

LifeLong Learning and the Neoliberal Imaginary

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The lifelong learner is a much over-burdened and over-determined social subject within current education policy

- The lifelong learning approach is an essential policy Strategy for the development of citizenship, social cohesion, employment and for individual fulfilment. (*European report on quality indicators of lifelong learning, European Commission, 2002*)

Lifelong learning indeed is subject to a constant stream of 'overblown policy statements' (Edwards and Nicoll 2001 p. 104) and lifelong learning texts are saturated with policy fictions

- 'The sheer pace of technological change has convinced business communities and nations alike of the need for flexibility in the quality of the labour force. Education systems can therefore no longer be expected to train a labour force for stable industrial jobs; they must instead train individuals to be innovative, capable of evolving, adapting to a rapidly changing world and assimilating change'. (UNESCO 1996 p. 71 *Open and Distance Learning: Prospects and Policy Considerations*, Paris).

Fuzzy fictions

- Within these dextrous texts LLL is constituted in relation to the fuzzy fictions of 'the knowledge economy' within which a new kind of worker, who is innovative, creative and enterprising, is hailed.
- we need to regard all of these pronouncements as partial fictions rather than simple truths, although they are not outside of the true but the 'real' economies of real nations and the realities of work for most, bear only a passing resemblance to what is described here
- At the core of all this seething of discourse around the lifelong learner is the enterprising individual.

- An enterprising individual has a positive, flexible, adaptable disposition towards change, seeing it as normal, and as an opportunity rather than a problem. To see change in this way, an enterprising individual has a security borne of self-confidence ... etc. (OECD report *Enterprising Culture: A Challenge for Education and Training*).

The 'work of politics or government is partly done in the materiality of [such] texts' (Furlough 2000 p. 158) and becomes part of their texture.

- Urgency, inevitability and radical change are part of this texture.
- These texts work, '[b]y furnishing a novel language and set of techniques for thinking about the objects, targets, mechanisms and limits of government' (du Gay 2004 p. 40).
- What is produced in these documents and what is the subject of the policies which stem from them is nothing less than a new kind of person and a new 'ethic of personhood'; for within lifelong learning 'an entire self must be completely made over as an enterprising individual' (McWilliam 2002 p. 292).

'regime of learning'

- A project of the self
- Documenting the self
- Appraisals
- confession
- improvement

the outlines of a 'totally pedagogised society' (Bernstein)

- the 'pedagogisation of life' in which learning is an activity that is conducted endlessly
- A social system within which individuals make themselves available for re-education and re-trainability – 'the ability to profit from continuous pedagogic reformations' (Bernstein 2001 p. 365)
- This is a kind of economic Darwinism (Edwards and Nicoll 2001); adapt, evolve or become irrelevant.

Responsibility and freedom

- LLL is a micro-technology of power which works to this end, mobilising subjects in ways that promote self-reliance and enterprise, enabling them to develop capacities and constantly re-making themselves, a form of continuous 'optimisation'
- the 'bewildering imperative of self-determination' produces its own particular inequalities.
- the 'runaway world' is one of very peculiar freedoms within which individuals are 'condemned to activity'

3 sites of LLL.

- Total mothering
- parenting is focused on making a project of their children and the mother becomes the 'planning office' for the production of a particular kind of educational subject, especially in the middle classes and especially at a time of generalised subjective insecurity and fear of falling (Ehrenreich 1989).

Post-compulsory learner- the trainable/flexible/developmental young person

- 'At the centre of attention is no longer the curriculum that learners have to master but their abilities to organize themselves and to perceive and use their circumstances as learning opportunities' (Tuschling and Engemann 2006 p. 458).
- This is a person who has the appropriate 'social competencies', or 'key qualifications' or 'basic self-organizational dispositions'
- Within this social world of learning everything is possible but nothing is stable. There are no certitudes or complacencies upon which we may rest and draw, we must become developmental rather than 'situated subjects' capable of a different realisation of self in different and changing contexts

The educable and Self-Helping adult learner

- (Rimke 2000) argues self-help literature may be viewed as a strategy 'for enlisting subjects in the pursuit of self-improvement and autonomy' (p. 61)
- 'hyper-individuality'
- Self-help is thoroughly commodified, in the form of self-help books and software and through the work of life-coaches, counsellors and therapists or advisers and mentors of various kinds.
- Through the calculative techniques of the self-help manual we turn 'the gaze' upon ourselves to see if we 'add-up', we audit ourselves. We learn about ourselves, and self-confess through hybridised, psychologically-based knowledges

A neo-liberal imaginary?

- 1. This world of lifelong learning is populated by learners who are alone and lonely. It is a world devoid of community and commitment within which, increasingly, social relations are valued solely for their extrinsic worth.
- 2. All of this can lead to a 'diminished moral responsibility' (Mason 2001 p. 47) as we fashion ourselves within a consciously contrived style of conduct and let go of out-moded authenticities and become ever more responsive to market signals.
- 3. A commodification of the self.

The logic of all of this is the end of ‘the age of education’ (Tuschling and Engemann 2006 p. 465).

- Perhaps then what we are witnessing is a profound epistemic shift from a welfare to neoliberal education paradigm – leaving behind the ‘authentic’ modernist/welfare learner to create a depthless, flexible, lonely, responsive and responsible learner (collectively represented as human capital), devoid of ‘sociality’, the ultimate commodification of the social.