CHAPTER TWO

ETHICAL ISSUES IN LIFELONG LEARNING AND EDUCATION

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LIFELONG LEARNING

The agenda of the lifelong learning movement for the worldwide transformation of social reality into lifelong learning cultures would seem to be emerging as one of the more spectacularly successful social movements in recent history. Lifelong learning is now institutionalised in the mission statements, policies and practices, not only of educational organisations but also of organisations in the corporate world, in the development plans of cities and towns and in the educational policies of governments and government instrumentalities.

The lifelong learning movement that has driven and which is identified with this triumph began in earnest in the early 1960s with the decision of the UNESCO to make lifelong education (as it was then termed) "the 'master concept' for all its educational planning" (Wain, 1987, p. 35). True to that vision, it has now anastomosed into a range of hegemonic programs, including those theorised variously as 'learning organisations', 'learning communities', and 'learning cities' (Longworth, 2003; Walker, 2001).

Those different emphases nevertheless cohere in the lifelong learning movement. That coherence is exemplified in the international plethora of lifelong learning policies and in publications such as the *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, the Pergamon international handbook, *Lifelong Education for Adults* (Titmus, 1989), the more recent Kluwer *International Handbook of Lifelong Learning* (Aspin, Chapman, Hatton, & Sawano, 2001), the edited volumes by Field and Leicester (2000) and by Holford, Jarvis and Griffin (1998) and the recently launched series of books on lifelong learning to which the present volume belongs. It is evidenced in a number of common dimensions articulated or presumed in lifelong learning advocacy, policy and programming, especially for the purposes of the present chapter the following:

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1. That learning is a human engagement that is important both throughout the lifespan and throughout all life tasks (Wain, 1987). It is not an engagement that can or should be confined to formal learning in preparation for adult life or for certain life tasks. Neither is it an engagement that can or should be confined to recognised institutions of education or training. Rather, it is and should be truly life-long and life-wide (Delors, 1996).
2. That knowledge is socially constructed (Winch, 1963). Knowledge—the immediate goal and end of learning engagements—is understood in lifelong learning theory as being the particular product of cultural traditions and perspectives. It portrays realities and presents alternative ways of engaging with them through those perspectives.
3. That learning is culturally embedded and interpersonal in nature. It is, in other words, irremediably contextualised or situated and is, in that sense, experiential in nature (Lave & Wenger, 1991). What an individual has learned is thus seen as being grounded in his or her experience. Education, then, should recognise this reality in constructing learning engagements that both build on prior learning and recognise the contextual importance of the educational intervention (Hager, 2001).
4. That learning is a holistic matter, involving the individual learner as an organic and dynamic whole, as a person—his or her feelings, intuitions, spirituality, fears, aspirations, hopes, denials, health and wellbeing, as well as his or her understanding, attitudes and skills. Learning, in other words is a humanistic endeavour (Rogers, 1969). Each individual is importantly seen as being a unique product of his or her learning and as being of value in virtue of that uniqueness. Lifelong learning theory thus places a premium on the recognition of individual diversity and rights.
5. That learning is importantly adaptational in nature (Kozlowski, 1995). I have identified this elsewhere as the adaptive progressive sentiment of lifelong learning theory and advocacy (Bagnall, 2001). It seeks through adaptive learning, liberation from deprivation, poverty and dependence.
6. That learning is importantly developmental and progressive in nature (Longworth & Davies, 1996). This I have identified elsewhere as the individual progressive sentiment (Bagnall, 2001). It seeks through lifelong learning, liberation from ignorance (through individual enlightenment), from dependence (through individual empowerment), from constraint (through the individual transformation of perspectives), or from inadequacy (through individual development).

7. That learning is importantly democratic in nature (Walker, 1992). This I have identified as the democratic progressive sentiment of lifelong learning theory and advocacy (Bagnall, 2001). It seeks through lifelong learning, liberation from inherited authority of all forms, whether autocratic, oligarchic, theocratic, or whatever, and from oppression, servitude and poverty, in the creation of a truly civil society through participative democratic involvement.
8. That learning is an individual attainment, transferable across contexts. It is knowledge that an individual may take to any situation or event and that may have application in diverse situations (Candy, Crebert, & O'Leary, 1994). This dimension also implies that bodies responsible for assessing and credentialing learning have a duty to recognise prior learning in their assessment (Skilbeck, Connell, Cave, & Tait, 1994).
9. That education for such learning should be constructed as the facilitation of learning and that access to appropriate such education is a human and democratic right and one for which educational providers and governments should be held accountable (Ball, 1990; Ranson, Rikowski, & Strain, 2001). Important here is the principle that educational access should be equitable (Ferrier & Selby-Smith, 2002).

ETHICS

Those common dimensions of the program articulated through the lifelong learning movement may be seen as suggesting a particular conception of applied ethics. Firstly, it is evident from the foregoing dimensions of the lifelong learning movement that ethical action is predicated upon humankind carrying forward a number of informed humane commitments, particularly the following.

1. A commitment to constructive engagement or participation in learning, which involves one in seeing each of life's events as a learning opportunity from which valued learning outcomes may be drawn and which may be manipulated to enhance the quality of those learning outcomes. It involves one in recognising and enhancing the learning opportunities immanent to all of life's engagements—effectively as seeing life *as* a learning engagement. With respect to the learning potential of an event, it involves one in making the best of any situation in which one finds oneself—in pragmatically accepting and building upon each situation. The nature of valued learning here—whether as process or

as outcome—is constrained by the humane commitments here noted. It embraces, though, a wide church. This commitment draws most strongly on the first dimension of lifelong above (the lifelong and life-wide nature of learning), but also on the second and third dimensions, which identify the socially constructed nature of learning outcomes and the culturally embedded nature of learning engagements. Its scope is indicated particularly by the dimensions numbered five through seven, which identify the adaptational, developmental and democratic nature of learning.

2. A commitment to oneself and one's cultural inheritance, which involves one in accepting and respecting oneself as a person of value and in seeing one's cultural inheritance—including its language, meanings and values—as worth preserving, celebrating and advancing. It draws most strongly on those dimensions of lifelong learning that identify its socially constructed, culturally embedded and holistic nature (numbers two, three and four). Presupposed here is the centrality of learning in the formation of individual and collective identity.
3. A commitment to others and their cultural differences, which involves one in respecting other persons and cultures as valued ends in themselves, not, or not merely, as opportunities to advance one's own interests. It involves one thus in respecting the differences that other persons and cultures present in comparison with one's own identity and culture. Like the immediately preceding commitment, it is grounded strongly in dimensions two through four. It also, though, draws strongly on the democratic nature of learning (dimension number seven), which presupposes the intrinsic value of others and otherness in learning, cultural development and identity formation.
4. A commitment to the human condition and its potential for progress, which involves one in seeing humanity, its nature, culture, context, limitations and possibilities as worth while, as worthy of advancing and enhancing and able to be so. The flourishing of humanity and the progress of the human condition are thus accepted as intrinsically valuable—as good—and, of course, as being achievable through human learning. This dimension draws most strongly on the adaptational, developmental and democratic dimensions of lifelong learning (five through seven above), although it presupposes the socially constructed, culturally embedded and holistic nature of learning (dimensions two through four).

5. A commitment to practical reason and its contribution to bettering the human condition, which involves one in seeing instrumental thinking, based on empirical evidence and experience, as valuable in the project of human betterment. Included here is empirical science in its various manifestations, but also informed and evidence-based policy and action much more broadly. It is grounded most strongly in the adaptational nature of learning (dimension number five), which foregrounds instrumental rationality as a means to developmental ends.
6. A commitment to social structures that give persons control over their own destinies, which involves one in valuing processes, policies and relationships that encourage individuals and collectivities to take responsibility for their own actions. Individual and collective autonomy is thus valued over heteronomy or dependence. It flows particularly from the holistic and democratic dimensions of lifelong learning (four and seven), which presuppose the value of individual and collective responsibility and hence also of social structures that enhance it. It derives also, though, from the last-noted dimension, which calls for educational opportunities that will facilitate individual and collective development—development that necessarily involves enhanced autonomy.
7. A commitment to social justice, which involves one in valuing the fair distribution of cultural goods, particularly here learning opportunities and resources. It thus involves one in valuing equitable and appropriate access to educational opportunities and to the recognition of learning attainments. It draws particularly on the holistic–humanistic and democratic dimensions of lifelong learning and that which constructs education as equitable access to structured learning opportunities (four, seven and nine). It also, though, builds strongly on the eighth dimension, which sees learning outcomes as individual attainments transferable across situations and hence as calling for the equitable recognition of prior learning.
8. A commitment to the non-violent resolution of conflicts, which involves one in working through differences in ways that avoid harm to others. Acknowledging the reality that individual and cultural differences frequently present conflicting agendas, courses of action and outcomes, in which a straightforward tolerance of the difference is not a practicable or a coherent option, some resolution or adjustment of the difference is necessary. This commitment informs those situations. It derives also

particularly from the holistic–humanistic and democratic dimensions of lifelong learning (four and seven).

These commitments are presumed to be of a general and universal kind. They are taken as goods in themselves—as qualities that define what it is to be a good person, organisation, community, city, society or other social entity. And they are taken as interdependent instrumental means to the end of attaining and sustaining the good individual or social entity. They also indicate, derivatively, what it is to do the right thing. To be intelligently committed to social justice, for example, is to act in such a way that it characterises one's actions and those of one's communities. These commitments are 'informed' in the sense that they are grounded in an understanding of their meaning and place in society—an understanding that is both theoretical and experiential and one without which an individual could not be intelligently involved in the lifelong learning project. They define important characteristics of the good individual, the good community, organisation, city, society or whatever. And they define also important qualities of human conduct necessary to attain and sustain those states of affairs. They are 'humane' commitments in that sense and may thus be seen as individual, community, organisational or societal *virtues*. The lifelong learning movement may be understood, then, as presupposing in this extended sense an ethic of virtue—an aretaic ethic. Such an ethic stands opposed to both ethical egoism (Nietzsche, 1967) and fundamentalism (Preston, 2001). An egoistic focus on doing whatever is in one's own best interests is clearly contrary to the ethical commitments enunciated here, as is a fundamentalist, self-righteous rectitude and intolerance of difference.

Secondly, the lifelong learning movement clearly recognises the contextualised nature of ethical action. The foregoing dimensions of lifelong learning focus strongly on ethical sensitivity and responsiveness to individual, collective and situational differences. They recognise knowledge as being constructed in particular cultural contexts. They recognise the value of the individual as an entity of value in and of itself. They recognise the value of cultural differences and of responding to the diverse empirical contingencies of lived circumstance. They recognise the value of sharing and negotiating meaning. And they recognise the value of individual aspiration, situation and attainment through learning and more broadly through life's events. In all of this diversity, the lifelong learning movement presupposes that the universal lifelong learning commitments—the humane virtues characterising the lifelong learning

movement—will be brought to all life's engagements in ways that are sensitive and responsive to the situational differences.

Thirdly, and finally, the lifelong learning movement presupposes a conception of ethical knowledge as progressive—developmental throughout and across life's situations, both lifelong and life-wide. It is seen as a socially constructed and situated quality or capacity of an individual to act appropriately. Appropriateness here is with respect to the lifelong learning commitments, which demand sensitivity and responsiveness to the particularities of the diverse situated events of human experience. Appropriateness is seen also as a progressive quality or capacity to act. It may be understood, in other words, as a life *skill*.

Human action and culture informed by such a conception of ethics is thus characterised by the skilled and situationally sensitive application of humane commitments. It is a conception of ethics that is grounded in Aristotelian ethics (Bagnall, 1998)—a conception argued by Alasdair MacIntyre to be the only true, sustainable and coherent approach to ethics and as that to which contemporary society must return if it is to correct the current descent into the new dark age of liberal individualism (MacIntyre, 1981). It has informed the work of other contemporary ethicists, most importantly here that of Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1990; Flyvbjerg, 1991) in their focus on ethics as a skill. Taken together, those workers present a conception of ethics that is transcendent in its commitments, situated in its responsiveness to contingent reality and individual in its capacity as a human skill.

This conception of applied ethics takes ethical knowledge to be culturally constructed, rather than it being a natural and universal property of the human condition. It understands ethical knowledge as something that is learned from and through the cultural contexts of its construction, rather than as a product of intuition or emotional disposition.

It sees the extent to which ethical knowledge is evidenced in action as a (variable) matter of degree (as well as of kind), rather than as a property that is either present or absent. Ethical knowledge is thus understood as being open to being progressively developed in an individual, into what we would consider to be ethical expertise (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1990).

It recognises ethical action as a situated outcome of what a good person is and aspires to be (or what a good society, etc. is and aspires to be). Ethical action is thus both evaluated and justified on that basis. It is in that way outcomes-focused, but not in the sense of being directed to specific action goals or outcomes. Its outcomes-focus, rather, is in the sense of ethical action being evaluated in terms of

the extent to which its effects or outcomes measure up to the standards expected in the ethical commitments in any given context.

As a skill, ethical knowledge is the skill of recognising and appraising ethically demanding situations; of identifying possible ethical issues; of identifying alternative courses of action, the resources needed for their implementation and their likely effects; of identifying the interests of those who stand to be affected by one's alternative courses of action; of explaining one's situation to others; of negotiating realities with others in cases of misunderstanding or lack of awareness; of appraising the effects of one's actions and those of others; of learning from the experience of others; of bringing past experience to bear on current situations in all of the foregoing tasks; and of undertaking them with situational sensitivity and responsiveness.

So conceptualised, ethical knowledge is seen as being knowable—learned—primarily through contextualised, guided practice and critical reflection on that practice and through modelling good practice (Dreyfus, Dreyfus, & Athanasiou, 1986; Proctor & Dutta, 1995). It clearly also, though, depends on descriptive or theoretical knowledge. The sort of descriptive and theoretical knowledge informing skilled ethical action is centrally not a knowledge of principles, rules or precepts of ethical action. It is rather a knowledge of possible ethical issues or concerns; of alternative courses of action and their demands and consequences; and of the likely expectations, interests, values and beliefs of those who stand to be affected by the alternative courses of action.

In their phenomenological account of ethics, the Dreyfuses have argued for the applicability of their five levels of skilled performance: those of the novice, the advanced beginner, the competent, the proficient, and the expert (Dreyfus, Dreyfus, & Athanasiou, 1986). Novice performance involves the situationally unresponsive and analytical application of ethical rules, precepts or maxims in a detached and non-perspectival manner. Advanced beginner performance involves a limited situational responsiveness in an otherwise similar manner. Competent performance introduces the selection of an ethical perspective and some involvement in the outcome of action. Proficient performance introduces the adoption of an experience-based ethical perspective and involvement in intuitively understanding the action taken. Finally, expert performance sees decision-making occurring intuitively, with involvement in (identification with or commitment to) all aspects of the engagement and its outcome. The main focus of skill development in this sequence is from the detached, context-free application of precepts, through deliberative, analytical decision-making to select a plan for each event, to intuitive, committed, situated action based on experience. Radically

novel situations that cannot be recognised and acted upon in the manner of an individual's skill level, or that lead to failure, are evaluated through deliberative rationality—effectively involving a situated regression to lower skill levels. In this developmental sequence, ethical reasoning plays an important role in ethical action. It is, though, a much more limited role than that in highly deliberative approaches to ethics such as utilitarianism (Smart, 1973) and ethical rationalism (Baier, 1958), where ethical reason or rationality is central and indispensable to ethical action. Here, ethical reason is seen as playing a progressively diminishing role in parallel to the development of ethical skill, but as remaining important particularly in critically evaluating radically novel situations and the ethical value of action taken in them.

Ethical knowledge and action as it is here understood stands opposed to codes of conduct. Codes of conduct seek to universalise ethical precepts. In contrast with the foregoing aspects of ethical knowledge as a skill, codes of conduct construct ethical knowledge: (1) as universally applicable within the community of practice for which they are intended (rather than as situationally responsive); (2) as absolute and invariable (rather than as a matter of degree); (3) as imperative knowledge to be applied in practical contexts (rather than as the situationally skilled application of humane commitments); (4) as knowable through study of the code and brought to individual practice (rather than being knowable, developed and learned through guided practice); (5) as evidenced in action that is evaluated and justified with respect to the codified precepts (rather than with respect to the good); and (6) as encouraging commitment to the code (rather than to a life lived according to the commitments). The various aspects of skilled ethical performance are not addressed in codes of practice. The descriptive and theoretical knowledge informing skilled knowledge and expertise are rarely mentioned in such codes.

More generally, ethical knowledge and action as it is here understood is opposed by contemporary approaches to applied ethics as rule-governed behaviour. This opposition applies to those (non-consequentialist) approaches in which the rules are expressed as duties (Darwall, 1977) or as rights (Locke, 1960). It applies also to those (consequentialist) approaches in which the rules are expressed as algorithms for the calculation of ethical outcomes. Most notably here, of course, is utilitarianism, which in varying ways and degrees is so influential currently in decision-making (Singer, 1979).

Ethical knowledge and action as it is here articulated is also opposed to tribalistic and the contemporarily important neo-tribalistic approaches to applied ethics (Maffesoli, 1988). In these approaches, ethical commitment is focused on or limited to particular categories of persons and cultural realities: one's family,

organisation, interest group, ethnic group, social class, or whatever (Maffesoli, 1996). Others are of lesser ethical value or of no ethical value. Such approaches to ethics run counter to the universal ethical commitments of the lifelong learning movement.

Conceptions of ethics as empathising with others (Verducci, 2000), as a love for others, in the sense of agapé (Fletcher, 1966), as relating to others in 'I–Thou' rather than 'I–it' relationships (Buber, 1965), or as caring for others (Noddings, 1984) all capture important aspects of ethical knowledge and action as it is here articulated. Clearly, though, they are insufficient descriptions of it. The ethical commitments recognised here, on their own, embrace a much wider realm of cultural realities than those of other persons.

ETHICAL LEARNING

Such a conception of applied ethics—as action characterised by the skilled and situationally sensitive application of humane commitments—has a number of implications for its learning within a lifelong learning framework.

Firstly, here, we may note that ethical learning is importantly grounded in ethical practice. Ethical knowledge as a skill is essentially knowable largely from and through actual or simulated performance of the knowledge. It is therefore necessarily learned through practice and its associated activities, such as modelling, in actual or simulated contexts that capture the complexity and richness of ethical action. Ethical precepts, principles, rules and axioms, which may be learned through educational instruction, inform the ethical decisions of the novice but, above that level, they play a diminishingly important role to the point that, in the higher skill levels, it is learning from experience that informs normal ethical practice as a skill. The learning of ethical commitment is no less dependent on learning through everyday involvement in events in which such commitment is practiced and informs the culture of the events. It is learned through immersion in communities of practice where such commitment is valued and modelled by valued others. Ethical precepts may therefore be expected to be educationally valuable in ethical development largely only for the very young and for those immediately recovering from profound memory loss. For higher skill levels, they may also be helpful, though, in evaluating ethical action after the event and hence in learning from the experience of radically different events where some degree of failure has been experienced.

The practice-based nature of ethical learning is linked to its situated nature. Skilled ethical responsiveness to new events, though, is limited by and to the

range of that experience. To be skilled across a broad range of ethically demanding situations implies prior experience of events over that range. The less rich the ethical learning from a diversity of events, the more coarsely and hence insensitively will be the categorisation of events and the responses to them. Educationally, then, there is an imperative to enhance the range and richness of ethically challenging events experienced and critically reflected on by learners. Approaches to education that may best contribute to such learning are those of process drama (O'Neill, 1995) and possibly virtual simulations through electronic gaming. Process drama would seem to be the most direct and authentic approach to simulation here. It also allows readily for interactive lived engagements with others in the process and for guided critical reflection after the dramatic event (Bundy, 1999). E-mediated simulations are certainly most appropriate for learning through situations in the increasingly important field of electronic engagements. However, the level of sophistication required of electronic games in this field of learning would render their development a highly costly venture and one that would require a very high end use in comparison with the relatively low cost of process drama. E-gaming, though, is much less expensive to operate for each learner once development has been undertaken, although this may be off-set by its limited flexibility.

Individual or group learning through case studies—such as through the study of historical accounts of experience, novels, films, plays, and so on (Kekes, 1993)—would seem to have potential for ethical learning in sensitising learners to possibly important ethical differences and as a source of precepts for reflecting critically on ethical performance outcomes from radically different ethically challenging events. At face value, though, case studies would seem not to provide the degree of learner engagement in events that is implied by the learning of ethical skill at or above the level of advanced beginner. Such learning engagements may, though, have general utility in learning precepts at the novice skill level. It may also be valuable in maintaining and strengthening ethical commitment, through either positive or negative instances.

Ethical commitment would seem to be most vulnerable to diminution or loss through gradual, progressive erosion of ethical commitment in one's cultural contexts, whether actual or virtual. Radical erosion is more likely to be experienced as negative—providing an oppositional strengthening of individual commitment in the face of such erosion. Educationally, then, radically negative case studies may be valuable in enhancing ethical commitment. Radically positive case studies, on the other hand, are more likely to be experienced as unattainable.

While they may not diminish commitment, they are unlikely to enhance it. Mildly positive case studies, though, may be expected to be more enhancing.

Being situated and grounded in practice, ethical learning as a skill is subject to refinement and extension in every situation in which it is used. It is thus truly lifelong and life-wide (Delors, 1996). The learning of ethical skill through such situated engagements involves—consistent with the nature of ethical action itself—learning activities that are outcomes-focused. The degree of ethical success from the (learned) development of ethical skill will importantly be ascertained against the general expectation defined by the ethical commitment within the learning context.

Learning through ethical experience is the essence of learning ethical skill at all but the level of the novice. Higher levels of ethical skill involve the use of categories with which any new event is identified and from which is derived an action plan or course of action. Since those categories and their selection are based increasingly on ethical experience, there is a clear learning imperative to experience as wide a range of such events as needs demand. And since the critical evaluation of individual events of ethical experience is important to learning from the experience of each event, meta-skills or cognitive strategies (Gagné, 1977) involved in such evaluation are indicated as learning needs. Through appropriately organised simulation and guided reflection on action, education at any stage in life may enhance the development of ethical skill.

Interestingly, ethical expertise (and, to a lesser extent, also proficiency) may be seen in a sense as a barrier to responding appropriately in new situations, since it involves the intuitive categorising of and responding to newly experienced events on the basis of prior experience. The more limited the diversity of situations embraced by that experience, the more dysfunctional may be the intuitive categorising and responding. On the other hand, from a learning perspective, such events may be valuable, since learning from critical reflection on one's errors is such an important part of developing ethical skill. Beyond the skill level of novice, ethical skill learning necessarily involves the making of ethical errors. The risks involved in making such errors in real life, though, can be considerable—a point that calls for educational interventions that allow errors to be made in the development of ethical skill in relatively risk-free simulations, through the use of process drama and virtual engagements using educational gaming and such like.

The role of ethical theory in the development of ethical skill would seem to be primarily that of providing a conceptual framework for the development of meta-ethical-learning skills or cognitive strategies. It may also provide learners with the

theoretical understanding with which to evaluate moral education, propaganda, and their own ethical learning. For teachers in particular, the study of ethical theory may provide the conceptual frameworks through which to structure their teaching of ethical skill. The oppositional relationship between ethical knowledge and codes of conduct or contracts (whether sectoral or situational) argues for the need for education that raises awareness of that relationship, of its consequences for human action and of how to work with those consequences in an ethically informed manner. This would involve at least guided practice in events involving such opposition and structured reflection on practice and action in such events. It presents also another role for ethical theory. However, the study of ethical theory is unlikely to impact directly on the development of ethical skill or commitment.

The earlier-noted commitment of lifelong learning to the construction of education as the facilitation of learning and as a human right for which educational providers and governments should be held accountable implies, in the context of this analysis, that lifelong education should embrace appropriate ethical learning. It implies that ethical learning should be a matter of curricular concern in lifelong learning advocacy, policy and programming, that learners have a right to such learning opportunities as they need them throughout life, for example when confronting radically new and ethically challenging situations, and that educational providers and government agencies should be held accountable for the provision and the quality of such learning opportunities.

ISSUES IN LIFELONG LEARNING AND EDUCATION

However, engaging in that programmatic responsibility may be expected to highlight a number of issues arising from the conception of ethical knowledge and action argued here to be entailed by contemporary lifelong learning theory. Those issues may be understood as *tensions* inherent to the conception of applied ethics as action characterised by the skilled and situationally sensitive application of informed humane commitments. Eight such tensions are here outlined, although these may constructed in different ways and thereby also variously aggregated or subdivided.

1. The tension between the universality of the humane commitments and the situatedness of ethical knowledge and action. On the one hand, lifelong learning theory presents the humane commitments as universally applicable: across cultural and other situational differences. On the other

hand, ethical action is necessarily situationally or contextually responsive and thus situationally sensitive and informed. Lifelong learning theory thus requires universal commitments to be used in a situationally sensitive manner. Any erosion of the humane commitments to enhance situational responsiveness will open action to charges of ethical or cultural relativism. Conversely, any more particular specification of the ethical commitments as rules or codes of conduct applicable across contexts will stand to limit situational responsiveness and therein to reduce the ethical quality of action taken in accordance with the rules or codes. The development of ethical skill thus requires the development of an understanding of and sensitivity to these limitations, without which action will be compromised.

Derivatively, in educational interventions, there is the tension between the learning of applied ethical theory—particularly that of lifelong learning ethics—and the learning of ethical skill. On the one hand, applied ethical theory is seen as universally applicable; on the other, ethical skill can only be developed in a situationally-sensitive, informed and responsive manner. The level of ethical skill development will be limited by the learner's knowledge of each particular situation, but his or her knowledge of ethical theory (including the humane commitments) is trans-contextual or transcendent across situations. The two aspects of ethical knowledge thus present very different, indeed opposed, learning demands. Any confusion of the two aspects, or any erosion of one by an over-emphasis on the other, may be counter-ethical in its learning outcomes.

2. The tension between the categorical nature of ethical skill and the demand for situational sensitivity. The learning of ethical skill is situated, but the application of that learning is generalised across a category of ethically similar or like situations. Without such generalisation, the learner is ethically constrained to act in only a very limited range of cultural events. However, the greater the degree of generalisation, the less the sensitivity of the action to ethically significant differences across situations. Ethical skill must thus be learned in particular situations and applied to others, but ethical action also demands situational sensitivity in the application of ethical skill—a sensitivity that diminishes with the extent of generalisation. The development of ethical skill thus presents conflicting demands between, on the one hand, its refinement through repeated application or practice in like situations and, on the other, extending its

range of through exposure to novel situations to which generalisation is inappropriate or should be limited.

3. The tension between the deliberative ethical reasoning required in the early stages of ethical skill development and the intuitive responsiveness of more highly skilled ethical action. The learning required for skill development at the lower levels of skill development, and for working within ethically novel situations, includes the learning of deliberative, rational, logical routines or algorithms to guide the process of assessing the ethically significant features of the situations, identifying and weighing up the value of alternative courses of action, obtaining the information necessary to do so, taking the indicated action and evaluating its consequences (Baier, 1958). In contrast, at higher levels of skill development, action is increasingly intuitive and the learning involved is thus diminishingly deliberative and consciously engaged in. There is thus tension between these two learning demands—both over developmental and across developmentally simultaneous situations when radically novel situations are encountered by an ethically skilled individual.
4. The tension between the experiential nature of ethical skill learning and the potential risks of such learning. While the development (the learning) of ethical skill demands learning events that are highly authentic and culturally embedded, the adverse consequences of errors from ethically flawed actions in such events would appear to be correspondingly high. The more naturalistic a learning event, the higher the potential risk. Entirely uncontrived (natural) events may be ideal for the refinement of ethical skill, but the consequences of ethically inappropriate action may be severe. There may thus be a tendency to be conservative and situationally insensitive in the face of radically novel situations—and hence to limit the opportunity to develop new ethical skill from and appropriate to those situations. The diversity of human nature and culture indicates that the development of ethical skill needs to be a truly lifelong and life-wide engagement. The provision of educationally contrived situations—such as through the use of process drama—to accommodate even a significant part of such learning is thus clearly out of the question. Responding effectively to this tension is thus a major challenge to ethical learning.
5. The tension between ethical progressivism and respect for cultural traditions. On the one hand, lifelong learning theory calls for a commitment to the progressive development of individuals and cultural

entities through lifelong learning. On the other hand, that theory calls for cultural traditions to be valued and cherished—both in oneself and in others. Clearly, there will be many situations when new learning conflicts with tradition, particularly when tradition works to perpetuate or contribute to structural disadvantage or to constrain educational provision or access in a manner that is contrary to the informed commitments, through the exercise of traditional authority or power. In all such situations, the learning of situational sensitivity will be inherently conflictual. The learning of some ethical skills, in other words, will be in conflict with the learning of others, both sets of which will be ethically informed by lifelong learning theory. Learning how to work within this tension presents a major challenge for lifelong learning theory.

6. The tension between individual and collective rights and duties. On the one hand, lifelong learning theory presents a number of humane commitments to the development of individuals. Individuals are seen as having a right to appropriate learning opportunities. On the other hand, there is a strong commitment to equity of access to those opportunities. Individuals are expected to make the most of their situation and inheritance and yet if their situation and inheritance inequitably advantages them, others are seen as having rights to a redressing of the inequity. The collective commitments in lifelong learning theory are thus in strong tension with the individual commitments. Again, here, we see the learning of some ethical skills potentially in conflict with the learning of others—presenting an important challenge to the further development of lifelong learning theory.
7. The tension between the tolerance of ethical differences and difference as intolerable. On the one hand, lifelong learning theory calls for differences in other individuals and cultures to be respected and accepted as part of the rich tapestry of human existence. On the other hand, it calls for a commitment to the humane commitments themselves, without which humanity is diminished and potentially threatened. In other words, there are limits to the tolerance of difference, beyond which the tolerance of difference is increasingly counter-ethical. If there were to be defined a point at which the tolerance of difference becomes unethical, it would be that beyond which living according to the humane commitment was threatened by the difference in the other. It could be, for example, any action by another to limit social justice, to resolve conflict in a violent manner, to avoid responsibility for his or her actions, or to limit human

achievement. Importantly, though, all such points are recognisable only in situated events, where conflicting imperatives are weighed to determine the ethical limits to tolerance in an appropriately democratically participative manner. Ethical learning is thus presented with the task of learning the skills and sensitivities to inform such judgements and actions.

8. The tension between self-interest (ethical egoism) and a commitment to the interests and welfare of others. On the one hand, lifelong learning theory contains strong elements of ethical egoism, required, for example, making the best of any situation, in valuing oneself and one's cultural inheritance and in taking responsibility for one's actions. On the other hand, there are strong elements of altruism in lifelong learning theory in, for example, the commitment to social justice and to the non-violent resolution of conflicts. To construct all the ethical demands of lifelong theory as entirely explicable in terms of enlightened self-interest is to fail to capture the richness and depth of that theory's commitment to the generation and maintenance of universal social good. While systems of reward and punishment may be generated within such a theoretical framework to capture the dimensions of that good, they will be unavoidably, reductive, formulaic and, ultimately, thereby contrary to the theory itself. Lifelong learning theory and its realisation in ethical action thus demands acting and learning within this tension, rather than through its resolution.

DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals the importance of ethical skill learning *within* realistic cultural contexts. To the extent that ethical learning is thus located, it cannot be separated intelligently from ethical action. The tensions of ethical action within a lifelong learning cultural framework thus become the tensions of ethical skill learning.

This analysis does not seek to offer solutions to those tensions. Indeed, it is questionable whether any such solutions are desirable. As I have argued elsewhere (e.g., Bagnall, 2004, 1999), living and working within such tensions is much more congruent with the contemporary cultural context of epistemic and cultural ambiguity than is any action to transcend or overcome them.

In the same vein, the existence and importance of these tensions should not be interpreted as a ground for rejecting contemporary lifelong learning theory.

I would wish to argue the contrary case—that the existence and importance of the tensions is an important expression of the relevance of that theory to the contemporary cultural condition.

What clearly is indicated by this analysis is the need for much more theorisation and experimentation of *ways* of working within the tensions and of learning to do so. To inform lifelong learning programmatic policy and action, the sort of research, development and scholarship that is indicated is clearly that with a focus on critical case studies in which the richness of context, action and the consequences of action is portrayed and evaluated in an integrated (holistic) and situationally sensitive manner. Through such studies our knowledge of possibilities, opportunities and possible situational relationships may be raised and sensitised.

The analysis presents lifelong learning theory and advocacy as an essentially normative project. As such, it seeks to create and perpetuate cultural realities that have certain ethical properties—those defined in this case by what I have articulated here as the humane commitments. As such, lifelong learning theory is irreducibly political and ethical. The centrality of ethics to the lifelong learning project needs to be better recognised in analysis, critique, research and development.

The implications of this analysis for lifelong learning policy and regulation are clearly for policy that opens up opportunities for and encourages the flourishing of a diversity of situationally sensitive programmatic responses. They are not for the regulation or the detailed specification of accountabilities, but for the legislating of broad, facilitative guidelines and supportive mechanisms grounded in the humane commitments.

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