Chapter 1
Lifelong Learning: Concepts and Conceptions

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The Concept of 'Lifelong Learning' for All

Although the term 'lifelong learning' is used in a wide variety of contexts and has a wide currency, its meaning is often unclear. One of the early writers on the topic Gelpi (1984) bemoaned the lack of conceptual clarity and argued that there was a need for a clear definition of the term. The problem, he maintained, was that, while one could be reasonably clear about the meaning and applicability of such terms as 'vocational education', 'technical education', and 'nurse education', no such clarity could be found in the case of terms with much less specific points of application, such as 'lifelong education', particularly when a range of other apparently similar terms – *education permanente*, 'further education', 'continuing education', and so on – were often used interchangeably with it and with each other.

Other writers on the topic have maintained that there is no point in trying to apply the term 'lifelong education'. They claim that such a term seeks to generalize the reference of the notion of 'education' to such a wide set of parameters as virtually to empty it of all meaning. Still others have acted as though the term 'lifelong education' were simply another way of alluding to those educational endeavours and opportunities that were offered after the end of formal schooling and thus was interchangeable and synonymous with terms that had wider currency, such as 'adult education', 'careers education', or 'recurrent education' (Stock 1979).

Yet another group have commented that, while there may be enough examples around in the history of educational philosophy of such key ideas as 'liberal education' or 'moral education' to offer discussants a reasonably firm point of purchase, there is so little said about 'lifelong education' in the educational philosophy literature, and discourse that there is almost nothing on which we can get a grip in our attempts to give a clear account of those elements that we may discern as being cardinal to or indicative of its meaning and application.

Richard Bagnall usefully highlighted the various differences between approaches to understanding the concept (Bagnall 1990). He noted that at least four main functions for the notion of 'lifelong education' have been assigned to the term in the literature:

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- The preparation of individuals *for* the management of their adult lives (White 1982, p.132)
- The distribution of education *throughout* an individual's lifespan (Kulich 1982)
- The educative function *of* the whole of one's life experience (Peña-Borrero 1984)
- The identification of education *with* the whole of life (Lengrand 1979)

Furthermore, Bagnall identified another interpretation as constituting what he calls 'the Programme' of 'Lifelong Education':

> that particular programmatic use of the term which has been developed through and in association with the UNESCO Lifelong Education Unit, and which Cropley (1979a, p.105) terms the 'maximalist position'. This position is that which sees lifelong education as involving a fundamental transformation of society, so that the whole society becomes a learning resource for each individual. (Cropley 1979a, p.105)

Exploring Alternative Approaches to Conceptualising Lifelong Learning

In this chapter we review some of the more robust versions of the concept of lifelong learning, set out the main lines of the conceptions of education articulated in them, show in what ways those conceptions might be partial, deficient, or fallacious, and then go on to suggest an alternative. Our analysis begins with a scrutiny of the notion that an agreed 'essential' definition of 'lifelong education' can be achieved, moves on to the search for such a definition, and then embarks on an examination of two of the most widely held views of 'lifelong education': one that is termed the 'maximalist' position; and the other that sees lifelong learning as an extension of the deliberate and planned interventions characteristic of 'education proper'. Operating from a post-empiricist standpoint, we argue that such searches are misconceived and rest on a false view of the nature of sciences and of concepts. We challenge the essentialism of the definitional approach and the claims to objectivity of the 'liberal education extended' account of lifelong education; and we reject the relativism of the maximalist position. In their place we proffer a pragmatic, problem-solving approach.

The Vain Quest for Definitions

There is an important point to be made when one is considering the positions that have been taken in the past in respect to the concept of lifelong learning and the arguments that have been put forward by various proponents of these positions. It seems to us that differences in and between various versions of 'lifelong education' are functions, not only of particular educational, moral, or political commitments, but also of a particular meta-theory at work in the philosophy of lifelong education.

In some versions of the term, and in various attempts to produce a clear account of it, we may discern the presence and operation of a particular preconception. In many writers' work on lifelong education, there seems to be an implicit acceptance of the notion that it is possible to arrive at some uniform descriptive definition of the term 'lifelong education', which all could then accept and take as a kind of *primum datum*; and that, if there were not such a definition already available, then there ought to be. The common postulate shared by many writers – particularly the earlier ones – seems to be that unambiguous agreement on the meaning and applicability of the term is conceivable, possible, and attainable. In this tacit assumption we see evidence that these writers on lifelong education appear to be operating according to the logic and dictates of an empiricist approach to concepts and meaning (see Dave 1975; Cropley 1979; Gelpi 1985; Lengrand 1975, 1986; and Richmond and Stock 1979).

The main feature observable in the work of such writers is their holding of preconceptions about definition that may be described as 'essentialist'. This is the notion that it is possible, and indeed philosophically proper, for participants in discussion about any such term in educational discourse to employ the methods of etymological derivation, dictionary definition, or the sharp-cutting tools of conceptual analysis (looking for those cases that all can agree to be 'central' or 'peripheral' to allowable utterance employing the terms in question), in order to arrive at some kind of agreement about the separately 'necessary' and conjointly 'sufficient' conditions that will underpin and define the direction of discourse employing this term.

That this presumption and *modus operandi* encapsulate a mistaken view of meaning and intelligibility has been common coinage for some time now (see arguments and sources cited in Aspin 1996a, b). It has been subjected to the formidable *elenchus* of the criticisms advanced against it by such powerful antilocutors as Popper, Wittgenstein, and Quine, to say nothing of more modern writers such as Rorty (1979) or Bernstein (1983). As a result of this *critique* we may now accept their point that this particular view can be called seriously into question if not decisively refuted. Instead of falling into the fallacy of seeking to achieve clarity about or understanding of the 'essential', 'basic', or 'central' meaning of the term 'lifelong education' according to such rubrics, we believe it is time to start on the search for other expedients.

The notion that the quest for 'essential' definitions was legitimate was held in an earlier era where students of education accepted the academic tenability and conformed to the dictates of the empiricist paradigm, tending only to engage in activities of conceptual analysis, pursuing philosophical enquiries, and developing and applying research designs and instruments exclusively based upon it. Recently, however, researchers in education and the social sciences have moved towards an approach based on advances in epistemology and methodology, that arise from post-empiricist work in philosophy and the philosophy of science, such as that of Popper (1943, 1949, 1960, 1972), Lakatos (1976, 1978), and Quine (1951, 1953, 1974).

In opposition to the thesis of empiricism, the main burden of the counter-arguments has been to show that there is no such distinction as that supposed to subsist between philosophy and empirical science, fact and value, or, come to that, between

policy analysis and policy formation. For Quine, Popper, and many others, all language and all enquiries are inescapably and *ab initio* theory-laden, far from value-free, and a mixture of both descriptive and normative elements. Indeed, says Kovesi (1967), in all discourse and enquiry, there is an unbroken continuum, at one end of which lies 'fact' and at the other end lies 'value'. Description, for such thinkers, is a way of evaluating reality; evaluation is a way of describing states of affairs.

Such arguments are used powerfully by such post-empiricist thinkers in education as Evers and Lakomski (1991) to develop a new approach to the elucidation of problems in educational discourse and policy. On this view all our talk on these matters is conceived of as being in itself a 'theory', embodying a complex 'web of belief' (see Quine and Ullian 1970), shot through differentially with descriptive and evaluative elements, according to the contexts and purposes of which our theories of education, policy, and administration are brought to bear and applied in our world.

For such reasons it can be argued that there is a need, in philosophical activities devoted to a thorough-going, intellectually responsible enquiry into such matters as lifelong education, to fuse description–evaluation, fact–value, quantitative–qualitative methods in new forms of enquiry, that are valuable both for the researcher and the policy-maker in educational matters. Such an approach would involve both groups in a common enterprise – what Lakatos (1976, 1982) might have seen as a 'progressive research programme' – of seeking to gain understanding and promote policy generation about lifelong education. On this account future work in the philosophy of education would be well advised to consider the adoption of approaches of this kind (see, e.g. Wain 1985).

In this enterprise, we do not attempt to reduce everything to some absolute foundations of 'fact' and 'value', 'theory' and 'practice', or 'policy' and 'implementation', in the (vain) attempt to educe some 'analyses' of concepts and theories, that can be completely 'correct' or 'true'; or to produce some fundamental matters of indisputable research 'findings', about the objectivity and existence of which there can be no dispute. Against this notion we tentatively contend that another approach is to be preferred. What is important, when we endeavour to identify the nature, aims, and purposes of all kinds of educating institutions, activities, and processes – formal and informal, fixed-term and lifelong – and to promote excellence, effectiveness, and quality in them, particularly when we wish to get clear about the contribution of such activities to programmes of lifelong learning, is, we believe, *to adopt some such pragmatic method as the following*:

- To seek to understand the questions, the problems, the categories, and criteria with which researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners in the field of lifelong learning are currently concerned and are working
- To identify the theories with which researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners in the field are operating
- To seek to understand the causes of success or failure in the conception and application of such theories, policies, and practices, as a necessary prelude to attenuating or eliminating dysfunctions and establishing or ameliorating structures and procedures that would conduce towards improvement

It is by looking at the various attempts that have been made to give form, content, and direction to the idea of 'lifelong education' that we may begin to develop and articulate a theory that will bear application to the problems that those who place so much emphasis upon the idea of 'lifelong education' are seeking to address and to solve. Of course, we cannot assume that all these problems are the same or even similar: different countries, different educational systems, different agencies of education will be preoccupied with some similar but many different quandaries. Such differences will not be only those of degree of complexity or difficulty; the problems they address will also be different in kind. This is something of which anyone attempting to give some account of 'lifelong education' will rapidly become uncomfortably aware.

The reason for this is not far to seek. Like 'Art', 'Religion', and 'Democracy', 'Education' (and *a fortiori* 'lifelong education') is an example of what W.B. Gallie (1956, 1964) called an 'essentially contested concept' (see Hartnett and Naish 1976). To think that one can find an 'essential', 'basic', or uncontestable definition of 'lifelong education' is to embark upon a search for a chimaera. So, rather than engaging in a futile search for the real meaning or an uncontested definition of lifelong education, we would suggest that the best one can do is to follow Wittgenstein's advice (Wittgenstein 1953, 1958) and 'look at the use' of this term in the discourse of those who employ it. This will enable us to note the increasing frequency and growing importance of the idea of 'lifelong education' in international discussions of educational policy, planning, and administration at the present time. We may then look carefully at the wide range of examples of the ways the topic appears in the discourse of education professionals and members of the broader community at the current time and see if we can discern any 'family resemblances' that may help us to move intelligently from the scrutiny of one set of uses to another centring on and employing reference to this topic.

A Consideration of Different Understandings: The Maximalist Position

The post-empiricist approach to understanding the various types and shades of meaning given to 'lifelong education' in educationists' talk sits well, on the surface at least, with the position that might be adopted towards *lifelong learning* by Kenneth Wain, one of the main writers on the philosophy of lifelong education in recent times (Wain 1984, 1985, 1987, 1993a, b). Wain accepts the point, by now widely agreed among philosophers of education, that, for good philosophical reasons, no one absolute and clearly agreed definition of 'education' can be found. He finds proof of this in the numerous accounts of activities or programmes falling under the heading of lifelong education. Some of these are synonymous, some overlapping, some contiguous, some distinct, some divergent, some conflicting, some opposing.

But Wain has another explanation for this. His rejection of essentialism and absolutism and the kind of normative conceptual analysis practised by proponents of *liberal education* such as Peters, Hirst, and White (see Harris 1979, Chapter 1) lead him to look to another account of differences in understanding and intelligibility. He finds this in Kuhnian paradigm theory (Kuhn 1973): for Wain the intelligibility and normative force of a number of different theories or programmes of lifelong education may be best explained as functions of different paradigms.

The paradigm from which Wain develops his own account thus makes of educational theory what some people have called a 'site of contestation': 'an area of competing programmes adherence to which constitutes the basis of agreement or disagreement between philosophers and educationalists who support one or the other' (Wain 1987, p.29). In Wain's view, such different theories of lifelong education are not only incommensurable with but also competing against each other for acceptance, support, and implementation. The resolution of these conflicts and the attempt to secure some sort of inter-paradigm intelligibility can only be achieved by reference to a 'touchstone' of rationality. 'Touchstone' in this sense suggests an area of inter-paradigm agreement, constituted not only by appropriate algorithms of coherence, logic, and semantics but also by areas of common interest, problems, and potential agreement.

Reference to 'touchstone' indicates that Wain has adopted a Lakatosian approach (see Lakatos 1976, 1978) to the question of the multiplicity, variety, and difference between theories of lifelong education. He says as much:

> [T]he idea of using Lakatos' model to describe an 'education programme' came from reading Harris (1979). … I regard the concept of education as one which is both contestable and liable to different interpretations … the decision as to which interpretation is the best one depends on nothing extrinsic to the power of the 'programme' each concept translates into. … There is nothing that lies beyond the programme … that can be appealed to to decide between competing interpretations of the concept. This view implies … a plurality of competing interpretations of education … that instead of one 'education' there are several 'educations' … that the world of educational theory should be permanently regarded as one of competing interpretations of what education should mean, competing … for the allegiance or commitment of practitioners and policy-makers. (Wain 1993a, p.60)

Wain adopts, as his preferred version of the 'progressive research programme' of lifelong education, the 'maximalist notion' incorporated in the UNESCO 'Programme'. He adopts and advocates this maximalist notion as the various writers on, and proponents of, this term (see Dave, Cropley, Gelpi, Lengrand, Suchodolski in Wain 1987) have delivered it:

> '[L]ifelong education' stands for a programme to reconceptualise education totally according to the principle that education is a lifelong process. … for a complete overhaul of our way of thinking about education, for a new philosophy of education and … for a programme of action (Fauré 1972; Lengrand 1975; Dave 1976; Cropley 1975) … as the 'master concept' for all educational planning, policy-making, and practice. Their ambition was that the word education would eventually become synonymous with lifelong education in people's minds … (today's) world … requires a lifelong education which is a 'constant reorganising or reconstructing of experience'. (Dewey 1966, p.76)

Wain claims Dewey, with *his* emphasis upon education as 'conceived as a continuous process of "reorganisation and readjustment" of experience and the pragmatic concerns of lifelong education', as the intellectual forebear of the UNESCO

programme and of the maximalist position. He points out (Wain 1993a, pp.59–62 *passim*) the large-scale social implications of this conception of lifelong education:

> Dewey's declaration that "to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living" (Dewey 1966, p.51) lays the seed for the movement's conception of the "learning society" … one which is participatory, democratic and bent towards realising humane educational practice. (See Fauré 1972; Suchodolski 1976).

According to Wain this does *not* mean that the whole of one's life is to be taken as educational. It is not the case that all activities we engage in, all the experiences we have, all the growth that occurs is, in and of itself, the education we receive. If it were, there would be nothing to distinguish between 'life' and 'education', between maturational and developmental growth *simpliciter* and 'growth' as a species of lifelong educatedness. Furthermore Wain is at pains to argue that Dewey's concept of 'growth' did not mean that all our life's experiences are educational; he distinguishes these from those that are educationally relevant (Wain 1987, pp.170–171). This, Wain maintains, gives us a principle of discrimination and choice between experiences. In order to make the necessary demarcation of what experience is to be regarded as educationally relevant in this way Wain brings in Dewey's criterion of learning as *directed* growth:

> Dewey … is interested in learning as "that reconstruction or reorganisation of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (Dewey 1966, p.76), to be distinguished from learning "as preparation for a remote future, as unfolding, as external formation, and as recapitulation of the past" (Dewey 1966, p.80) and include informal learning. (See Dewey 1966, Chapter 2)
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> Dewey … does not forego adopting operational criteria to distinguish what learning is technically "educative" from what is not. Making experience subject to criteria … effectively means bringing it under the control of the learner, researcher, or educator … the learning context signifies for Dewey "a specially selected environment, the selection being made on the basis of materials and method specifically promoting growth in the desired direction" (Dewey 1966, p.38). Dewey … specified that *educational* growth should involve the direction of experience in certain ways. (See Dewey 1966, Chapter 3)

This, argues Wain, should absolve Dewey from any charge of 'having proposed an anarchic definition of education as growth'.

Wain also points out the importance of the notion of direction and conscious ordering in the reconstruction and reorganisation of experience in desired directions as the manifestation of a concern on the part of proponents of the maximalist position to show that educators are leaders of the 'learning society':

> The programme's proposal that lifelong education … should be institutionalised in a "learning society" clearly shows that … it wants to make education more central to society, not deprive people of the right to it. (Wain 1993, p.67)

Wain expands upon what a 'maximalist' conception of a 'learning society' might mean:

> There is no 'model' learning society, there are different forms a learning society could take, just as there are different forms the lifelong education programme could take. What distinguishes one learning society from the other is precisely the kind of programme it institutionalises within its particular socio-cultural and political context. The political characteristics of the movement's learning society are … democratic … a shared, pluralistic and participatory 'form of life' in Dewey's sense.

> This means reassessing the role of the school and of childhood learning … and prioritising adult learning on the same level. A fundamental strategy with regard to the latter is to sensitise social institutions, the family, the church, political party, trade union, place of employment, etc., to their educational potential … with respect to their members. To encourage these institutions to regard themselves as potential educative agencies for their members and for the wider society. (Wain 1993a, p.68)
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> [T]he learning society is one that is exceedingly self-conscious about education in its total sense; that is conscious of the educational relevance and potential of its own institutions and of the general social environment that is its way of life, and is determined to maximise its resources in these respects, to the maximum. (Wain 1987, pp.202–203)

A better summation of the 'maximalist' position could hardly be found.

ANOTHER VIEW:

Lifelong Education as Education 'Proper' – the Extension of 'Liberal' Education

The maximalist position is severely criticised and firmly rejected by Richard Bagnall (1990). He argues against the relativism clearly apparent in the adoption of Kuhn's account of incommensurable and competing paradigms as an explanation for the different versions of lifelong education, many of them at odds with each other, and implicit in the idea of 'research programmes' proposed by Wain as a way of bringing them all within the same purview. Insofar as the idea of 'research programme' has any applicability to or utility for seeking to get clear about 'lifelong education', Bagnall maintains that this particular approach is 'regressive' (a term he employs in preference to Lakatos' 'degenerating'; for Bagnall, so wide is the ambit of the maximalist use of the term 'lifelong education' that he considers it to have no high point from which to decline). He also claims that the 'maximalist' view is also 'illiberal' insofar as, in Wain's version at any rate, it incorporates a species of epistemological and ethical relativism. This, he claims, encourages 'both intolerance ... and a ... lack of humility' (see Paterson 1984; Trigg 1973, pp.135–137). In Bagnall's view, Wain's analysis of the Lifelong Education programme, which Wain claims is strongly relativist, is a good illustration of this point:

> Through [its] neo-Lakatosian analytical framework … "knowledge" and "ideology" are viewed as being bundled into epistemically and ethically competitive and incommensurable programmes. Such a view must encourage … protagonists to reject, wholesale, all bundles and knowledge and ideology that are perceived to be in conflict with those of one's contemporary commitments. Consistently, … Wain reject(s) whole systems of educational thought (liberal, humanist and existentialist), in which he perceives some conflict with the tenets of the … Programme. … One of the features of programmatic hard cores is, of course, that they are immune to modification.

Bagnall returns to the four semantic interpretations of 'lifelong education'. The first – 'education as a preparation *for* the rest of a person's life' – he says

> may be identified with the traditional view of schooling … as comprising … an educational foundation for adult life (e.g. Peters 1966; White 1982, p.132) … such a view of education is inadequate for adult participation in modern, technologically sophisticated, liberal democratic societies. (see Evans 1985; Long 1983; Wedermeyer 1981)

The second – 'Lifelong education as education to be distributed *throughout* the whole of the lifespan' – remarks Bagnall,

> accords … with the … conception of lifelong education as "recurrent education" (Davis, Wood and Smith 1986; Kallen 1979) and with the principles of "continuing education" (Titmus 1985 and Za'rour 1984). … While further development of educational systems along the lines of "recurrent" education would clearly entail major changes in educational provision and participation, these changes at least would appear to be a constructive development of present educational provision and understanding.

The third – 'lifelong education as education *from* the whole of life's experiences' – reduces, in Bagnall's view, to the fourth version of 'lifelong education' – that 'All events in which one is consciously involved throughout one's lifespan constitute education (as process) and contribute to and are part of one's education (as outcome). Education is the process and the on-going learning product of living.' On this view there is no need to engage in careful planning, research or evaluation of programmes we pick out for educational endeavour: since education is coterminous with the whole of life's experience there is no particular reason for doing this rather than that, for selecting one set of activities over another. This makes the notion of 'education' vacuous: there is nothing we could possibly want or need to provide for, since, on this account, everything educative is already there.

This view – a view which Wain denies either Dewey or he himself holds – Bagnall finds espoused in the work of many writings on lifelong education. He believes that it should be rejected, for it fails to accord any intelligibility to the notion of 'education proper' or of formal and active as opposed to informal and unintentional learning. On Bagnall's account, education proper consists in making distinctions between knowledge and ideology, between educative learning and the simple accumulation of experience, between offering a contingent plurality of programmes and simply following one undifferentiated path of cognitive growth, between activities that conduce to worthwhile ends and experiences that are just simply 'had', between ends that may be epistemically difficult and challenging, but are morally defensible, laudable, and commendatory for all people, and outcomes which just simply come about after undifferentiated and unselected experiences and not as a result of informed and clearly differentiated choices of various kinds.

Bagnall maintains that 'There is a desperate need for concrete educational expression to be given to many of the liberal and humanitarian ideals of lifelong education theorists such as Gelpi (Ireland 1978)'. This is a view with which Charles Bailey would be in strong sympathy, and for reasons that have to do with the stress he lays on the importance of developing, maintaining and applying the powers of rational autonomy throughout the whole of people's lives (Bailey 1988). Bailey cites the work of Kant (1964), Hirst (1965), and Peters (1966) in support:

> If … Hirst claims that a genuinely liberal education must involve the development of rational mind … then it is difficult to see why this should be a process that terminates at 16 or 18. … Hirst's well-known transcendental justificatory argument … does bear on individuals asking questions like: How should I live? How ought I to develop myself? Persons asking these kinds of questions would clearly be adults rather than children. …
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> Similarly … Peters' … conception of education as involving worthwhile developments in knowledge and understanding is clearly not something that is in any essential way limited to schooling … there is the clear implication that the rational person will have a duty, or at least might reasonably want, to continue their liberal education throughout life. …
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> There is every reason, on this account, for seeing education as a series of deliberate undertakings to choose some activities rather than others and to make them available as programmes in educational settings, on grounds that they will introduce individuals to a range of activities and experiences that will enable then to make informed judgments about the options open to them, to choose rationally between them, and consciously to accept the consequences and obligations that may arise from them. On this account it is not the case that the undifferentiated flow of life itself will guide us to make such judgments and choices; the presuppositions of human autonomy and community render it a matter of necessity for the enterprise of education to be a conscious, deliberate and discriminating series of distinctions, values and decisions.

These considerations in turn require that *education proper* must be based on some more deliberate, objective, and interpersonal ground than those accretions of experience that come about as mere increments of growth. That ground is provided, on these arguments, by the presupposition of individual autonomy and the moral obligations towards other autonomous agents constituting the human community and their welfare and progress, that arise from it.

Faults and Virtues of Alternative Views

The consequences of adopting the arguments of Kant, Peters, and Bailey bear substantially on the idea of lifelong education and of the role of educators as leaders of a learning community. Those arguments carry considerable implications regarding the necessity of committing oneself to the correlative educational imperative of planning and seeking educational opportunities, activities, and experiences and making them available for ourselves and others throughout our lives. It would be a pity if we were distracted from taking the moral commendations implicit in and arising from the arguments of Kant in the presuppositions of personal autonomy in all moral enterprises, and their implications for endeavours such as those of education (see Daveney 1973), by pausing too long over such differences between protagonists of lifelong education as those outlined above. For, after all, we can find faults and virtues on both sides.

In the case of the maximalist position outlined by Wain, for example, we can find much that is noteworthy and commendable. Wain's proposal for making 'lifelong education' a 'progressive research programme', as Lakatos conceived, it is worthy of the most serious consideration. His emphasis on the importance of and the need for a move towards inclusiveness and lack of limitation in educational provision gives point and direction to the idea of a 'learning society'. Finally his notion that lifelong education subsumes both formal and informal models of learning, and places the

main burden of the control and direction on learners themselves, accords well with recent developments and advances in both pedagogy and andragogy arising from research into meta-cognition and student-centred learning (Knowles et al. 1984).

Wain's position does have its problems, however. The notion of internal coherence as a criterion of progressiveness in a research programme is open to all the criticisms which anti-relativists have deployed against it. Again, Wain's statements on the status of ideologies are a clear rejection of transcendental arguments but his appeal to 'touchstone' as somehow enabling inter-paradigm comparisons to be made and understood suggests that Wain's account of theory does, after all, presuppose some extra- or supra-paradigm criteria of intelligibility and corrigibility. He cannot have it both ways. Further again, as Bailey trenchantly shows, Wain has problems with his concept of 'relevance' as constituting one criterion of progressiveness. As Bailey comments:

> Saying that a particular programme must satisfy criteria of relevance to historical, social and technological circumstances is saying very little. What requires justifying is why we are being asked to respond to those particular circumstances in one way rather than in other, equally relevant, different ways. (Bailey 1988, p.122)

Finally, one might have some reservations about the almost totalitarian character of the position envisaged by advocates of the maximalist programme. Not only might some critical comment be made on the unitary character and personification of 'Society' evident in Wain's summary statement set out above – how can a learning society be 'conscious of' and sensitive to the educational potential of all its institutions and individuals? – but one might also be justified in sensing in the views of the proponents of that idea a vision and a sense of mission that detractors might describe as utopian and Popperian critics might characterise as millenarian. Certainly the way in which Wain describes the views of the 'Movement' might seem to expose them to the *elenchus* advanced against such thinking in Popper's discussion of such matters in his *Conjectures and Refutations* and *The Poverty of Historicism*. These considerations should caution us against a too ready acceptance of maximalist rubrics for the idea of lifelong education as Wain adumbrates it.

On their side, Bagnall and Bailey have properly drawn attention to some important questions to be asked of those advocating programmes of lifelong education. It is good that they have underlined the need for concepts of lifelong education to be analysed in such a way that they make clear the underlying value judgements at work in them. It is good too that they make it clear that education, however we conceive it, is not something to which artificial barriers can be drawn and that, properly conceived, it is an enterprise that lasts over the whole of a lifetime. Perhaps, however, they have committed themselves too much, within the empiricist and 'essentialist' approach of Peters and Hirst, to the pre-eminent importance they both assign to the idea of active discrimination in a formal institutional sense. As Wain rightly remarks they give too little attention and scope to the idea and functioning of informal education, too much to the place of the centrality of the idea and the force of particular conceptions of liberal education in debates about the meaning and content of lifelong education programmes.

A great deal has been written in criticism of that view of liberal education and its justification (see Langford 1973; Harris 1979; and Evers and Walker 1983 for

references to the plethora of criticisms against the Peters–Hirst view of liberal education, the use of transcendental arguments, and the status and justifiability of analytic philosophy of education generally). The apparent espousal by Bagnall and Bailey of a similar view of the concept of lifelong education – though they do say many wise things about it – should perhaps caution us against a too ready acceptance of their rejection of arguments based on 'relevance' and 'coherence' and of their plea for lifelong education to be seen as a species of liberal education generally.

A Suggested Way Forward: A Pragmatic Approach

Rather than getting bogged down in this debate, we should like to suggest a different expedient. We believe that Bagnall's and Bailey's adherence to a conception of philosophy of education that is both empiricist and normative can no longer sustain the weight of all the critical arguments marshalled against it. At the same time we are clear that the relativism implicit in Wain's case may be reduced finally to the kind of incorrigible solipsism into which all such arguments ultimately fall, if they are not, that is, to seek to make some tacit appeal to some kind of overarching criteria of intelligibility and adjudication and thus either fall into contradiction or betray an underlying predilection for transcendental arguments.

As against these positions, there is, we believe, something to be said for trying a different expedient. There is not much point in attempting to achieve some kind of resolution between the different accounts of the term, especially when we accept the view that there can be as many different conceptions of the concept of lifelong education as there are philosophers to put them forward and communities willing to put their own versions of lifelong education programmes into effect. Rather than participating in an exercise of interpretation that might in the end prove self-defeating or inconclusive, it might, in our view, be better to look, not so much at the various interpretations and accounts of lifelong education, but rather more at the circumstances in which various theories and policies of lifelong education have been articulated, developed, and applied.

In other words, we are suggesting, an objective referent may be found: it lies in the *problems* to the settlement of which lifelong education programmes are addressed. There is, we believe, more sense to be gained by looking at the difficulties, issues and predicaments, the attempted solution of which different policies of lifelong learning have been conceived to tackle. In that way we might attempt to see how, why, and in response to what pressures and quandaries the various versions of lifelong education have been developed or are in play and can be seen to be at work in the attention educational policy-makers devote to them, before attempting to assess how far those policies and practices have succeeded in addressing the problems that policy-makers are attempting to address.

One resolution that might be suggested, then, is to take a pragmatic look at the problems that policy-makers are addressing when urging that learning be lifelong and open to and engaged in by all people. This will help us accept that, just as there is a myriad of such problems, some of them unique to particular countries, educa-

tional systems or institutions, some much more general and widespread, so there will be a large difference, not only in kind but also in degree of complexity and sophistication, in the type and scale of the solutions proffered to them. There will be small- and large-scale differences too in the particular terms of significance in those solutions, the tests for efficacy, the standards of success, and the criteria and arguments that make certain approaches more fruitful than others, for the particular times and circumstances in which they are brought to bear and applied.

Examples of such problems may be readily found, though our examination of them is likely to start closer to home than further away. Perhaps we may begin to make ground by examining some of the versions of the need for undertaking education and learning across the lifespan, currently under consideration by governments and policy-makers around the world, and the arguments put forward for them. Clearly the main versions of lifelong education delineated above may be associated with attempts to respond by educational means to problems of a very large scale and widespread international presence. These may be listed as follows:

- The need for countries to have an economy sufficiently flexible, adaptable, and forward-looking to enable it to feed its citizens and give them a reasonable quality of life
- The need for people to be made aware of the rights and duties open to them in the most widely preferred modern form of government, to be shown how to act in accordance with those rights and duties, and to become committed to the preservation and promotion of that particular form of political arrangement and set of political, social, and community institutions
- The desirability of individuals having an informed awareness of a range of options of activities from which they can construct and continually reconstruct satisfying and personally uplifting patterns of life for themselves

There is no shortage of problems, issues, and questions which individual countries, institutions, and individuals have to address in attempting to work out what will best conduce to their individual and communal welfare, how they should act, what choices they need to make, in what directions they may try to shape their futures, and for what reasons, as matters of ongoing educational endeavour and self-discerning and deliberate concern. For their facing the kinds of problems instanced above will enable them consciously and purposefully to work out ways in which they might bring about an improvement in their own lives and that of all members of their community and hand it on to their successors in coming generations. And that, in the eyes of Mary Warnock (1978), is the end of all education.

A Pragmatic Approach to Realising Lifelong Learning for All

The criteria for determining improvement and advance in their respective accounts, policies, and undertakings of lifelong learning will require philosophers, researchers, educators, and policy-makers to attend to the interplay of both function and form with respect to the purposes of the institution in which they are all

interested and – albeit in different ways and for different purposes – actively engaged. This area of common ground in which agreed interests are enmeshed provides both sets of researchers with a 'criterion' and a standard against which the success or failure – the progression or degeneration of their ongoing research programmes or political initiatives – can be measured.

This area of engagement – what we have elsewhere called 'enmeshment' (Aspin and Chapman 1994) – is where the activities of philosophers, educators, researchers, and policy-makers coincide. Their common interests provide the area of overlap that Lakatos named the 'touchstone' area (Lakatos 1976; see Evers and Walker 1983) against which the theories of one and the policy enterprises of the other – and indeed of all other workers in the field – may be tested. It is this that we may call the new 'science' of educational philosophy, policy construction, and educational management – and it is to the application, extension, elaboration, and refinement of this new scientific way of looking at and dealing with the problems of philosophy and education that we believe that those concerned with lifelong learning may now be well advised to consider turning.

Perhaps the most plausible account of the way in which this approach may best work is to be found in the Quinean notion that knowledge in matters of educational policy, curriculum construction, and the management and administration of schools and school systems is, like any other cognitive enterprise, a complex web of belief, formed of different elements that interweave and form, in their separate parts, a coherent whole (see Quine and Ullian 1976). Conceived of in this way educational discourse and policy analysis and construction becomes like any scientific endeavour – an unending quest to comprehend clearly the theories with which we are working, to compare them with the theoretical efforts and productions of others faced with similar problems, to subject them to positive criticism, and to attempt to improve them and make them fit for their educational purpose: the advancement of efficiency and excellence in all forms of educating institutions, for the benefit of all individuals, for society and for our nations.

The analogy which is most helpful, and the one frequently employed by Quine, is that of Otto Neurath (1932): the theory that we work out in our educational endeavours is like a boat crossing the sea. Because of the continuing stresses and strains upon it, the craft that is our best theory has continually to be repaired and rebuilt even as it crosses the ocean, while it is still on the move, so to speak – and in a way that will, while still giving overall coherence to the whole, make for a vessel that, at the end of the enterprise of theory building, is fairly radically different from that 'theoretical vessel' upon which the journey began. For human beings that 'end' comes when they die: it is part of the human cognitive condition that we are *always* rebuilding our theories. It is the end of our lives that marks the end of theory–change. Only then shall we come to the end of our learning.

What is critical to this enterprise of theory/vessel building and repairing – the pragmatic criteria with which we work – will be the need continuously to look at all plans, theories, and forms of cognitive transport, drawn up both by ourselves and others, in the attempt to see how well they manage to fulfil their function of conveying their passengers and their intellectual *impedimenta* across what might

be seen as an as yet uncharted 'sea of learning' (see also Cupitt 1985). This will be the criterion of success in any cognitive endeavour of learning across the lifespan: has our thinking efficiently fulfilled its function and secured the end towards which it was striving? This will be achieved by subjecting our theories, beliefs, policies, and solutions to critical scrutiny, appraisal, and comparison. This will enable us to assess their functional utility, fecundity, and felicity in meeting the challenges of the problem situations in which we have devised and applied them.

This then is the nature of our enterprise. Neither logical empiricism, positivism, nor ordinary language analysis will serve as single or 'would be' comprehensive theories to account for all the phenomena constituting the bases and interstices of our subject of the soundness and comprehensiveness of our educational policies or the effectiveness of our provision of lifelong learning. What we need to adopt, rather, is a pragmatic 'evolutionary epistemology', an approach that goes, as Richard Bernstein (1983) puts it, 'beyond objectivism and relativism' and enhances and facilitates discriminatory theory construction and comparison and so makes our own theories meet for application, modification, and repair at every stage of our intellectual journey.

Perhaps the best model for us in this enquiry, therefore, is to adopt a pragmatic approach as one of our principal modes of operation in the examination and attempted solution of one of the more serious problems facing education today: what we ought to do about the various challenges posed for us by the need for our policies of education to be 'lifelong'. To conceive of our enterprise as an activity of problem-solving is to propose, in the best Popperian tradition, that, in our desire to solve the problems that face us, we should be concerned to proffer our solutions on the basis that they are put up as tentative hypotheses to be, if possible, knocked down. We should seek widely after all possible sources of criticism and potential refutation and, if we find one powerful enough to falsify our proposed solutions, then, from whatever quarter it might come, we should be open-minded enough to admit it and treat it on its merits as a source, not only of criticism and further clarification but, in the novelty of its contribution, as an imaginative essay in the attempt to provide answers, solutions, and best provisional theories for application to the difficulties that beset us and the predicaments that perplex us on the road to finding policies that will best address the imperatives of the need for education and learning to be lifelong.

Conclusion

Given many governments' concerns for the multi-faceted character of lifelong learning and its relationship to a broader and more diverse set of goals, it may well be that, in setting the agenda for education for the twenty-first century, a more comprehensive analysis of all the various dimensions and features of the nature, aims, and purposes of policies for 'realising a lifelong approach to learning for all' will have to be tackled, and a more wide-ranging set of justifications addressing

the differences in those aims and purposes more clearly articulated and provided. In this way policies pertaining to lifelong learning endeavours are more likely to be developed and articulated, not merely with respect to providing arguments to vindicate a country's concern for its economic self-sufficiency, but also to reinforce its appreciation of the need for a multiplicity of initiatives that will increase the emancipation and participation of all citizens in its various political, social, and cultural institutions, and open further avenues of personal advancement to them.

For the time being, however, we suggest that the pragmatic, problem-based approach, which we have put forward, will be sufficient to tackle the questions with which so many governments, authorities, and agencies are currently preoccupied.

We believe we have provided here some answers to the question: to what problems, topics, and issues are proposals for lifelong learning deemed to provide solutions? We hope to have made it clear that governments in many countries are now concerned to increase their economic potential, to make their political arrangements more equitable, just and inclusive, and to offer a greater range of avenues for self-improvement and personal development to all their citizens.

We realise, of course, that none of these aims and undertakings for lifelong learning can really be separated from the other: all three elements interact and cross-fertilise each other. A more competent and highly skilled agent in the workforce has more of an interest in and responsibility for contributing to the improvement of institutions and their point in a set of democratic political arrangements; both are in turn enhanced by the affective satisfaction experienced and achieved by those who have expanded their life horizons in cognitive content and skills in complex forms of intellectual operation on which, upon reflection, they now prefer to spend their time.

There is a complex interplay between all three, that makes education for a more highly skilled workforce and *at the same time* an education for better democracy *and* a more rewarding life. That is why the whole notion and value of 'lifelong learning for all' might be usefully seen as a complex and multifaceted process, that begins in pre-school, is carried on through compulsory and post-compulsory periods of formal education and training, and is then continued throughout life, through provision of such learning experiences, activities, and enjoyment in the home, in the workplace, in universities and colleges, and in other educational, social, and cultural agencies, institutions, and settings – both formal and informal – within the community.

In respect to the development of policy, this approach requires a far greater, more coherent and consistent, better coordinated and integrated, more multifaceted approach to learning and to realising a 'lifelong learning' approach *for all* than has hitherto been the case.

The central elements in what we have described (Chapman and Aspin 1997) as the 'triadic' nature of lifelong learning –

- For economic progress and development
- For personal development and fulfilment
- For social inclusiveness and democratic understanding and activity

– are now seen as fundamental to bringing about a more democratic polity and set of social institutions, in which the principles and ideals of social inclusiveness, justice, and equity are present, practised, and promoted; an economy which is strong, adaptable, and competitive; and a richer range of provision of those activities on which individual members of society are able to choose to spend their time and energy, for the personal rewards and satisfactions that they confer.

To bring this about – to move towards the achievement of a 'learning society' – nothing less than a substantial reappraisal of the provision, resourcing, and goals of education and training, and a major reorientation of its direction towards the availability and the value of opportunities for all to secure access to 'learning throughout life' is required. Therein lies the major challenge for governments, policy-makers, and educators as they continue to grapple with ways of conceptualising lifelong learning and realising the aim of 'lifelong learning for all'.

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