

LEARNING, WORK AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Lifelong Learning Book Series

VOLUME 13

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Aims & Scope

“Lifelong Learning” has become a central theme in education and community development. Both international and national agencies, governments and educational institutions have adopted the idea of lifelong learning as their major theme for address and attention over the next ten years. They realize that it is only by getting people committed to the idea of education both life-wide and lifelong that the goals of economic advancement, social emancipation and personal growth will be attained.

The *Lifelong Learning Book Series* aims to keep scholars and professionals informed about and abreast of current developments and to advance research and scholarship in the domain of Lifelong Learning. It further aims to provide learning and teaching materials, serve as a forum for scholarly and professional debate and offer a rich fund of resources for researchers, policy-makers, scholars, professionals and practitioners in the field.

The volumes in this international Series are multi-disciplinary in orientation, polymathic in origin, range and reach, and variegated in range and complexity. They are written by researchers, professionals and practitioners working widely across the international arena in lifelong learning and are orientated towards policy improvement and educational betterment throughout the life cycle.

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LEARNING, WORK AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

CHALLENGES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN A GLOBAL AGE

by

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For Sarah and Matthew

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Author's Introduction

The concept of individual responsibility has taken on a significance comparable to that of 'choice' in the global rise of neo-liberalism of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The rise of neo-liberalism is most often analysed through the lenses of theory, governmentality and societal structures. There has been a tendency for analysis to become overly abstract with the subjective experiences of the social actors missing dimensions in the literature.

This book draws on more than 20 years of international research that has focused on the subjective experiences of people as actors in changing social landscapes. These landscapes are differently positioned politically, economically and socially, in relation to the rise of neo-liberalism. Comparisons enable the differences in people's experiences to be located, explored and explained in relation to different socio-economic landscapes, thus throwing into relief the effects of neo-liberal policies where they are found.

My approach is to create an extended dialogue between ideas and evidence, starting close to home, and then extending to specific international comparisons and to wider explorations of the central themes of the book: human agency and social responsibility. Finally, I return to social landscapes of Britain, to review the position and potential for social change in societies that exemplify what Sennett has termed 'Anglo-American regimes', in contrast to 'Rhine regimes' as exemplified by Germany.

Chapter 1 is rooted in the British social landscapes of my own experience, drawing in essay style on popular and literary portrayals of social phenomena as well as a range of social science sources. My analysis moves outwards to systematic comparison of the experiences of young adults in British and German cities that highlight the contrasts between environments governed by deregulation and the growth of marketisation, the struggle to maintain social democratic values in changing contexts and the post-communist transition from a command economy. Analysis of effects of the regulated, diverse and polarised socio-economic environments in which people get started on their occupational and learning careers provides a basis for better understandings of the work and learning experiences of adults in a range of different settings, particularly those at the lower end of the earnings distribution. Work and learning are considered in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 from the perspectives of the people who are differently positioned in their social landscapes: as employees or

hidden workers, as students who anticipate work through learning, as unemployed people trying to gain a foothold in the labour market and as hidden workers who support the vast amounts of unpaid work. Cross-cutting themes are drawn out, with issues of gender, participation, citizenship and social life explored more fully in Chapters 6 and 7. The evidence is drawn from a series of UK Research Council Major Awards, EU-funded projects and other research carried out at national and international levels. I am indebted to the research colleagues and partners with whom I have travelled in these social landscapes over 20 years, particularly Walter Heinz, John Bynner, Martina Behrens, Claire Woolley, Peter Rudd and Jens Kaluza (Anglo-German Studies), Gerald Heidegger, Beatrix Niemeyer, Bettina Hoffman, Sue Saxby-Smith (youth and adult transitions, gender and qualification), Edmund Waite, Maurice Taylor (Anglo-Canadian studies), Lorna Unwin, Helen Rainbird, Phil Hodgkinson and Natasha Kersh (improving workplace learning).

Chapter 8 sets out conceptual schema to assist rethinking of 'social structures' in relation to human aspiration and capacities for change in learning, work and social responsibility. From a theoretical standpoint, the book develops an analysis of the scope ordinary people have for fulfilling their aspirations and the ways in which they strive for this through work and learning. This focuses attention on connections between the bounds of human agency and the individual, mutual and social responsibilities enacted in the social world. Chapter 9 returns to the themes introduced in Chapter 1, showing how popular beliefs in meritocracy and the openness of opportunities to all could evaporate very quickly in the new generation of adults as it becomes apparent that the qualifications chase eventually becomes a zero-sum game for all but the most advantaged. Assessing claims that the neo-liberal trends are approaching a 'stall point' in societies such as Britain and the USA, it is argued that the culture of contentment is disturbed by growing inequalities to the point that even the middle classes recognise that what is being created is a zero-sum chase and a context of insecurity in which inequality, in the end, is bad for everyone. Greater social responsibility exercised throughout society means *replacing individual responsibility with mutual responsibility as the core construct*. The mutuality of social responsibility requires reconnection and voice for the ordinary citizen, exercised through work and the workplace as well as in the wider social world.

The argument, put simply, revolves around social justice and active and engaged citizenry. The relentless pursuit of economic advantage distances us from these goals.

There is an increasing mismatch between the aspirations of ordinary people and policies designed to help them fulfil their aspirations. Policies to encourage lifelong learning are based on the view that individuals must learn new things primarily to secure employment in an ever-changing world. The result of these policies has been to open up unsustainable inequalities which ordinary people are unlikely to tolerate for much longer. There is the prospect that social movements will increasingly counter these trends as dissatisfaction grows. For politicians, bringing politics closer to the life worlds and aspirations of ordinary people will mean seeking solutions based on broader and fairer forms of meritocracy and bringing work and the pursuit of broader social purposes into a better balance at all levels of the social world.

Editorial By Series Editors

Since the publication in 2001 of the first work in the Lifelong Learning Book Series, *International Handbook of Lifelong Learning* (edited by Aspin, Chapman, Sawano and Hatton), the subject of 'Lifelong Learning' and a range of issues, policies and problems arising within and from this topic have been confirmed as a central theme in education. International and national agencies and governments and educational institutions have realised that it is only by getting people committed to the idea of education both life-wide and lifelong that the goals of economic advancement, social inclusion and personal growth will be attained.

The *Lifelong Learning Book Series* aims to advance research and scholarship in the domain of lifelong learning addressing and pertaining to those themes. It further aims to offer a rich fund of resources for researchers, policy makers, scholars, professionals and practitioners in the field.

The volumes in this international series are written by researchers, professionals and practitioners working widely across the international arena and are orientated towards policy improvement and educational betterment throughout the life cycle.

Our colleague Karen Evans has addressed such a range of problems, topics and issues in her book *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility*. She has drawn on more than 20 years' international research, focussing in this volume on the ideas of individual responsibility and people's notions of and approaches to it in their roles as social actors located in different and changing social landscapes. Karen addresses the notion of the subjective experiences of such actors and the senses they make of their living and working in different social, economic and political environments, where the concurrent tensions between neo-liberal and social responsibility perspectives are most strongly being played out. She approaches the study of these tensions by creating an extended dialogue between ideas and evidence, starting her inquiry from the range of social landscapes in which she has most recent engagement – those of the United Kingdom – before moving on to locate the interplay of such tensions in a range of international settings, perhaps best exemplified in the contrasts in approaches to ideas of social change between what she terms 'Anglo-American regimes' and those that are seen in operation in the 'Rhine Regimes' of Western Europe.

The major contrast here is that between government policies of deregulation and the growth of 'marketisation' and those where there is still to be found a

commitment to such social democratic values and concerns as those promoting policies of social and economic inclusion, the increase of democratic access, equity and participation and the development and extension of the ideas and values of individual autonomy and personal growth. Commitment to such values will be furthered by actors' involvement in programmes of learning, both generally in schools and occupational, professional and other learning programmes for adults. Here Karen's concentration moves particularly towards possibilities for learning in the workplace and the labour market, where actors' experiences as those in work or seeking work or dealing with the difficulties of securing work and getting a footing in the labour market are investigated, analysed and reflected upon. She notes the fruitful possibilities of commenting upon the intersection of such themes with issues of gender, participation, citizenship and social living.

Karen moves on to explore the possibilities for change in learning, work and social responsibility engendered by her reconceptualisation of the notion of 'social structures' and their relationships to people's individual aspirations and capabilities. Her argument is that these possibilities have greatest potential for being realised if the value placed upon individual autonomy and social responsibility is best reconsidered by moving to a notion of social mutuality. This means replacing the stress on individual responsibility with an emphasis on mutual responsibility as the core concept and central value in all such thinking and policy-making. Karen concludes that 'her argument, put simply, revolves around social justice, active and engaged citizenry. The relentless pursuit of economic advantage distances us from these goals'. She writes that she sees 're-establishing the relationship between education and real life in terms of broadening public appreciation of what is genuinely educative in people's lives, as conceptions of worthwhile learning break free of narrow institutionalised confines' – noble aims, as we believe.

For this is an argument and a point of view with which we have much sympathy and on which we have already written at some length ourselves. It is an issue that impacts directly on the conception, framing and institutionalisation of policies for schooling and learning in post-compulsory settings of all kinds – formal and informal, institutional and alternative, in the workplace and other learning environments - that will promote such ends and a number of which are now being worked upon by governments across the international arena seeking to address the learning needs of their citizens, countries and regional and international connections for the purposes instanced by Karen Evans in this book.

All these ideas are set out and explored in a volume that is designed to shape, inform and aid the process of reflection upon the responsibility educators and policy makers have for developing peoples' repertoires of knowledge and understanding, helping to shape and frame their values, and by their policies and initiatives in the worlds of learning seeking to influence the kind of society in which we live. It is this process of critical reflection on issues raised by the concepts of learning in all its various modes, stages and locations, work as a site of learning and advancement and policies for the development and enlargement of a sense of social responsibility among all citizens of a modern participative democracy that will best promote the values instantiated in them, which should continue throughout life.

We take pleasure in launching this volume as evidence of the excellence and range of the work undertaken since the commencement of this series by Springer. As editors to the series, we trust that its readers will find this collection to be as thought provoking, controversial and stimulating to the advancement of their own work and thinking on these and the many other related topics and to their own framing of responses to it as its author would wish. Karen Evans merits no less, and we commend her argument to all those working in this area of interest, activity and intellectual enquiry. We hope that it will encourage their continuing critical thinking, research and development and academic and scholarly production and mark a further advance in their individual, institutional and professional progress and development.

November 2008

David Aspin and Judith Chapman