

## LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURAL CHANGE: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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### **Introduction**

Since the mid-1990s, lifelong learning has become an extremely fashionable concept. Of course, the idea is not a new one. One leading British adult educator was already writing in 1920 on the topic of “education as a lifelong process” (Basil Yeaxlee, quoted in Field 2000, 5). Yet although there is a long standing recognition that learning is a process that continues beyond formal schooling, the level of interest in lifelong learning has shot up since the early 1970s, and in particular since the late 1990s. This development has primarily been associated with policy debate rather than academic interest, and above all it has been fostered by international policy forums. Key founding texts of the first wave of interest in lifelong education include the famous Faure report, published by UNESCO in 1972 (Faure 1972), which was followed by a series of national governmental measures, particularly in Europe, Australasia, Canada and Japan. The second wave of interest was marked by a plethora of major policy documents, starting with the European Commission’s white paper on competitiveness and employment (CEC 1994), followed shortly by further publications from the European Union (CEC 1995, CEC 2000) as well as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 1996) and the Group of Eight (G8 1999). Once more, the publications of these international policy forums were rapidly followed by a wide range of national policy documents, all of which placed lifelong learning at their centre.

Despite their variety, the second wave of lifelong learning policy papers shared a number of common features. First and foremost, they announced a change of emphasis in policies for education and training: instead of focussing on teaching and training, the main goal of policy should be to promote learning. This represents a remarkable change in itself. The idea of learning is much wider than that of education, and indeed it may be so broad as to pose serious challenges of definition and measurement for policy makers. Moreover, it reflects a major shift of attention: the focus has moved away from what the teacher is doing, and towards what is going on for the learner.

Secondly, the second wave policy papers were responding to what appear to be widely shared problems. Western countries in particular are undergoing a crisis of competitiveness. Globalizing trends mean that industrial and financial capacities are highly mobile, removing the many of the established advantages of the western economies, whose growth rates have been eclipsed since the 1950s by the remarkably dynamic 'tiger economies' of the Pacific Rim. The creation and application of knowledge play a considerably greater role in economic activity in the post-industrial economies, and are now widely seen in the West as the only possible sustainable source of competitive advantage. Information technologies are further transforming the nature and location of economic activities, as well as creating new possibilities for new services and products, and contributing towards acceleration in the pace of social, technical, cultural and economic change.

Third, the second wave policy debate has been marked by an absence of utopian optimism. This contrasts markedly with the first wave of policy papers on lifelong education. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, lifelong education was regarded as an unquestioned good, contributing to economic well being and social equity at the same time. The current debate is marked by a more anxious and uncertain perspective, which can detect negative as well as positive possibilities in the emerging learning society. The most obvious of these is the impact of lifelong learning on social cohesion and stability; several policy bodies have warned of the likelihood of a learning divide between the knowledge-rich and knowledge-poor. Others – notably the American sociologist Richard Sennett – have lamented the influence of continuing lifelong learning on the corrosion of individual character. In his view, flexible, adaptable learning citizens make for fragile, self-doubting personalities. But the solution favoured by policy makers has been to embrace an approach to lifelong learning that encompasses the whole population, and that is thus designed to serve an integrating function. To quote from the OECD's ministerial conference of 1996, the second wave is concerned with "lifelong learning for all". In the language of my own current government, the aim is to provide "lifelong learning for the many, not the few".

In moving towards these goals, there has been a widespread recognition that attitudes and values play a significant role in motivating learning. This is not new to adult educators, who have always worked with a population of students who are learning because they want to learn. If the adult educators wanted to stay in work, then they had to persuade students to attend their courses. So it is understandable that motivation to learn was at the top of their agenda. This issue has become of much more general interest with the general adoption of lifelong learning as an overarching policy goal. It is of particular concern for those who take an inclusive view of lifelong learning, and who seek to engage the wider population in continuous learning. It is in this context that the current interest in learning culture has come to the forefront of policy concerns, and formed the focus of scholarly analysis.

This paper seeks to provide a critical assessment of the notion of learning culture. I start with a brief overview of the policy debate, drawing largely on evidence from Britain and the rest of Europe. This is followed by a discussion of the wider social and cultural context in which this debate has occurred, with particular reference to the conceptual and policy debates over lifelong learning. I will argue that ideas of change and flexibility and continuous learning are now deeply rooted within western cultures, and that the concept of cultural change corresponds to a fundamentally individualistic conception of lifelong learning. This means that ideas of a broad learning culture are at odds with the relatively narrow and instrumentalist definitions of lifelong learning that dominate the current European discourse. I then briefly review some recent attempts by policy makers and practitioners to promote cultural change in a way that

will favour greater and wider participation in learning. I conclude with some comments on the remarkably difficult challenge that cultural change poses, both to policy makers but also to those working in educational institutions.

## 1. Cultural change and policy discourse

Contemporary interest in cultural change has been stimulated by several different factors. The first is the recognition that people's values and attitudes appear to have a direct influence upon their economic behaviour. This challenges some influential traditions of economic thought – notably rational actor theory – which treat people as autonomous individuals who clinically define what is in their own interests, and then make choices which enable them to pursue these interests. Geert Hofstede's pioneering work on the influence of culture upon work performance was instrumental in shifting the terms of discussion in the direction of cultural analysis (Hofstede 1980). Drawing on large scale survey data from workers in a number of countries, Hofstede identified a number of dimensions of values and attitudes that, he claimed, helped to explain the ways in which workers from different countries behaved. Thus he found high levels of individualism in the western countries, and high levels of collectivism in less developed nations; high levels of power-distance in Latin and Asian countries, lower levels for the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon nations; high levels of uncertainty avoidance in Latin countries and Japan, low levels in the Anglo, Nordic and Chinese culture countries; and a strong orientation towards the long term in the East Asian countries, a much weaker one in the western nations. Although more recent analysts have criticized Hofstede for his tendency to over-generalise at the national level, and have emphasised that the different characteristics can be found within all societies (Boreham 2004), these dimensions are still widely used. Moreover, Hofstede's basic point – which was that culture influences economic behaviour in important ways – is generally accepted.

Second, the debate has been fuelled by growing interest in the importance of organizational culture. Again, Hofstede's work may be taken as an example, as it has been particularly influential in the field of organizational studies. His own background as a senior Human Resources manager in IBM made him particularly sensitive to the way in which workforce performance could vary within the same organization, and he has developed his analytical framework further within the organizational context (Hofstede 1998). Here, Hofstede introduced a new set of dimensions which are specific to organizations rather than nations. Diagrammatically, these are:

- Process orientation vs results orientation
- Employee orientation vs job orientation
- Parochial orientation vs professional orientation
- Open system vs closed system
- Loose control vs tight control
- Normative orientation vs pragmatic orientation

Such dimensions are, of course, overlaid upon national cultural patterns. The success of a multinational company in a particular country will depend, Hofstede argues, on the extent to which its organizational culture is consistent with and indeed reinforced by the national culture. This in turn may depend upon whether the local organization is a newly created one, or is based on an existing organization (for example, through a take over).

Third, the debate has been shaped by the general adoption in the West of new forms of governance, which are sometimes called the New Public Management. This is particularly associated with widespread disenchantment – not only among governments but also among the wider population – with the existing models of the

welfare state. The influential French social thinker and policy advisor Pierre Rosanvallon has written of the general change of focus within social policy in Europe, away from existing models of “passive support” to “active strategies of insertion” (Rosanvallon 1995). Importantly, education/training and job placement are, for Rosanvallon, one of the chief methods of achieving active assertion, since they enable socially-excluded individuals to acquire the skills and knowledge that will allow them to take charge of their own destinies. But this shift is part of a broader change, as western governments have sought to deal with complex and multi-faceted problems, of which the promotion of lifelong learning is only one (others might include health promotion, crime prevention, waste recycling or poverty reduction). All of these involve government in developing a range of partnerships with intermediary agencies, in order to change the behaviour of citizens themselves. As one British scholar has put it, in a nautical metaphor that prefigures the success of the British rowing teams at this year’s Olympics, this approach “involves ‘less government’ (or less rowing) but ‘more governance’ (or more steering)” (Rhodes 1996, 655). But this then faces government with the need to consider the ways in which their citizens’ values and attitudes influence their behaviour.

Fourth, and closely associated with the previous factor, the interest in cultural change corresponds to the growing weight placed on the role of the individual. This is a pervasive aspect of the policy discourse in Europe. The Confederation of British Industry in 1989 stated that “As manual work declines, the emphasis is on individual responsibility” (quoted in Boreham 2004, 7), and this view has continued to run through British government policy ever since. One Netherlands policy paper has argued that this perspective particularly applies to participation by excluded groups:

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. . . . All people, young and old, are firstly and naturally responsible for themselves. You have to learn how to take care of yourself, and therefore you must want to acquire the knowledge and skills to do that (quoted in Field 2000, 119).

I will argue in the next section that this corresponds towards wider tendencies and trends towards individualization in the western societies (not only perhaps in those). It has been associated with a considerable heightening of interest in the role of individuals’ beliefs and values in determining their overall orientation (by which I mean both attitudes and behaviour) towards learning.

These broader trends help to explain the way in which cultural change has come to form a part of the current policy debate over lifelong learning. I will illustrate this with respect to recent policy debates within the United Kingdom, where the New Labour government adopted a very clear set of policies for lifelong learning shortly after its victory in the 1997 election. Its policies were influenced by the first report of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, which itself called for a process of cultural revolution, and recommended that government should “seek to construct a popular and coherent vision of a nation-wide learning culture for the many and not the few, with shared responsibility for its achievement” (Fryer 1998). This view was subsequently echoed in the government’s Green Paper on lifelong learning, albeit with a subtly new emphasis on those groups and individuals in the population who allegedly do not value learning. According to the Green Paper, the challenge of lifelong learning would

mean changing the culture in many homes and workplaces where learning is not seen as having any relevance. . . . We cannot force anyone to learn - individuals must take that responsibility themselves - but we can help those who want to develop a thirst for knowledge. Together we can create a culture of self improvement and a love of learning where if people want to get on, their first instinct is to improve their skills and education (DfES 1998).

The very title of the British Green Paper, with its reference to the Renaissance, evoked the notion of a learning culture characterised by breadth, humanist scholarship and creativity.

Ideas of cultural change are, then, an important element of the policy debate over lifelong learning. They are also to be found in scholarly analyses of learning, whether in organizations, families or neighbourhoods or at the national level. They have been influenced by the work of organizational analysts such as Hofstede, as well as by more anthropological and sociological understandings of culture. And they have emerged as part of a wider debate about the role of government in complex post industrial societies, seeking to develop and implement policies that actively involve the population at large in new forms of behaviour rather than simply providing services for them. I have argued elsewhere that lifelong learning is typical of the new policy focus, and also that the emergence of lifelong learning is one of the reasons why the new forms of governance have emerged (Field 2000). But this is itself a complex area of governance, and one in which the outcomes really are not easy to predict.

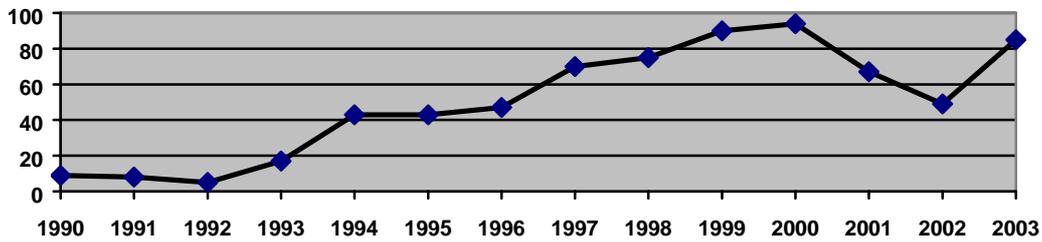
## **2. Concepts of and policies for lifelong learning**

This paper opened with the claim that the language of lifelong learning is now pervasive. Again, I will take a British example, but I think it is probably one that is typical of many western nations. Figure One shows the numbers of times that the term has been cited in the British Education Index<sup>1</sup> since 1983. It shows a dramatic rise of interest in 1993 and 1994, with a further steep rise in 1997, and a peak in 2000. While there has been some falling off in recent months, suggesting that the term may have lost an edge of fashion, it has clearly become rooted in the everyday discourse of educational debate. By contrast, the term 'learning culture' was noted only fourteen times in the same period, suggesting that this is a much more restricted term, while lifelong learning is more of an umbrella concept.

Of course, a new language may be used to mask an established reality. In the case of lifelong learning, a number of such possibilities exist. It could be that the term has been used to legitimate an existing shift of attention and resources away from older and institutionalised forms of publicly provided adult education, towards emerging forms of largely privatised vocational training. This is the claim of the New Zealand academic Roger Boshier, who has described lifelong learning as "human resource development (HRD) in drag" (Boshier 1998, 4). Or it could be that lifelong learning is simply a rebranding exercise, carried out by adult education institutions in order to show that they are modern and forward-thinking. In Britain, for example, a number of adult education providers have adopted the new language: some local government bodies now have a "Lifelong Learning Service" rather than an Adult Education Service, while several UK universities now have Departments or Centres of Lifelong Learning. In both of these cases, then, a new terminology is being adopted, but without corresponding changes in practice. Yet even if this were all that is happening – and I do not suggest that it is – it does not explain why this particular term has become so widespread in such a short period.

Figure One: References to "Lifelong Learning" in the British Education Index

Figure One: "Lifelong Learning" in the BEI



In reflecting on the conceptual content of lifelong learning, it is clear above all it remains a policy concept. Its currency in academic circles appears to be largely a response to the way in which lifelong learning has been promoted by policy makers. The reasons for its popularity must therefore lie less in its scholarly value than in the function that it serves for policy makers.

At one level, the language of lifelong learning has been adopted because it corresponds to the challenges facing contemporary governments. As the Group of Eight leading nations put it at the Köln summit in 1999,

Adaptability, employability and the management of change will be the primary challenges for our societies in the coming century. Mobility between jobs, cultures and communities will be central. And the passport to mobility will be education and lifelong learning for everyone (G8 1999).

The capacity to learn and adjust creatively to such key policy drivers as globalisation, technological change, scientific innovation and new approaches to management is increasingly presented as a core competence of contemporary capitalism.

In addition, the term is usually accompanied by references to the urgency and necessity of a 'learning revolution'. According to this viewpoint, the pace and extent of contemporary economic, technological and scientific change are so great that traditional front-loaded systems of schooling (including university) are at worst redundant, and at best sorely inadequate. Contemporary policy makers therefore present lifelong learning as part of a strategy for modernising the education and training system.

This means that the normative dimension of the concept is partly expressed through more or less explicit challenges to the existing, allegedly "old fashioned" system of provision for education and training. As the European Commission's staff memorandum on lifelong learning expressed it,

Lifelong Learning is no longer one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for the provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. The task for the member states is to identify coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all (CEC 2000).

This in turn echoes the earlier phrasing found in Jacques Delors' visionary White Paper on competitiveness and employment:

Preparation for life in tomorrow's world cannot be satisfied by a once-and-for-all acquisition of knowledge and know-how. . . All measures must therefore necessarily be based on the concept of developing, generalising and systematising lifelong learning and continuing training (CEC 1994, 16, 36).

Thus the idea of lifelong learning represents much more than an additional emphasis on adult education and training. It amounts to a full-blooded, head-on challenge to the front-end model that underlies all the assumptions underpinning our existing education system.

It is important to acknowledge the profound radicalism that characterises western policy thinking on lifelong learning. But as well as representing a far-reaching way of approaching modernization of the education and training system, the idea of lifelong learning has also been widely adopted in academic circles. This is, I would say, by no means an unusual process: many social science concepts emerge from the fields of practice and policy; and equally, basic social science terminology has been borrowed and adapted by policy makers since the late nineteenth century. However, the idea of lifelong learning is not one that is located firmly within any particular academic discipline. Rather, it seems that the concept of lifelong learning is inherently inter- and trans-disciplinary, and therefore crosses boundaries in a way which does bring considerable breadth and multiplicity to its definition (Brödel 1998). And although its origins lie in the domain of policy formation, it is important to recollect that it was coined and developed not just by politicians such as Edgar Faure, but also by social scientists such as Torsten Husén, Jarl Bengtsson and Tom Schuller who were employed by international governmental organisations that stood at one or two removes from policy implementation.

However, this is not to suggest that I accept the dominant policy view of lifelong learning as adequate. As I have made clear elsewhere (Field 2000), it is not. Far from being too broad, its scope at present is usually too narrow, tending as it does to treat informal and non-formal learning somewhat sketchily and crudely, before returning to the familiar terrain of more institutionalised forms of learning. Furthermore, the dominant view tends to present an over-socialized perspective, which understates the importance of agency. Lifelong learning is presented as a reaction to impersonal events “out there” over which people have little control; thus, to take one brief example, “globalisation” is presented as an undifferentiated process, rather than as a number of inter-related trends which ultimately arise from human choices. Few commentators – scientific or otherwise – have drawn analytical attention to the rising social demand for learning, which often appears to function more or less independently of the economic demand for skills. So this is a concept which is far from fully developed; much more work has to be done.

### **3. Academic contributions**

It is also striking to note that the concept of lifelong learning is closely related to some of the key ideas of contemporary social science. This phenomenon has gone largely unremarked so far, yet it is potentially of very great significance. I would like to illustrate this point with brief, and unsatisfyingly superficial, reference to one particular framework of analysis: the case of reflexive modernisation theory in sociology (see also Schemmann 2002). I have selected this example only to make the general point that lifelong learning, as broadly understood, is increasingly acknowledged as a central phenomenon in the social sciences. Moreover, the many-faceted patterns of behaviour, norms and institutions to which the term refers have attracted the attention of some leading social scientists.

Reflexive modernisation theory is a somewhat loose term for what might be described as a neo-Weberian attempt to grapple with social change at the macro level. It is very much a European phenomenon, and is most commonly associated with the work of Ulrich Beck (Beck 1992) and Anthony Giddens (1991). Beck and

Giddens both seek to emphasise the role of human agency in creating the collection of changes (globalisation, uncertainty, risk) to which lifelong learning is so often presented as a response. In particular, they stress the role of institutionalised reflexivity, which arises from the fact that people are constantly confronted with new knowledge about the world around them, and therefore must constantly reflect upon the circumstances in which they live their lives. The range of new knowledge spans the everyday and banal (such as information about the type of clothing that is currently fashionable in California) to the profound (such as detailed knowledge of humanity's genetic structure). For Beck, what is important about this remarkable development in the spread of information and knowledge has been its complexity, and the ways in which any decisions are therefore infused with risk. Giddens has examined the ways in which such decisions involve new types of trust; rather than placing their trust mainly in people who are directly known to them, people are increasingly required to place trust in distant sources of information and knowledge, which may be more or less inconsistent with one another.

Both Beck and Giddens have illustrated this trend with reference to intimate relationships such as love; whereas in past times, love usually moved in a linear manner into marriage, which was then a once-in-a-lifetime matter, the outcomes now are much more diverse and considerably less predictable. In order to inform their choices about love and marriage, people are less likely to consult a known authority figure (such as a parent or priest) and far more likely to turn to a self-help text on relationships. While neither Beck nor Giddens have written in detail on lifelong learning, this theoretical framework has considerable relevance to a world in which flexibility, adaptability and choice appear to be profoundly embedded not only in the economics of skills and competitiveness, but also in individuals' own life strategies.

The importance of reflexive modernisation theory lies partly in the fact that it emphasises the importance of individual behaviour in actively embracing different forms of learning. Learning is undertaken by individuals (and is indeed a major force for individualisation), rather than by governments or instructional institutions. Moreover, it is undertaken on a day-to-day basis; it relates to the active ways in which people relate new knowledge to the circumstances of their everyday lives. If anything, this approach can be criticised for overplaying individuals' interests in learning as part of their constant reinvention of themselves, and for downplaying the world of work and the workplace in the everyday learning that is also part of institutionalised reflexivity. But on the positive side, we might expect that this theoretical framework might also open up new questions about reflexivity in workplaces.

Sociology is unusual, in that two of its most outstanding current theoretical giants are both profoundly interested in the role of knowledge, reflexivity and learning in adult life. Psychology, by contrast, remains primarily concerned with learning during childhood. But given this traditional child-led focus, it is noticeable that a growing variety of recent work is concerned with studies of learning in adult life. Even constructivist psychology, which in Piaget's hands was focussed mainly on the earliest stages of what he saw as a relatively fixed life cycle, has been increasingly applied to the study of learning in adult life, which in turn has produced new elements which may enrich constructivist theory (Bourgeois 2002, 148-9). The Vygotskian tradition of activity theory also has its roots in the study of childhood learning, but many key elements of sociocultural theory are fully applicable to the role and nature of learning in adult life. Among others, Engeström, Lave and Wenger (1991) have developed their concepts of situated cognition through empirical investigations of informal and nonformal learning among adults in the workplace. Particularly influential has been the notion of a community of practice, which treats work itself as

a communicative process that always involves mutual learning. This work has also helped influence research in applied fields such as management studies, which has in recent years paid considerable attention to lifelong learning, and has also in its turn greatly influenced the study of learning in organisational settings.

Finally, some contemporary work in economics is also highly pertinent to the current debate over lifelong learning. In particular, I have in mind some recent work on knowledge, innovation and economic performance, much of which is concerned with the range of factors that underlie and may help to explain the relative success of particular nations or regions. This work draws on an established tradition within economics, which rejects the atomized individualism of rational choice theory and in its place seeks to understand economic behaviour as always being embedded in social relationships. Landmark studies in this tradition include Granovetter's work on youth labour markets and Porter's study of the competitive success of nations, as well as more recent work by the Danish economist Bengt-Åke Lundvall and his collaborators. Lundvall has distinguished between different varieties of knowledge, including what many of us might call abstract and explicit knowledge (which he calls 'know-what') and tacit and practical knowledge (which he calls 'know-how'). Lundvall identified the role of social networks as mediators in the transmission of know-how, as contrasted with the role of formal and abstract communications systems in the transmission of know-what (Lundvall and Johnson 1991). Following Lundvall, Peter Maskell has argued that such social capital forms a major economic asset in countries such as Denmark, which are able to compete effectively despite their high cost base, thanks to the rapid sharing of new techniques and ideas among the local business community (Maskell 2000).

In short, there has been a considerable body of conceptual development across the social sciences which is centrally concerned with aspects of lifelong learning. For those who see lifelong learning as an applied and inter-disciplinary field, these developments are of great theoretical significance. From the rather narrower perspective of those who still see adult education as a discipline in its own right, of course, these developments are somewhat threatening. Rather than enriching and widening the field of analysis, from this viewpoint they rather introduce the risk of an uncontrolled eclecticism. Such concerns are highly understandable, particularly in a field of research where any pattern of cumulative enquiry has been rare. Nevertheless, a certain eclecticism seems hard to avoid, particularly given that most enquiry into lifelong learning is typically and rightly concerned with middle range theory rather than grand theory. Indeed, my own criticism would be that many scholars in this field have been far too reluctant to draw on a range of social science concepts, and have rather formulated their questions on the basis of too narrow a range of ideas. It is striking, for example, that those scholars who do have a well developed interest in theory have tended to neglect economics. Even those who work comfortably within an interdisciplinary framework have tended to draw mainly on sociology and cultural theory, and to a lesser extent on political science and psychology. Lifelong learning can be viewed on a variety of levels, and from a variety of theoretical approaches that can be applied in a complementary way to the study of specific problem areas.

So let me draw this section to a close by suggesting that these new social science debates have considerable significance for our understanding of what might be meant by a learning culture. Reflexive modernization theory has itself been informed by earlier ethnographic work on value change in the west, and its core concerns include an attempt to explain and understand the nature and extent of cultural change. In a sense, it underlines the way in which continuous learning – reflexivity – is deeply embedded in western cultures. It suggests that this poses individuals with

the need constantly to make choices, which themselves subsequently impact back upon and reshape the context in which people then make further choices. Particularly in Beck's work, this process of continuing reflexive learning and decision making is closely associated with general tendencies towards individualization, by which Beck refers to the increasing differentiation and pluralization of individual biographies. Cultural institutions, values and practices are all themselves subject to the processes of reflexivity, and both shape and reflect the common tendencies towards individualization. So reflexive modernization theory has clear and direct relevance for our understanding of learning cultures, since it tends to assume that reflexivity and learning are already deeply embedded in our culture.

Economists, by contrast, tend to be more interested in the role of culture as an independent variable that can help unlock the mysteries of economic performance. The economics of innovation and knowledge, as practiced by scholars like Lundvall and Maskell, fully acknowledges the significance of culture in explaining variations in economic performance. In so far as the economists are concerned with the regional level of analysis, or with small nations such as Denmark, such work frequently refers to the cohesive values and beliefs that are shared by the key actors in economic activity. Chief among these is the existence of values of reciprocity and trust, which are fundamental to promoting co-operation and information exchange (Maskell 2000). Cultural perspectives are also acknowledged by Lave and Wenger (who mention their debt to the anthropological tradition), and to some extent by Engeström and others influenced by Vygotsky. However, like the economists, the social psychologists tend to regard culture as an independent variable.

#### **4. Promoting change**

There is, then, a widespread consensus that culture shapes lifelong learning, and that it has a powerful influence on the ways in which people learn. I would argue that much research has shown that culture is significant both for participation in formal, institutional learning – for example, studying in universities or in a training centre – and also for the nature of informal learning. So we might reasonably conclude that if we wish to promote continuous lifelong learning, we should seek to foster cultural values and practices that favour participation and success in such learning.

Western governments attempt to change cultures all the time. My own government, in Scotland, is preoccupied with a number of issues that require cultural change. They would like to persuade all Scots to change their diet and take more exercise, and they would like to dissuade young Scots from anti-social behaviour, just to pick two examples from many. In each case, policy makers have talked of the need to change people's values and practices – in some cases, they have even spoken of the need to change Scotland's culture. And so it is with lifelong learning.

This brings us to the critical question: what kind of culture might promote lifelong learning? The Fryer Committee suggested that the following might be seen as the general hallmark of a learning culture:

“Above all, a vision of a learning culture will envisage learning as a normal, accessible, productive and enjoyable (if demanding) feature of everyday life for all people, throughout their lives” (Fryer 1998).

The subsequent Green Paper, while by no means going into detail, pin-pointed two specific cultural characteristics: “The fostering of an enquiring mind and the love of learning are essential to our future success” (DfEE 1998). So at this level of analysis, two main challenges appear to exist: how to encourage curiosity and a wish to know

more; and how to encourage people to value learning as an intrinsically worthwhile activity.

The British government has developed a large number of instruments to promote lifelong learning since 1997, and I do not have the time to go through these in any detail. They include a concern with promoting achievement at school, as well as in providing more widespread opportunities for organized learning among pre-school-age children; and they include considerable expansion and change in the field of adult education and training. I will focus on three examples of the latter, each of which has sought to promote changes in people's attitudes, and particularly in the attitudes of those people who are least likely to participate in organized learning. These are:

- Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs)
- Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF)
- Union Learning Fund (ULF)

I will also refer briefly to a relevant programme of government-funded research.

ILAs featured strongly in the Fryer report as a means of stimulating demand for learning. Essentially, the ILA allowed individuals to obtain a small grant from the State in order to meet some of the costs of a learning programme. Almost any subject could be studied. The thinking behind this scheme was that once people had tried adult learning for themselves, they would want to do it again – either because they had enjoyed the experience so much, or because the benefits had been so positive. In the event, the scheme was brought down through a combination of its own success (so many people applied that the money was committed far more quickly than the government had planned), and partly through fraud (the government failed to create a way of checking the quality of all the providers, and some bodies took the opportunity of taking ILAs under false pretences). So far as our understanding of cultural change is concerned, the key features of the scheme were that it provided an inducement to individuals to change their behaviour, while leaving it to the individuals to decide how they would spend their ILA, as well as making no attempt to influence their longer term behaviour. These proved highly attractive features, and it can be concluded that this was an effective way to change behaviour, if not necessarily making much impact on cultural change. It was also extremely expensive, and involved considerable deadweight and substitution; it was therefore unsustainable. The four UK governments all abandoned the ILA scheme, and so far it has only been reintroduced in Wales, in a rather more focussed and limited version.

The ACLF was introduced with a view to encouraging community-based learning among people living in England's least advantaged neighbourhoods. Essentially, this Fund offered medium-sized grants to a very wide range of organizations, including voluntary agencies and informal groupings of various kinds, in order that they could develop new approaches to adult learning. Evaluations of the ACLF showed that it has had a considerable direct impact in reaching people who otherwise would have been either reluctant or unable to participate; it has been particularly effective in terms of its contribution to personal development, including learning how to learn; and it has had substantial indirect benefits, particularly in the form of capacity building inside the voluntary organizations that have benefited from the Fund. The important features of this programme included a willingness by government to allow arms-length agencies to manage the Fund, rather than seeking to control it directly; an insistence on partnership working within ACLF projects; and a clear focus on the least advantaged. There appears to have been some impact on cultural change, with evaluation studies suggesting that there had been some significant changes in attitudes alongside the personal development learning that had occurred.

The Union Learning Fund was also established in 1998, on the recommendation of the Fryer report. It functions in a similar way to the ACLF, but its main target group consists of trade union members, and the learning activities are managed by a trade union. Its focus has generally been somewhat restricted, concentrating mainly on activities that are designed to promote literacy, numeracy and basic IT skills. Evaluation studies have reported that the outputs from the ULF were considerable, particularly given the relatively limited size of the Fund (Armistead and Shaw 2003). One interesting feature of ULF is the way that it has been accompanied by the election, at workplace level, of local union learning representatives, who are expected both to represent and to influence their local members. The hallmarks of the ULF's success were therefore similar to those of the ACLF, but the approach to cultural change rests heavily on the role of the local learning representative.

Lastly, I would like to mention the role of government in sponsoring research into learning cultures. Particularly important here is the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Centre, established with government funding at the University of London in 1999 (see <http://www.learningbenefits.net/>). While not directly concerned with learning cultures as such, the Centre's role has been to investigate the impact of learning on a wide range of non-economic, social and private benefits, and to explore ways of evaluating types of learning that do not primarily produce standard economic outcomes (or the proxy indicators of such outcomes – usually taken to be credentials gained). The Centre's work programme has included important studies of learning and social cohesion, social capital, well being, family structures and other areas concerned with the quality of life. To date, the Centre's work has mainly been concerned with England, but it has ambitions to undertake international work, and its early findings have been greeted with considerable interest elsewhere in the English-speaking world and beyond. It has, though, conducted some preliminary international comparative analyses, and the results have been extremely significant for our understanding of culture and learning (Green, Preston and Sabates 2003; Preston and Green 2003). Potentially, its work offers significant insights into what we mean by the idea of a learning culture for our times.

Having considered some ways in which this challenge has been tackled in Britain, let me conclude with a few brief warnings about the nature of the influence of culture on lifelong learning. First, this influence may be extremely complex, and work in different ways for different types of learning. Let me illustrate this point with reference to my own research on Northern Ireland (Field 2003). Drawing both on survey data and on qualitative data, this study suggests that the existence of close community networks with strongly shared values has tended to facilitate the sharing of certain types of information among adults, thereby promoting a high level of informal learning; it has reinforced the expectations on young people to succeed in school and university, thereby promoting a high level of certificated learning among the young; and it has served to divert interest away from participation in formal learning among adults. So we should not simply assume that a given cultural pattern will automatically favour all types of learning – or conversely, undermine all types of learning.

This has implications for how we might analyse the influence of culture on learning (and vice versa) at the international level. It is tempting to take Hofstede's typology as the basis for international comparative studies. However, the impact of different cultural patterns will vary depending on a number of factors, including the type of learning under consideration. Let me take the example of high levels of power-distance, which is said by Hofstede to be typical of Chinese cultures. This feature may foster a high level of respect for teachers, and thus promote the initial socialization of young people, leading to very high levels of achievement of

credentials, and a strong platform of basic literacy, numeracy and abstract knowledge. In so far as it involves learning from a community of practice where established masters transmit their skills, it can also foster high levels of informal learning, including the transmission of tacit knowledge and embedded skills. Yet it may also inhibit certain types of learning, since these typically require a willingness to challenge accepted authorities, and to take into account and evaluate a variety of different types of information coming from multiple sources. It may also slow down the processes of collaborative knowledge creation, particularly where these processes benefit from dissonance/conflict and hybridization. These types of learning are often associated with innovation and flexibilization, which are widely seen as essential requirements of contemporary capitalist economies.

Second, learning also has an influence on culture. How people learn, what they learn, and who they learn it from – all of these can in turn shape their values and practices, in ways that may weaken existing cultural patterns and displace them with new ones. The reflexive modernization theorists that I considered earlier in this paper, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, are making precisely this point when they argue that contemporary western citizens are always drawing on knowledge and ideas in a reflexive way when they make decisions about their future behaviour. This reflexive behaviour, Giddens says, means that people do not make their decisions by reference to traditional norms and habits and authorities; rather, they reflect actively on the options that face them, and they do so with reference to a variety of competing authorities, including those – scientists and technologists – whose expertise is wholly disembedded from traditional frameworks. If they decide to behave in a customary manner, and justify it by reference to tradition, they are still doing so from a reflexive stance and with the knowledge that other options exist. The majority do not abide by tradition and habit – on the contrary.

This of course helps to explain the extraordinary cultural dynamism of many western societies, whose dominant values and cultural practices have changed considerably over the last century. For some people, this comes as a loss – the corrosion of tradition and habit are greatly to be regretted. For my purposes, though, the important consequence of this institutionalized reflexivity is that cultural change is a very hard game for the policy maker to play. Even if the policy maker succeeds in changing the culture, the results will be filtered through the countless numbers of decisions that are made by tens of millions of reflexive citizens.

Third, there are many influences on culture, of which government is only one. No culture is fixed rigidly over time; all cultures change and evolve continually. The idea of a constant, fixed culture is itself a cultural artefact – a set of beliefs that are the product of a particular time and place. But it appears to be the case, as Husén argued in the 1970s, that there is a growing number of influences on the lifestyles, values and behaviour of citizens in contemporary societies. We often use convenient shorthands such as globalization to summarize the ways in which people are subjected to a variety of influences, often originating from countries many thousands of miles from their own. Young people are particularly open to such influences, many of them American, of course, but I have to say that in Britain you can also see plenty of cultural influences that hail from this quarter of the globe: clothes sense, portable communications technologies, films, cuisine and spiritual influences have all been drawn from the Asian nations and are reshaping young people's sense of themselves and their society in Britain. But to the best of my knowledge, no one in the British government has ever made a conscious decision that these things should be purchased and enjoyed by British citizens (though some policy makers do lament our inability to copy Asian attitudes towards education and parental control). So the role of government in this area really is a limited one.

The interplay between learning and cultural patterns will continue to form a focus for both policy and scholarly interest for some time to come. I have argued above that it is possible to shape the direction of people's values and behaviour in ways that can promote learning, though these do require approaches to policy making that rely on an unusually high level of devolution of resources and decision-taking. This process is by no means a clear and direct one; rather, it is characterised by uncertainty and the risks of unintended consequences. We are, I believe, at the very early stages of understanding some of the complexities of human cultures as they impact upon learning behaviour. Further research will help us to understand more clearly how these complex inter-relationships are influenced by other factors, such as globalizing tendencies or generational change. But the challenge remains of developing an open and generous learning culture for all, so that lifelong learning becomes part of a shared endeavour to harness the resources of our planet for the good of all.

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<sup>i</sup> The British Education Index is compiled and edited at the University of Leeds. It provides bibliographic references to 350 British and selected European English-language periodicals in the field of education and training, as well as developing coverage of national report and conference literature. Figure One is based on the total numbers of references to the term "lifelong learning" in titles and abstracts of the publications covered by the Index.