all will learn in the process of living in the finest product of schooling' (quoted in Jarvis, 1983: 32). In Britain, similar sentiments were expressed in the 'Introductory Letter' to the 1919 Report, where A L Smith wrote in his letter to the Prime Minister, 'adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be universal and lifelong' (Ministry of Reconstruction, 1919: 5). However, the idea of lifelong learning has been influential only since it was adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Faure's report (Faure *et al*, 1972). This Report made important claims for the possible effects of lifelong learning. Echoing the 1919 Report, it was argued that education should be universal and lifelong, but it also went further, not just claiming that education precedes economic development but suggesting that it also prepares an individual for a society of the future.

While lifelong learning was being proposed for individuals, the need for preparation for a society of the future was seen to point to changes in the education of society as a whole. These changes were encapsulated in the idea of the 'Learning Society' theorized by Schon (1971). Ranson (1998: 2) defined the learning society as a society:

- which learns about itself and how it is changing;
- which needs to change the way it learns;

- in which all its members are learning;
- which learns to democratically change the conditions of learning.

The two notions of lifelong learning and the learning society had a broad appeal. In Scandinavia, especially Sweden, the ideas of Husén (1974) helped to reform the whole theory of schooling and to develop very successful mechanisms for lifelong learning. Husén argued: ‘the task of reforming education to meet the needs of a changing society required a critical review of the institutionalized nature of schools, without moving to the excess of “de-schooling”’ (Ranson, 1998: 4). In the US a ‘Lifelong Learning Act’, the Mondale Act, was passed in 1976, promising \$40 million a year between 1977 and 1982, but lifelong learning never gained the support in the US that it has enjoyed elsewhere.

It is ironic that while these theories about the learning society were being developed, in Britain ‘the great tradition’ of university adult education was losing its sense of direction. The immediate post-war expansion in adult education had included the appointment of a number of young, politically committed tutors like Raymond Williams and E P Thompson. Despite this, in 1956 Harold Wiltshire, Head of the Nottingham Extra-Mural Department, argued that ‘the “great tradition” of university adult education had lost its old dynamic, principles, purpose and relevance’. He continued that this tradition had been committed to humane, non-vocational liberal studies ‘as a means of understanding the great issues of life’. He concluded that this tradition was opposed to examinations and awards (quoted in Fieldhouse and Associates, 1996: 217). By the 1950s this approach was under attack by a more technical, vocational and, above all, award-oriented tradition. A sign of this change was a very great reduction in the proportion of courses run jointly with the WEA. While the number of university courses rose from 2,635 in 1947/8 to 7,957 in 1968/9, the number of joint courses grew only from 1,570 to 2,169.

What these figures conceal is a subtle shift. While the WEA continued to follow the tradition of liberal non-vocational courses, university departments were beginning to change, offering shorter and even vocational courses. In 1954 the Ashby Report recommended that the restrictions on both length of courses and the provision of vocational and technical courses should be lifted. These conclusions contributed to an expansion in the number of extra-mural departments and to wider curricula. Some of these new departments were delighted by this freedom to construct programmes, but it was regretted by many. For example, the vice-chancellor of Leeds University pointed out in 1963 that ‘the contemporary world has no belief in, and no use for, education at all’, meaning by this adult education for social purpose (quoted in Fieldhouse and Associates, 1996: 218).

However, the foundation of the Open University (OU) in 1969, after a long period of debate, at least suggests that a section of adult educationalists

and a large number of students thought otherwise. Initially at least the OU was determinedly 'non-vocational', reflecting perhaps its founders', especially Jennie Lee's, origins within, and respect for, the 'great tradition' of working-class adult education. From the start there were real tensions between the OU and older forms of adult education, not least because many felt the OU received the lion's share of financial support going to the non-compulsory sector. This view was confirmed when the new Conservative government's White Paper, *Education: A framework for expansion* (DES, 1971) paid little attention to adult education. The reason for this was, as William Van Straubenzee, an involved minister later said 'Adult education [was] already receiving substantial and increasing sums through the Open University' (Sargant, 1996: 295).

Equally important was the view that what the OU was doing was in some ways against the spirit of adult education. Distance learning broke the personal face-to-face contact which many saw as a vital part of the adult education tradition. Further, the OU offered accredited courses which, even if they were not directly vocational, had a vocational element – an element that has certainly got stronger over the years – and is clearly represented in the OU Business School.

To an extent these debates were already going on as the OU was being created. In 1969 the Labour government set up the Russell Committee to assess the need for the provision of non-vocational education in England and Wales. However the Committee did not report until 1972, and it reported to a much less sympathetic Conservative government (Sargant, 1996: 295). The Russell Report made few new recommendations, and in many ways had little impact. However, in arguing that university adult education should be seen as part of the overall provision of adult education, not as an intrinsic part of higher education, the Report, while apparently reinforcing 'traditional' ideas actually spoke clearly for a new generation in adult education. These were the radical, socially committed and left-wing tutors associated with organizations like 'History Workshop' or 'Centreprise'. Often ex-adult students themselves, they wanted to keep adult education separate from the 'degree machine' of the universities and move it 'into the community', setting up permanent centres within that community. Central to this move 'back to the roots' were new classes and programmes based not within a tradition of liberal education but on community 'needs', like basic literacy and numeracy programmes for adults. Many of these programmes targeted, for the first time, groups that had previously been difficult to recruit, for example the unemployed, working-class women at home, the disabled or ethnic minorities. These initiatives also sought to provide wider access to higher education for these groups.

By the mid-1980s, the extra-mural departments had been through decades of change and emerged in a confused state. Their name had changed

to 'continuing education', they were encouraged to help economic regeneration through vocational and accredited courses, and they were encouraged to fill any shortfall in recruitment in the 'mainstream' university. These changes finally removed any sense of a specific purpose in providing liberal adult education as the main responsibility of university continuing education. In 1987, the Government announced the end of Responsible Body status, through which specific funding for liberal adult education had been allocated to university departments of continuing education. This was a prelude to greater changes still, which came about as a result of the abolition of the binary divide between polytechnics and universities in 1992. Traditionally there had been no separate provisions for extra-mural work in the polytechnics; rather it was seen as part of their mainstream, regional provision. As a result of their change to university status, pressure grew on the 'old' universities to bring lifelong learning into their mission statements. In 1994 HEFCE changed the funding for adult education. From 1995/6 only award-bearing courses were eligible for HEFCE-directed funding. Since that date all funded students have become 'part' of the main student body and departments have been 'mainstreamed'. For many this seemed to mark the end of traditional liberal education within the university sector.

Despite this the tensions between learning for learning's sake and vocational learning have not disappeared. I have argued in detail elsewhere (Merricks, 2001) that many students express a strong preference for non-accredited courses for a variety of reasons, many of them derived from the ideas of the 'great tradition'. More strikingly, the discussions on the practicalities of lifelong learning and the learning society have revived the arguments about the 'purpose' of adult education.

The origin of government interest in lifelong learning lies in the economic recession which characterized most Western economies from the mid-1980s. In the US, as early as 1983, the dangers of falling behind the skills revolution were connected to the necessity for educational reform. The National Commission on Excellence in Education argued in their report that 'educational reform should focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society', specifying that to achieve this, education should be universal and lifelong – just as had been argued throughout the 20th century. In Sweden, participation in learning has been encouraged to the point where almost half the adult population is involved in some organized learning activity. The importance of these ideas can be seen in the description of 1996 as 'European Year of Lifelong Learning'. This had its origin in a 1993 European Union paper entitled, significantly, *Growth, Competitiveness, Employment* (see Tuckett, 1997: 6). The background to the paper is familiar:

The rapidly changing technology and economic structure of Western societies, the consequent need for a more highly trained and flexible workforce, and the

demographic projections of an ageing workforce and society into the twenty-first century. These and related influences constitute a strong case for a radical revision and extensions of post-compulsory education which should be characterized by a recognition that education throughout and beyond 'working life' is essential. (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 21)

In 1995 the European Commission published a 'white paper', *Teaching and Learning: Towards the learning society*, whose objective was to help Europe move towards the knowledge-based society as a necessary step in economic and social progress. The paper catalogued three 'factors of upheaval' that were destabilizing society: the impact of the information society; the impact of industrialization; and the impact of the scientific and technical world. The proposed solution to these was twofold: reintroducing the merits of building 'active citizenship' and building up employability. The problem with these views is that, as Tuckett (1997) and Watson and Taylor (1998) point out, there is a potential tension between the two elements. The 'vocational' aspect could be justified in terms of pragmatic economic need, but notions of knowledge designed to create a more democratic or informed society are rather more difficult to justify, especially since even ideas about 'citizenship' have historically embraced very different views. In practice this problem was dealt with within the EU by concentrating on vocational training initiatives.

In fact in the UK this view had already been articulated by adult education's traditional friend, the Labour Party. The Labour Party policy statement of 1996, 'Opening Doors to a Learning Society', is dominated by an emphasis on the importance of education and training. The document says:

Labour's vision is of an educated democracy in which good education ceases to be restricted as a competitive prize at arbitrary points throughout life but becomes the very basis for economic, political and cultural success.

However, the most powerful theme throughout the document is one of economic success. For instance:

everyone has an entitlement to a high-quality lifelong education... without this entitlement individuals will be unable to be part of the multi-skilled, creative and adaptable workforce we will need in the twenty-first century.

The only kind of learning for personal fulfilment or citizenship is to occur in later life when 'changes in life expectancy increase learning in retirement' (Ranson, 1998: 134-36).

Interestingly, many of these views were shared by the then Conservative government in *Lifetime Learning: A policy framework* (DfEE, 1996). Its view

of the importance of lifetime learning is very similar to that of the Labour Party, although there is no mention even of democracy. For them, 'Lifetime learning matters to the economy, to businesses, to communities and to individuals. It is important socially, culturally and economically.' However, when this sentence is elaborated into ten points, eight of them refer to the advantages of learning which will lead to increased mobility in the workforce and so to increased employment opportunities. Learning will sustain the country's and individual businesses' competitiveness and it will help to build productive communities. Otherwise, again the retired will benefit from learning, but even here there is an economic advantage: 'older people with a background of continuing learning are likely to remain active in the economy and community for longer'. Beyond this there is a vague promise: 'Learning offers individuals personal fulfilment' (Ranson, 1998: 143–44).

All these reports – EU, Labour Party and Conservative Party – have common elements. All stress that education is a 'lifelong' process continuing long into the post-compulsory period. However, all equally appear to regard 'learning' in terms of the economic advance of the individual and then of society (although this relationship remains untested). Strikingly, all three use the phrase 'learning society' without any real thought of what that means beyond some vague notion of 'everyone learning'. However, as Coffield and Williamson (1997: 2–3) put it:

the modern *economic imperative*... tells only half the story; it needs to be matched by a *democratic imperative*, which argues that a learning society worthy of the name ought to deliver social cohesion and social justice as well as economic prosperity to all its citizens.

However, ideas of the 'economic imperative' are not hegemonic, even within educational policy discussions. For example, *Scotland as a Learning Society*, published by the Scottish Community Education Council, starts from a very different standpoint. Their initial definition of a learning society is much closer to Coffield and Williamson's and to the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s – 'a society whose citizens value, support and engage in learning, as a matter of course, in all areas of activity'. When this is developed into seven more detailed points, only one of them, the last, refers to purely economic factors. The others range widely to include social, political and cultural factors which would effect democratic processes, critical awareness, environmental protection and reform of schooling (Ranson, 1998: 157).

It could, of course, be argued that this vision can afford to be idealistic as its programme is the least likely to be implemented. However, the Kennedy Report, published by the Further Education Funding Council in 1997 and

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hailed as an important new vision of the learning society, echoes this general thrust. Again, a very brief quotation illustrates this:

Our work over the last two years has confirmed our conviction that learning is central to both economic prosperity and the health of society. We believe that the achievement of economic goals and social cohesion are intertwined.

Although there is no simple listing of main points here, this intertwining of learning leading to success in personal, social and community terms with economic development is a constant theme: 'We found that while recent policy acknowledges both the economic and social benefits of learning, it does not recognize sufficiently their interdependence.'

One more example must suffice. The Kennedy Report's discussion of the technological innovations that have accelerated changes in the world of work is accompanied by a discussion of new and changing skills that will be needed to keep up with the challenge of these changes. However, this section ends with a discussion of how the technologies that will fuel these changes in the workplace will impact on domestic and community life. Finally, like the majority of the theorists of the learning society examined here, the report argues for universal learning:

developing the capacity of everyone to contribute to and benefit from the economic, personal, social and cultural dimensions of their lives is central to achieving the whole range of goals we set ourselves as a nation. (Ranson, 1998: 163–67)

Centrally important to universities in the last years of the 20th century has been the Dearing Report, published in 1997. The extent to which Dearing attempts to combine the two streams identified above suggests some shifts towards a more balanced view. Although concentrating on higher education and so from a different perspective than either the Scottish Community Council or Kennedy, Dearing recognizes that:

the purpose of education is life enhancing: it contributes to the whole quality of life. This recognition of the purpose of higher education in the development of our people, our society, and our economy is central to our vision... UK higher education must be part of the conscience of a democratic society, founded on respect for the rights of the individual and the responsibilities of the individual to society as a whole. (Quoted in Ranson, 1998: 170–71)

It seems, though, that the Kennedy and Dearing agendas, in so far as they develop a notion of a learning society which goes beyond economic progress, were too radical for the Labour Government. In *The Learning Age*:

A renaissance for a new Britain, the Green Paper published in February 1998, only months after Dearing, the rhetoric returns straight to the 1994 statement. David Blunkett opens his foreword by saying:

Learning is the key to prosperity – for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century. This is why the Government has put learning at the heart of its ambition. (DfEE, 1998: 7).

Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, conveys the same message more succinctly: 'Education is the best economic policy we have' (DfEE, 1998: 9).

This emphasis is continued through the paper. Within its 82 pages, only one paragraph directly addresses broad questions about the social and cultural aspects of the learning age which, significantly, has now replaced the 'learning society'. In the learning age:

Community, adult and family learning will be essential... It will help improve skills, encourage economic regeneration and individual prosperity, build active citizenship, and inspire self-help and local development. We propose to draw on the considerable experience of community development projects to help us see how leadership and involvement in the neighbourhood can be part of the learning process and how community education can support such self-help. (DfEE, 1998: 48)

In this view of the world, not even the retired will in future have the opportunity of learning for self-fulfilment and citizenship. The only reference to the retired is a negative one: 'We do not think it would be appropriate to make income-contingent loans available to students who do not plan to re-enter the labour market following their studies and so would not be in a position to repay' (DfEE, 1998: 30). Against this kind of economy-led policy, the enormous growth in numbers joining the University of the Third Age, where fees are very low or non-existent, is hardly surprising. In addition, the appeal of an organization where topics for courses are suggested by the members and there is no formal assessment or accreditation to those who feel no need for 'more qualifications', is great.

But perhaps it goes deeper than that. As Watson and Taylor eloquently argue, any discussion of the 'purpose' of adult education must of necessity, even in a 'postmodern' age, engage with questions of value. They propose three possible value systems: one in which education has a purely vocational purpose; one in which personal development is the central purpose of education; and a third in which the purpose of education is to develop a critical, even radical view of the world. Watson and Taylor argue that for much of its history adult education has been dominated by the 'personal

development' or liberal model but that this model has been consistently under attack from first the left and then the right since the 1970s (Watson and Taylor, 1998: 138–40).

At present it appears that vocationalism has won, yet as Dearing writes, 'As the world becomes ever more complex and fast-changing, the role of higher education as a guardian or transmitter of culture and citizenship needs to be protected' (NCIHE, 1997, Summary Report: 12). This seems to point at least to a model of lifelong learning that is more than simply constant work-based learning updating of work skills. Yet current government policy seems unwilling to take this on board – the division between economics and citizenship seems as sharp as at any point in the 20th century.

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