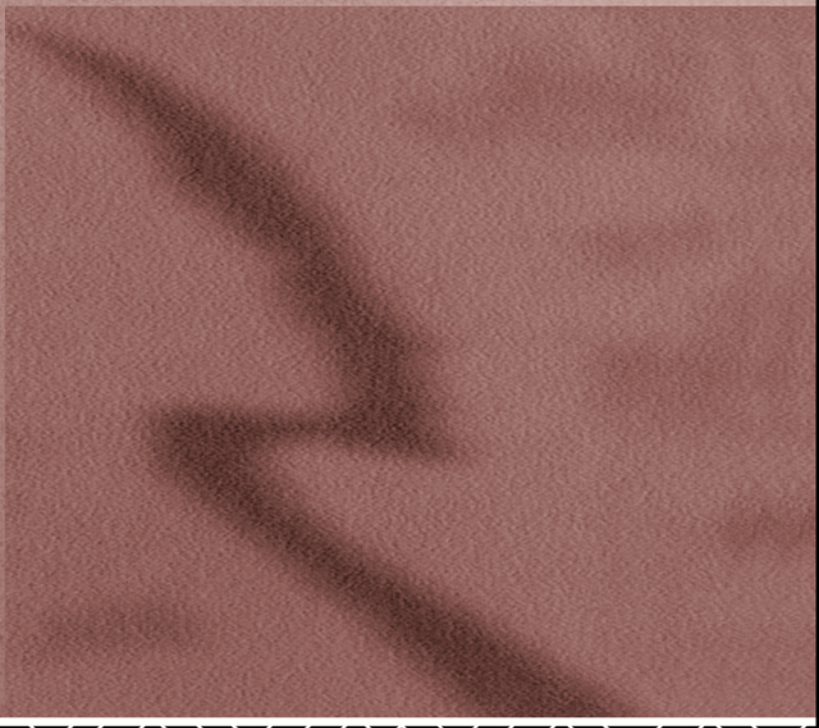
Changing Places?

Flexibility, lifelong learning and a learning society

Richard Edwards

ROUTLEDGE



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Changing Places?

Flexibility has become a central concept in much policy and academic debate. Individuals, organisations and societies are all required to become more flexible and to learn so that they can participate in the ongoing processes of change.

This book explores how the notion of a learning society has developed over recent years: the changes that have given rise to the requirement for flexibility, and the changed discourses and practices that have emerged in the education and training of adults. With increased interest in adults as learners (primarily to support economic competitiveness), the closed field of adult education has now been displaced by a more open discourse of lifelong learning. This involves not only changing practices such as moving towards open and distance and workplace learning, but also changing identities for workers and learners. Learning settings are therefore changing places in a number of senses: they are places in which people change; they are subject to change; and they are changing to include the home and workplace as well as more formal settings.

This book takes an unusually critical standpoint: it challenges many contemporary trends, explores the uncertainties and ambivalences of the processes of change, and is suggestive of different forms of engagement with them. It will prove an important text for policy makers, workplace trainers and those working in the fields of adult, further and higher education.

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In memory of my mother, Joy Edwards (1917–1994)

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Debts, I have a few, but then again, too many to mention . . .

A text of this sort is inevitably the outcome of a range of influences, previous work and especially the support of people over a period of time. Charting those is itself a daunting task. However, there are specific factors which have made this particular text possible to which I wish to make reference. Two in particular have had an iterative effect on my work and thinking and encouraged me to engage with the processes of rethinking the present and future for the education and training of adults, to which this text is a further contribution.

The first factor is the work I undertook in 1994 and 1995 in working to prepare written distance education materials for the School of Education at the Open University, United Kingdom. This enabled me to engage with a wide range of literature on the education and training of adults and start to produce the conceptualisations and propositions which are explored here in greater depth and detail. Fundamental to that process were my colleagues on the course team. They both encouraged me in that process and challenged me to clarify my thinking. In the interests of students they also restrained me from developing some of the ideas that I have gone on to develop in this text. My thanks therefore go to Peter Raggatt, Ann Hanson, Nick Small and Sue Parker, all of whom in a variety of ways have been supportive towards me in recent years and who will recognise some of the ideas here as prefigured in Edwards *et al.* (1996) and Raggatt *et al.* (1996). They have demonstrated consistently that, despite difficult times, critical collegiality is still possible. Thanks also need to be extended to John Field, who provided a critical voice at a distance, challenging me to justify the stance I am adopting as preferable to the alternatives. Whether I have done so to his satisfaction is another matter. It is a dialogue to which we will no doubt return.

The second factor is my ongoing collaboration with Robin Usher at the University of Southampton, United Kingdom. Robin and I have spent the last few years examining the ways in which postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives can help to inform and improve our understandings of the education and training of adults in the contemporary period. This collaboration has proved to be one of the most

intellectually enriching and challenging experiences of my academic life. It has also provided a legitimate space for me to be able to revive my earlier interests in social and political philosophy. As well as our collaborations, Robin has encouraged me in my own work and the two have fed into and off one another. Thus, in this text there are many perspectives which come from and develop out of some of our joint work, most notably Edwards and Usher (1994a, 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b) and Usher and Edwards (1994 and 1995). The personal and inter-textual debt is great, as is the pleasure of it.

Three further debts need to be recognised here too. First, to David Boud and Andrew Gonczi at the School of Adult Education, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia. They invited me to spend my study leave at UTS in 1996. This provided a changed place and space in which to put this text together. In addition, the warmth and engagement of many of the staff and students in the School during my stay cannot be overstated. They both stimulated me to reconsider some of my earlier arguments and made the writing an enjoyable experience. Second, I would like to thank Leonie Jennings, Zbys Klich and the staff and students in the Institute for Workplace Research, Learning and Development at Southern Cross University, Lismore, for providing the time and space to share ideas while on a three-week visit during my time in Australia. Winter temperatures of twenty degrees celsius are indeed an inspiration! Taking study leave seems increasingly like a luxury. So I am indebted also to my colleagues in the School of Education at the Open University for supporting my leave, in particular Bob Glaister and Ron Glatter, but also all those colleagues who filled in for me while I was away.

A text of this sort is not produced fully formed from nothing. As is clear from the above, it is a moment and place in which to bring together many of the strands of my thinking in recent years – where the 'my' is already problematic. Certain of the ideas developed here have seen the light of day in earlier forms which I have drawn upon where relevant (in particular Edwards 1993a, 1995a, 1995b, 1996). Whether this involves a plagiarising of the self or a legitimate rewriting of a text I leave to the reader. While I question the notion of authenticity and originality in the former, I am also conscious of the possibility of repeating myself endlessly!

As well as intellectual and professional factors, there are also the personal ones. Many family members and friends have encouraged me to position myself as an academic and writer, and have put up with my self-doubts and obsessions. The list would be an exceptionally long one and I am fortunate to have that breadth and depth of support.

I may have done it my way, but without the above, to whom I have done insufficient justice, I could well have been left sitting on the dock of the bay. Writing this while in Sydney, there are, of course, worse places to be. Nice work, if you can get it. Small worlds too!

Chapter 1

Introduction

Waiting for the post?

> . . . knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.
>
> (Foucault 1987: 8)

This text is concerned with thinking differently about some of the changing discourses which have come to govern the education and training of adults in recent years and the consequence for practices. It examines the context for such changes and their contested nature. The focus for the discussion is on differing notions of a learning society and the ways in which that is being constructed in the changing practices and discourses of lifelong learning. The argument will be that to encapsulate those changes new forms of thinking are necessary which involve moving away from the dominant discourses of adult education. While much of the detail will focus on events as they are occurring in the United Kingdom, the suggestion is that many of the general trends have a wider applicability and resonate with much that is going on elsewhere in the world. To support this view a certain amount of literature from beyond the United Kingdom is incorporated into the text. Caution is always necessary in making comparisons between nations and even within nations. However, resonance of certain similarities of influence can be identified, particularly given the greater economic and cultural integration being experienced in contemporary conditions of globalisation.

Like all texts, there is an inevitable locatedness and selectivity which places certain boundaries around what is discussed and how it is presented. And the notion of boundaries will be central to this text. What constitutes the boundaries of a learning society? Who constitutes it as 'a learning society' rather than as 'education' or 'training'? What are the consequences of a learning society being constituted in particular ways? Who are most powerful in defining the directions a learning society should take? How are the boundaries of a learning society maintained, broken down or crossed? These are questions which are central to evaluating the significance of the changes taking place currently and alternative visions for the future. Such issues are not easy ones to evaluate and there is no claim here to a definitive or universal account of a learning society. What is attempted is a contribution to a necessary dialogue if

adult educators are to play an engaged role in the processes of change. Otherwise it is suggested they simply will be subjected to change by others.

The work is consciously informed by certain strands of poststructuralist and postmodern analysis. This in itself is controversial. However, such strands of thought signify the need to think differently if the differing conditions of the contemporary period are to be adequately conceptualised and addressed. During the 1980s, this was most noticeable from the Left in the work of the United Kingdom magazine *Marxism Today*, and its attempt to chart 'New Times', a restructuring of the economy and society and a breakdown of the consensual certainties of the post-Second World War period.

> The 'New Times' argument is that the world has changed, not just incrementally but qualitatively, that Britain and other advanced capitalist societies are increasingly characterised by diversity, differentiation and fragmentation, rather than homogeneity, standardisation and the economies and organisations of scale which characterised modern mass society.
>
> (Hall and Jacques 1989: 11)

The 'New Times' thesis, while influential, was not without its critics, and the same is true for poststructuralist and postmodern positions. While not adhering totally to a postmodern analysis, I believe the latter is highly suggestive and to ignore its contemporary power would be misconceived. As Kumar (1995: 195) suggests, 'the contemporary world may not be simply or only post-modern; but post-modernity is now a significant, perhaps central feature of its life, and an important way of thinking about it.'

In this chapter, therefore, I shall provide some background on the approaches underpinning the positions adopted in the text as a whole. First, I shall outline the poststructuralist influence, largely derived from the work of Foucault. In particular, this text will make use of the notions of discourse, power–knowledge and governmentality. Second, I shall outline briefly what is often viewed as constituting postmodernity, the particular perspective of the contemporary world which informs this text. The post-structuralist and postmodern are often deployed as mutually reinforcing, if differing, dimensions of a particular analysis. While this is largely the position adopted here, I also introduce the idea that discourses of postmodernity can themselves be subject to poststructuralist analysis. Finally, I shall outline the various notions of 'changing places' that I am using and lay out the course of the rest of the text.

It may be considered that this is a somewhat abstract and theoretical way to approach the subjects of lifelong learning and a learning society. However, in taking this stance I am attempting to make as clear as possible my own position and to foreground the fact that no text is constructed without assumptions. Readers can question those assumptions, the contradictions, ambiguities and ambivalences within

the arguments herein, and foreground assumptions which may be implicit rather than explicit – the 'silences' upon which the text is built. I do not assume a transparency or uniformity in my own writing or in the readings of this text. For me, this is part of the ongoing dialogue necessary in constructing a 'knowledgeable practice' of lifelong learning.

DISCOURSE – POWER–KNOWLEDGE AND GOVERNMENTALITY

The notion of discourse has become increasingly important in academic and public debates in recent years. The roots of the growing influence of discourse analysis are beyond the scope of this text (Macdonell 1991). Primarily, it can be seen as a response to the perceived weaknesses of conventional notions of scientific and social scientific knowledge, in a period when the range and sheer amount of information available to individuals through various media has resulted in greater uncertainty as to what signifies 'knowledge', 'truth' and 'progress'. Language has displaced consciousness as the focus for philosophical and social scientific debate, and science has itself been critiqued as simply another, rather than the privileged, language game.

The notion that scientific method is a neutral avenue for gaining truth about the 'real world' as a condition for knowledge, human emancipation and social progress has been subject to much criticism and, in some quarters, discredited. This criticism has come from both within and outside the scientific community. The validity of scientific method as neutral has been questioned, as has the knowledge gained from science and the consequences of scientific 'progress'. This has been particularly marked in the human sciences. The inevitability of progress to emancipate humanity through the advance of scientific knowledge, what Lyotard (1984) calls the 'grand narratives' of modernity – the justifications for pursuing certain forms of knowledge – has come into question. Stemming from the Enlightenment, Lyotard argues that the grand narratives have provided a teleological rationale for the development of the role of the modern nation state and educational institutions and the narratives which support that development. Modernity is characterised by narratives of the pursuit of truth and emancipation through the application of scientific rationality, of emancipation through learning the world better. Progress is judged by such things as mastery of the physical and social worlds, the growth of scientific knowledge, the spread of a particular kind of rationality and the development of rational, enlightened and autonomous people.

Lyotard argues that the grand narratives of modernity have declined in influence in the contemporary period and no longer have the ability to compel consensus. Emancipation through the application of scientific rationality has been shown to be, at best, ambiguous and, in certain situations, far worse. The application of scientific rationality in Hiroshima and the Holocaust, nuclear tests in the Pacific and China,

concerns over environmental degradation and the risks to humanity by the very progress science has brought about, have all led to doubt about the sustainability of the project of modernity. There is now a widespread recognition that there is too much of a gap between the aspirations embedded and promoted in the grand narratives and the constantly reconfigured materiality of want and oppression. Increasingly, the grand narratives are seen as masterful narratives and narratives of mastery, functioning to 'legitimise Western man's self-appointed mission of transforming the entire planet in his own image' (Owens 1985: 66). Their declining influence and power in the contemporary period has also thrown into doubt the subaltern narratives they have helped to shape, including those of adult education and education more generally. Master signifiers are no longer quite as masterful. Universal messages, including those of education's role in fulfilling the project of modernity, are now seen as historically located, cultural constructs, their universality and consequences open to question. Teleological certainty has been replaced by open-ended ambivalence with significant consequences for what constitutes a learning society. In recent years, therefore, the extent and level of doubt over progress have resulted in doubt over the capacity of science to represent the truth of the world.

Beck (1992) suggests that the forms of progress based on science that have been experienced have created what he terms the 'risk society', in which it is the very existence of humanity which is at stake. More specifically, questions have been raised about the interests science supports when its development is embedded in the practices of the state and capitalist institutions. State policy and profit influence science into following particular directions and supporting particular views of progress. While this critique of science has proved very influential in certain quarters, it should not be overstated. Scientific knowledge has maintained credence among many planners and policy-makers and continues to be highly influential in shaping processes of change.

The challenge to traditional science, therefore, has taken a number of forms. The ideological critique of science is that it supports particular interests. However, it masks or mystifies those interests by presenting itself as a neutral and disinterested activity. In other words, the very neutrality suggested is already a specific ideological position, a dimension of ideological hegemony. Ideological hegemony is gained by that grouping in the social formation which can establish its interests and perspectives as 'natural' to the social formation as a whole. While science rests in an assumption of knowledge as universal and generalisable, an ideological critique assumes social formations to be divided and knowledge to be particular to specific groups and interests. This critique is very influential in socialist, marxist and certain branches of feminist and post-colonial analysis. However, scientific method and ideological critique tend to share both the view that the 'truth' can be established and a view of history as progressive, even if its basis is different. More crucially, they share a view that language transparently conveys meaning. It is the critique of the latter which has

resulted in the increasing weight being given to forms of discourse analysis within academic study.

The turn to discourse has resulted in part from a similar critique to that offered by an ideological critique. Knowledge is held to be partial and contingent upon the specific factors and contexts within which it is constructed and presented. In questioning the status of scientific method as foundational knowledge, the foundations of discipline-based education are also undermined, to be displaced by a diversity of situated knowledges. There is also an emphasis on the oppressive consequences of assuming knowledge to be universal, that is, true for everyone across time and in all settings. However, discourse analysis differs from ideological critique as it does not assume that language conveys a single transparent meaning. The meaning of language is held to be contingent on the specific contexts in which it is constituted. There are constant processes of constructing different meanings from the same texts. The assumptions within such texts, the issues they exclude and marginalise from legitimate debate and the consequences of the acceptance of what they construct as 'true' become the subject of analysis. Which discourses are most powerful and how they frame practices become significant questions.

In this approach, it is the story-telling capacity of human beings which is held to be fundamental to their being (MacIntyre 1981; Edwards and Usher 1996). Increased attention is given to texts and the ways in which discourses construct certain objects as 'knowable' and 'known' and certain perspectives as 'true' – the ways in which they 'tell a story'. All forms of social reality are textualised in the sense that they are represented and inscribed. The social world is narrated into being through the discursive practices in which we engage and which make our experiences meaningful. Thereby the place and significance of narrative as a 'world-making' practice are foregrounded. Social practices such as the education and training of adults and lifelong learning can be seen as texts, worlds defined, delimited and constituted through narrative processes. A social practice can be multiply 'written' or narrated, it can be 'read' and interpreted with single or multiple meanings and can be 'rewritten' or re-presented with different meanings. In the contemporary conjuncture, it is possible to suggest that there is a rewriting and rereading of adult education taking place.

Through narratives, selves and worlds are simultaneously and interactively made. The narrator is positioned in relation to events and other selves and an identity conferred. Positioning oneself and being positioned in certain discourses becomes therefore the basis for personal self-identity. Narratives are both unique to individuals, in the sense that each tells their own story, yet at the same time culturally located and therefore transindividual. For instance, an adult educator may tell their own story rooted in their unique autobiographical trajectory, but the narrative is itself sedimented in the narrative practices of adult education and, beyond that, in the wider

narratives of the culture and practices in which the adult educator are located. They live these stories; through them they construct others and are interactively constructed by them, as active, meaningful, knowable subjects acting in meaningful and knowable ways.

The result of these trends is a shift from questioning whether or not a discourse gives us a 'true' representation of the 'real world' – a continuation of the modernist scientific approach – to an examination of the ways in which a discourse constructs 'truth' and the consequences of accepting it as true – a form of cultural analysis. In other words, rather than assuming a hierarchy of knowledge with science at the pinnacle giving us 'objective truth' – embedded in the notion of disciplinary knowledge – there is the constant search for the cultural conditions that produce this hierarchy and recognition of the plurality of knowledges. Discourse therefore displaces knowledge as the object of study as problems and inequalities surrounding the universality of knowledge come to the fore. This can be illustrated in the practices of lifelong learning in a shift from a focus on teaching, as the transmission of the (usually) university-generated canon of disciplinary knowledge, to learning, in which greater weight is given to, for instance, the experience of learners and practitioner-generated knowledge. A group of American women adult educators have posed this shift as a question of first,

> who shall be heard and second, what kind of knowledge shall be considered legitimate. The project of formal knowledge construction in our field is characterised by a preference for the knowledge of scholars rather than that of practitioners or the people who are the field's constituencies, and a preference for knowledge born of reason and science rather than emotion and experience. These preferences are woven in complex and subtle ways into an historically and culturally determined web of beliefs, values, and norms that justify the exclusion of some and the inclusion of others in the knowledge-making process.
>
> (Group for Collaborative Inquiry 1993: 44)

The focus on discourse, therefore, has been associated with recognition of the heterogenity of meanings and powerful consequences that are engendered in the use of language and narrative processes.

Macdonell (1991: 1) points out that the emphasis on discourse has 'radical implications not only for the disciplines of the humanities, literary studies and human science, but for all knowledge'. Meaning can no longer be ascribed to human intention or a common language. It is itself a site of contest, to which the trivialising reports over 'political correctness' in parts of the media attest, and can only be elucidated in the exploration of the particular discourses under consideration. The examination of lifelong learning and a learning society, and the changes taking place within them, are

themselves subject to these implications, as illustrated by the many different and contested views in which knowledge and truth are constructed through and in a range of discourses.

The use of discourse as a key concept in this text is not uncontroversial. A more conventional text would survey the field and positions within it and attempt to evaluate which visions of lifelong learning and a learning society describe the situation most accurately and/or are normatively more appealing. However, to do so would have been to ignore some of the important debates which have emerged in the wider sphere of intellectual debate and their significance for an understanding of what is occurring in the education and training of adults. It would have required this text to be unreflexive about producing a text which is intended to encourage critical and self-critical reflexivity. For part of the power of academic discourses – of which this is an example – lies in their construction as 'neutral', a universal and privileged position from which 'truth' is established, when they are as partial and as inscribed with power as other discourses. This is particularly significant for a text on education and training, for, as Ball (1990c: 3) suggests, 'educational sites are subject to discourse but are also centrally involved in the propagation and selective dissemination of discourses, the "social appropriation" of discourses. Educational institutions control the access of individuals to various kinds of discourse.'

Discourse analysis is not therefore without its problems and its critics. Nor is it a homogeneous field in itself. However, what it makes possible in the discussion of a learning society and lifelong learning is an examination of who is setting the agendas, how, what those agendas are and where and how they are contested. It takes us beyond the ideological critique, which tends to become reduced to somewhat stale polarities of 'them' or 'us', 'good' or 'bad', 'emancipation' or 'oppression'. Rather it offers an opportunity, through exploiting ambiguities and ambivalences of meaning, to build alliances in specific contexts in which interests may be reconfigured, if not overcome. Here

> discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. . . . Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.
>
> (Foucault 1981: 100–102)

For instance, feminists, the new right and new middle classes may all support experiential learning for differing reasons and use each other's interest to contest and reconfigure opportunities for adults (Edwards 1994b). In this sense, experiential learning does not 'belong' to any of these groups, nor is it inherently emancipatory or part of the interests of particular groups – it has multiple and ambivalent meanings.

The notion of discourse deployed here is derived largely from the work of Foucault (1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1981). His work has become increasingly important to the analysis of education and training, used most extensively in the discussion of initial education (Marshall 1989; Ball 1990a, 1990d; Gore 1993). In opposition to much 'common-sense' thinking that power and knowledge are separate from one another and that the exercise of power invalidates a claim to knowledge, Foucault argues that power and knowledge are inseparable. Knowledge is permeated with power and exercises of power are imbued with knowledge. Further, power is not simply oppressive and distorting, but also has a positive and productive role in making things possible. Foucault examines the development of the human sciences as power–knowledge formations linked to the development of such modern institutions as the prison and the asylum. It is upon these foundations that others, like Ball and Gore, have developed their analysis. Rather than conceptualising issues to be resolved on an either/or basis – either for or against, either in the interests of adult learners or against, either oppressive or emancipatory – this form of analysis results in more contingent, partial and ambivalent readings of situations and possibilities.

The exercise of power through knowledge and the production of knowledge through power in modern social formations is central to a poststructuralist stance. Foucault's work is far from unambiguous on this. However, for the purposes of this text the exercise of power can be analytically separated into the disciplinary and the pastoral. Disciplinary power signifies those processes through which knowledge about the population is gained by the nation state as a condition for the effective management and governance of 'the people'. These processes are embedded in the knowledgeable (expert) discourses of the human sciences, sciences which provide knowledge about madness, deviancy, crime and, of course, education. These discourses constitute the objects of their disciplinary gaze, for example, 'the deviant', 'the prisoner', 'the student', and provide the basis for intervention, for programmatic action. Disciplinary knowledge is therefore associated with certain practices or exercises of power which discipline and position people in certain ways and 'produce' certain forms of experience and subjectivity (Edwards 1991a). To learn a discipline – philosophy – is to learn to be disciplined into a particular identity – a philosopher. For Foucault, certain forms of knowledge, power and subjectivity are integral to one another through which discipline is exercised.

Pastoral power, by contrast, is exercised through 'confession', by which the self is constituted as an object of knowledge, self-regulation, self-improvement and self-development (Foucault 1981). This process has become central in the governance of modern society, displacing externally imposed discipline with the self-discipline of an autonomous subjectivity. In other words, confession actively constitutes a productive and autonomous subject already governed and thereby not requiring externally imposed discipline and regulation. In order to participate 'successfully' in the process

of confession, subjects need to have already accepted, or be brought to accept, the legitimacy and 'truth' of confessional practices and the particular meanings that these invoke. For example, as Metcalfe (1991) suggests in relation to careers guidance, the aim is to help align student subjectivity with the various educational and psychological discourses available to help them reach a 'realistic' decision. Confession enables individuals to actively participate in disciplinary regimes by investing their own identity, subjectivity and desires with those ascribed to them through certain knowledgeable discourses.

Pastoral power is a central component of contemporary governmentality, which Foucault (1979b: 20) defines as 'an ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power'. For Foucault, the notion of governmentality is a way of thinking power differently. It points to the dispersed 'capillary' nature of power and its embodiment in 'rational' forms of government, administration, management and supervision, what Miller and Rose (1993: 83) term 'government at a distance'. They characterise the modern form of governmentality as a mentality where political rationalities – the aims and purposes of government - are linked with programmes of political action and particular procedures and techniques. Governmentality is discursive, a technology of thought, which constitutes a domain for programmatic action. However, it is not confined simply to the workings or deliberate policies of governments, but exists wherever 'the political programmes and objectives of government have been aligned to the personal and collective conduct of subjects' (Gane and Johnson 1993: 9). In its most contemporary form, governmentality is characterised by 'the entry of the soul of the citizen into the sphere of government' (Rose 1991: 113). Through certain practices and techniques people's 'inner' lives are brought into the domain of power. This, then, is a governmentality where power seeks to govern not only bodies, but also subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and to do so not through force and repression, but through 'educating' people to govern themselves. Governmentality works through bringing people's self-regulating capacities into line with the gaze (and regulation) of 'government', a process where the gaze is interiorised, where 'political power has come to depend upon a web of technologies for fabricating and maintaining self-government' (Miller and Rose 1993: 102). Power is exercised through seduction rather than repression. Lest this seem an inescapable determinism, it is important to note that governmentality is never and can never be complete. Indeed, as du Gay (1996: 73) argues, the 'very "impossibility" of government justifies and reproduces the attempt to govern'.

The significance of pastoral power for lifelong learning can be illustrated in a wide range of practices to which confession is central, for instance, guidance and counselling, action-planing, the accreditation of prior learning, portfolio-based

assessment, learning contracts, records of achievement, continuous assessment, self-evaluation (Usher and Edwards 1995). Nor is this form of governmentality restricted to students. It also operates in relation to staff, where increased importance is given to staff appraisal and human resource development (Ball 1990a; Metcalfe 1991). Thus, people are being encouraged to drive themselves ever harder, to accept even greater individual responsibility for themselves and their contributions to organisations and the social formation. With this responsibility goes increased stress. In this sense, pastoral power becomes self-replicating, creating the conditions for its own proliferation, as the form of 'empowerment' engendered is a basis for the 'problems' it seeks to resolve. Confession is therefore a symptom of the contemporary form of governmentality rather than a cure for its ailments.

Disciplinary and pastoral power are embedded in discourses. Ball argues that discourses are

> about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations. . . . Thus, discourses construct certain possibilities for thought. They order and combine words in particular ways and exclude or displace other combinations.
>
> (Ball 1990a: 17)

Rather than taking discourses, or what is said, signed or written for granted, these texts need to be problematised, and their neutrality and the knowledge they purport to provide questioned. In the process, the 'truth' is constructed as a certain discourse becomes powerful in normalising particular strategies and outcomes. Certain 'regimes of truth' are established. For example, Ball argues that the 1988 Education Reform Act in the United Kingdom was made possible through a 'discourse of derision' upon which the new right in and outside government founded their criticism of the ideas and people they held to be responsible for the 'failure' of the education system. This

> discourse of derision acted to debunk and displace not only specific words and meanings – progressivism and comprehensivism, for example – but also the speakers of these words, those 'experts', 'specialists' and 'professionals' referred to as the 'educational establishment'. These privileged speakers have been displaced, their control over meaning lost, their professional preferences replaced by abstract mechanisms and technologies of 'truth' and 'rationality' – parental choice, the market, efficiency and management.
>
> (Ball 1990a: 18)

While this analysis is of the reform of schooling, the 'discourse of derision' has been deployed against those working elsewhere in the education and training system,

including those working with adults. A 'regime of truth' has been established about the failures of the education and training system in relation to the needs of the competitive economy. Nor has this been restricted to the United Kingdom, as Shor (1987) and Kenway (1990) demonstrate for America and Australia respectively. The 'discourse of derision' displaces the views of the education professional and invests authority in those of consumers and employers. This is important insofar as who speaks about lifelong learning and a learning society, how they speak and what they say help to shape the changes to which the provision of learning opportunities are subject. Since the end of the 1970s, this has been most notable in the powerful role of national governments, political parties, employers and trade unions in framing lifelong learning predominantly within a discourse of economic competitiveness, thereby producing a 'need' for the development of occupational competences amongst the labour force.

In examining discourses, therefore, the 'neutrality' of knowledge is undermined, as the latter is suffused with power, which seeks to normalise certain inequalities. As an illustration, we can take the example of discourses about the 'problem' of motivating unemployed adults (McGivney 1992). From a discursive viewpoint, these are not neutral descriptions of 'reality' as is commonly conceived. They construct a view of a reality in which a specific agenda is promoted which places the social and economic 'problems' of unemployment upon the shoulders of those individuals who 'lack' motivation and skills. Knowledge about 'unmotivated unemployed adults', therefore, already assumes a certain exercise of power and has powerful effects in directing greater attention on to the disciplining of the unemployed and driving wedges between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' unemployed – those who are motivated and those who are not. The lack of employment opportunities, the impoverishment of many unemployed adults and the very fact that emphasising employment as central to people's lives acts as a barrier to participation in training (ACOSS 1996) are thereby marginalised from debate. Meanwhile, changes in policy and practice, in the exercise of power, rely on knowledge being generated about the lack of motivation of unemployed adults. Power–knowledge is embedded in discourses about unemployment and motivation.

The powerful consequences of the impact of discourses can be illustrated also in the discussion of 'access' for adults to learning opportunities. Tight (1993) discusses the ways in which debates and policies over access to higher education for adults in the United Kingdom developed at the end of the 1980s and into the early 1990s. While he does not use an explicit form of discourse analysis, he focuses on the ways in which access to post-school education and training as a whole was narrowed to one of access to higher education. This, in turn, became focused on access courses as the principal route for adults to take into higher education. In other words, access was discursively reshaped and narrowed. Rather than providing a rationale for a broad range of

learning opportunities, access became focused on a specific form of provision as a way of establishing a claim to entry to higher education. Implicitly, therefore, Tight highlights some of the different discourses of access and the importance of the meaning of access in terms of the overall effect on the provision of learning opportunities to adults.

Viewing a learning society and lifelong learning as constructed through a range of discourses of unequal power also provides the basis to question whether certain stances and practices are, as is often claimed, inherently more 'empowering' than others. This is brought into question as each set of practices is examined within its particular context. For instance, it is often assumed and asserted that student-centred approaches to teaching and learning result in the discourses of learners being given greater status in relation to those of lecturers or other practitioners. The lecturer is not the disseminator of knowledge and skill, but the facilitator of learning, or, as Bauman (1989) puts it, the educator becomes an interpreter rather than legislator. However, to suggest that this is simply more 'empowering' is problematic. This issue of the learner's 'voice' in education and training settings is one which informs a lot of the debates within critical and feminist pedagogy (Ellsworth 1989; Lather 1991a, 1991b; Whitson 1991; Giroux 1992. 1994; Gore 1993). Certainly, access to learning opportunities for certain groups may provide an opportunity for new discourses to be constructed, as has been the case with the emergence of women's studies as a field of study. This resulted from feminist struggles over and in higher education to create a space to articulate women's knowledge and perspectives which critiqued much that is presented as neutral and universal knowledge as gendered, that is, masculine. However, as Gore (1993) suggests, much critical and feminist pedagogy inscribes fresh forms of exclusion and oppression in their emancipatory practices. Having a 'voice' is certainly important, but it cannot be assumed to be inherently authentic or 'empowering'. Voices are themselves constructed through culturally located discourses.

Different circumstances therefore give rise to certain possibilities for discourse. 'Discourses differ with the kinds of institutions and social practices in which they take shape, and with the positions of those who speak and those whom they address' (Macdonell 1991: 1). Within the provision of lifelong learning this may be even in the very arrangements of learners' seats within a room, for example, in rows, circles, groups, or on a banked or flat surface. Each will affect who speaks and the discourses that learners construct, providing certain possibilities of 'truth'. Gore outlines the ways in which being subject to the gaze of one's peers in a circle may be more intimidating for some learners than sitting in rows, thereby silencing those whom the seating arrangements are meant to encourage to participate. For Gore attempts to produce a more democratic learning setting involve a lot more than a change of seating arrangements.

> The teacher cannot simply attempt to abolish his or her authority by maintaining an experiential realm in which 'shared' narratives are assumed to equalise participants, and which, because the teacher and students learn from each other, is assumed to be a reciprocal enterprise.
>
> (Gore 1993: 125–126)

Obviously, there are a range of discourses on most topics. Within the discussion of lifelong learning and a learning society we have, for instance, the discourses of learners, lecturers, managers, policy-makers, academics, professional bodies, employers, trade unions, awarding bodies, think tanks, journalists and commentators. Each have their own discourses through which the terrain is constructed, contested and challenged, for example, liberal humanist, human resource management, skills training, social action. However, as elsewhere, not all discourses are equal and the power embedded within them also seeks to construct certain discourses as more valid, 'truer' than others. For instance, in a period of financial constraint, the 'truth' of management and efficiency may well take precedence over the 'truth' of learners seeking access to provision. Policy-makers may question the 'success' of letting autonomous professionals determine curriculum. Certain forms of learning are constructed as 'leisure' or 'sport' and therefore not a legitimate case for state support through taxation.

In a sense, therefore, given its challenge to many 'common-sense' views, the approach in this text can itself be seen as an attempt to develop an alternative knowledge and discourse about lifelong learning and a learning society. This is not without its dangers. As Millar (1991: 22) suggests, when discussing a graduate class of adult educators in South Africa, in which analysis of the discursive frameworks that constitute meaningful action was adopted, 'the course seems to favour the more articulate, formally educated and theoretically inclined members of the class'. So, even in constructing this discourse on discourse, power–knowledge and governmentality, I may well be excluding a certain readership. However, in laying out my starting point, possible areas for disagreement and discussion can be foregrounded.

POSTMODERNITY – MADE FUTURE/FUTURE TO BE MADE?

The meaning and significance of postmodernity are subject to much debate (Lyotard 1984; Lash 1990; Giddens 1990; Harvey 1991; Featherstone 1991, 1995, Bauman 1992, Beck 1992; Smart 1992; Lash and Urry 1994; Usher and Edwards 1994). This encompasses many areas traditionally covered by separate academic disciplines and work practices, for example, literature, architecture, the media, advertising, cinema, music. The full range of that debate will not be encompassed here. I intend rather to introduce a broad characterisation of the contemporary period which is argued to be

postmodern by some writers. Many of the ideas introduced here will be taken up in later chapters in more detail. In particular, in chapter 2 I shall discuss in a more systematic fashion some of the different dimensions of change which are introduced here.

In economic terms the current conjuncture has often been characterised as a period of revitalised capital accumulation based on globalisation, which has helped bring about and resulted from new forms of production, distribution and consumption. Globalisation involves the integration of the economies of nation states through market mechanisms, accompanied by increased transnational flexibility of capital and labour markets and new forms of information technology. With globalisation comes increased economic competiton and a requirement for flexibility. This has resulted in a shift towards neo- and post-fordist forms of work organisation in fragmented and volatile market for goods and services, where smaller scales of production and customised design for market niches have tended to displace pre-existing forms of mass production for the homogenised consumers of the mass market (Murray 1989). Marketisation and a culture of consumption become central to the economy as a whole. Changes in products, services and working practices reconstruct the workplace and the social definition of skills.

Harvey (1991) argues that the contemporary reconfiguration of capital, which he terms flexible accumulation, depends on new ways of representing space and time, a space–time reorganisation which both produces and is produced by globalisation. Two seemingly paradoxical yet interlinked processes are discernible. First, space–time compression, where hitherto separated/bounded time and space are brought together to produce both a literal and metaphorical sense of the world as 'one place' and time as an instantaneous present. Second, an increased emphasis on place and identity, diversity and difference. Globalisation therefore refers to a process where it becomes 'much more difficult for nation-states to opt out, or avoid the consequences of being drawn together into a progressively tighter configuration through the increasing volume and rapidity of the flows of money, goods, people, information, technology and images' (Featherstone 1995: 81). Greater integration of the global market simultaneously produces homogeneity and heterogeneity. Globalisation has meant the spread of the market economy, Western institutions and culture. New forms of communication enabling simultaneous transactions have created deterritorialised economies and cultures. Yet these very trends have also produced pressures for local, sub-state autonomy and identity.

This paradoxical process is emerging also from globalisation in the cultural sphere (Morley and Robins 1995). At one level, urban and suburban landscapes become more identical with familiar icons such as McDonald's golden arches ubiquitously present, and with certain media images instantly recognisable in every corner of the globe. We are witnessing a process of 'global cultural convergence, the production of universal

cultural products and global market consumers' (Kenway *et al*. 1993a: 118), linked with a commodification and imagisation of culture. At the same time, globalisation induces effects of cultural specificity. There is 'a renaissance of place-bound traditions and ways of life' (Kenway *et al*. 1993a: 118), a new sense of pride and value in the recognition of difference and the revival of hitherto suppressed identities. The globalisation of culture, then, far from repressing the local and the specific, actually stimulate them. At the extremes, the contemporary condition of what Bauman (1991) refers to as 'homelessness' results in more strident assertions of a narrow sense of community among some, where difference becomes the basis for exclusion and oppression.

Alongside, and as part of, changes in the economy, therefore, are changes in cultural forms. First, in the realms of culture narrowly defined – film, music, entertainment, fashion, architecture, art. Modernist seriousness and the search for deep, often hidden meaning is contested by postmodern 'playfulness', pastiche and self-referentiality, as the possibility of providing secure and deep meanings is overwhelmed by the proliferation of signs and images. Here the playful or ludic does not signify the trivial, but an alternative strategy to transgress and dislocate meaning and power. Second, in the significance of culture generally to the economy and the social formation as a whole, where the hitherto tight boundary between the realm of culture and the realm of the socio-economic, and the dominance of the latter over the former, breaks down. Cultural goods become commodities to be consumed. Such consumer goods are 'infected with aesthetic considerations, becoming signs of style and taste, and losing their functional qualities' (Gabriel and Lang 1995: 107). Here, the cultural and the aesthetic displace, or come to be valued more highly than, the economic and the functional. Featherstone (1995: 2) argues that 'in effect, culture is now beyond the social and has become released from its traditional determinisms'. Consequently, the aesthetic and cultural displace the functional as central to economic activity, with style and design playing an increasingly significant role in ensuring consumption of products and services, and with image and lifestyle playing an increasing role in the choices of consumers. On this reading, the economy, and this includes providers of learning opportunities for adults, is increasingly recentred away from 'meeting need' towards supporting 'lifestyle practices'.

It is in this sense that some have argued that these changes are linked to the presence of a consumer society, whereby centres of production have been displaced by centres of consumption – financial services, shopping malls and superstores, entertainment complexes and theme parks (Urry 1990; Rojek 1993). Here it is suggested issues of lifestyle manifested through consumption have become central to the contemporary moment. Modernist, production-orientated identity is displaced by a postmodern consumption-orientated identity. The aesthetic, hitherto the preserve of high culture and the elite associated with that culture, now pervades everyday life and, equally,

everyday life now invades high culture. The different cultural spheres lose their autonomy, as 'the aesthetic realm begins to colonise both theoretical and moral-political spheres' (Lash 1990: 11). There is a breakdown in the distinction between high and popular culture. In the 'cultural economy', the relationship between consumers/ audience and producers/ artists is broken down. The producer is no longer constructed as the autonomous 'genius', the legislator of 'good' taste, and the consumer is given the opportunity to actively engage in the cultural event – audience participation, interactive video, and so on. There is a consequent proliferation and diversification with an emphasis on the celebration of difference and a foregrounding of multiple identities and realities. Boundaries no longer operate in quite such an excluding and exclusive way. They have not ceased to exist, but under challenge and contestation both from reconfigured forms of capital and from alternative social groupings, some boundaries have shifted and others have become more permeable.

As I have suggested, the discourses and practices of modernity are characterised by an emphasis on progress and faith in rationality and science as the means of its realisation. This faith, with its promise of inevitable progress in human betterment, is a feature of modernity which perhaps is most intensely questioned in the postmodern. It also illustrates the relationship between a poststructuralist and postmodern stance. In postmodernity, the grand narratives are greeted increasingly with 'incredulity' (Lyotard 1984). Postmodernity is a condition where people have to make their way without fixed referents and traditional anchoring points in a world characterised by rapid and unpredictable change, uncertainty and ambivalence, where knowledge is not only constantly changing, but is becoming more rapidly and overwhelmingly available. A modernist perspective views all this with an existential anxiety and with profound concern, a postmodern perspective as a matter of celebration of diversity and difference, of troubled pleasure (Usher and Edwards 1995; Edwards and Usher 1996).

Postmodernity has also been termed a condition of 'hypercommodification' (Crook *et al*. 1992), the condition where the commodity has become culturally dominant and where the dominant commodity form is the image. The communication/media revolution means that people are engulfed by images to the extent where the distinction between reality and image breaks down in a condition of 'hyperreality' (Baudrillard 1988). The hyperreal is a world of constantly proliferating images or 'simulacra' (copies detached from their originals, but meaningful despite this detachment) which become a desirable reality to be consumed, and where experience becomes contingent rather than coherent and determinate. In this process, new forms of experience proliferate, experiences that are not rooted in a stable and unified self – itself conceived as a modern patriarchal construct. Hence there is continual shaping and reshaping of subjectivity and identity. In postmodernity, therefore, sensibilities are attuned to the pleasure of new experiences, part of a constant

making and remaking of a lifestyle. In the postmodern, the cultivation of desire displaces modernity's cultivation of reason.

The decentring of knowledge is accompanied therefore by a decentring or multi-centring of the self – the significance of which for the identities of workers with adults I shall return to in chapter 5. Modernity is characterised by a search for an underlying and unifying truth and certainty which will make the world and the self coherent, meaningful and masterable. In modernity, although the self constantly experiences a sense of discontinuity and fragmentation, this is regarded as an 'unnatural' condition to be remedied by such practices as counselling which enable the uncovering of a preexisting coherent and authentic self. Postmodernity, on the contrary, is marked by 'a view of the human world as irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, split into a multitude of sovereign units and sites of authority' (Bauman 1991: 35). The modernist search for a true and authentic self and the fulfilment of a pre-given individual autonomy gives way to a playfulness where identity is formed and re-formed by a constantly unfolding desire realised, although never fully and finally, through lifestyle practices in a multiplicity of forms. The unified, coherent and sovereign self of modernity, the firm ground for the fixing of identity, becomes a multiple, discontinuous self traversed by multiple meanings whose identity is continually in a process of re-formation. In the postmodern, one does not experience in order to enumerate the knowledge gained or to become a 'better' person or to better become oneself. Experience leads to further experience, experiencing is itself the end, not the means to an end. It is the very openness of experience which is desirable.

> Theorists of the postmodern often talk of the ideal-type channel-hopping MTV (music television) viewer who flips through different images at such speed that she/he is unable to chain the signifiers together into a meaningful narrative, he/she merely enjoys the multiphrenic intensities and sensations of the surface of the images.
>
> (Featherstone 1991: 5)

The complexity and ambivalence that characterise the postmodern are mirrored therefore at the personal level. Identity becomes something that is continually reconstructed through self-reflexive biographies. Commentators such as Bauman and Beck have argued that in this situation individuals may still seek to construct meaningful lives, may still require the teleological certainties and comforts provided by the anchoring grand narratives of modernity. Featherstone (1995: 45) argues that in the postmodern, it is not so much that lives are totally disordered and identities totally decentred but that they have 'a more flexible generative structure which allows for a greater play of differences'. He also argues in relation to globalisation and increased intra- and transnational mobility that 'people can live happily with multiple

identities' (Featherstone 1995: 9). In the face of reflexive individualisation, with teleology seemingly inappropriate, disordered lives and ambivalent identities may seem to be the new norm. At the very least, the kinds of situations people increasingly face are such as to require more flexible classifications and less highly defined boundaries.

Postmodern perspectives, then, are at one and the same time both parts of and ways of understanding the contemporary world. Reflexively there is the attempt to provide a discourse for the world they seek to explain. This is undoubtedly controversial. However, it highlights notions of decentring, ambivalence and contingency which many would argue interlink with the thrust of postmodernity in a socio-cultural and economic sense. The perspectives associated with a postmodern approach encourage us to challenge boundaries, including those of all-embracing emancipatory ideologies, and encourage us to be border-crossers (Giroux 1992). However, caution is necessary, as 'the "postmodern" discourse generates its own concept of "modernity", made of the presence of all those things for the lack of which the concept of "postmodernity" stands' (Bauman 1992: 95). In other words, postmodern discourses construct modernity in particular ways, some more inclined towards distinguishing absolute breaks than others. Attempts to distinguish the modern from the postmodern are fraught with difficulty and the construction of a discourse of postmodernity to govern the contemporary condition can be argued to displace concerns with inequality and emancipation in a period when such concerns need to be central. Postmodern discourses, therefore, are seen to address some of the consequences of changes rather than the changes themselves; 'celebrating' consumption, lifestyle and individualism and thereby providing a self-fulfilling rationale for a revitalised global capitalism – a postmodern grand narrative. In this way, postmodern discourses can become subject to poststructuralist analysis in which their many meanings are foregrounded.

Postmodernity has been deployed in a variety of ways, as an

> historical period, an aesthetic style, and a change in the condition of knowledge; to conceptualise difference – a distinctive form beyond the modern – as well as similarity – a variant of the modern, or its limit form; and to describe affirmative or reactionary and critical or progressive discourses and movements.
>
> (Smart 1992: 164)

For those for whom a postmodern discourse is interpretatively powerful, it is only through identifying such changes in this way that critical practices and possibilities can be established. This does not mean establishing firm boundaries between the modern and postmodern. Indeed Lyotard (1992) argues that the postmodern is the constantly reworked interface between the past and future, with the implication that the modern and postmodern are moments found together in dynamic tension and interaction. Further, Foucault (1986) suggests that it is wrong to think of history as

discrete periods and of complete changes in these. Rather modernity and postmodernity are different attitudes and discourses present in the contemporary period. Burbules (1995) argues that the postmodern attitude is one of doubt based on 'an inability to believe' and marked by narrative tropes of irony, tragedy and parody. The postmodern marks the terrain of ambivalence and uncertainty of which it is partly a product, enhancing and opposing aspects of modernity. We may not like all the messages in the post – indeed we may feel there is too much junk mail – and certainly some are more important than others. However, it is only through a critical 'reading' that such evaluations can be made. On this basis, postmodernity cannot be simply dismissed.

THE TEXT – STRUCTURE AND READINGS

Having outlined the inter-related strands of poststructuralism and postmodernity which are woven into the rest of this text, I want now to briefly outline the senses in which I am using 'changing places' in this text and the structure of the argument which follows.

Changing Places is the title of a novel by the British author David Lodge. It tells the tale of an academic exchange between an American and British university at the end of the 1960s. The two academics involved are both white and male and the story can be read as of their respective mid-life crises. It is meant to be witty, but read in the 1990s seems somewhat crass and superficial. A similar condition can be said to exist metaphorically in many of the discourses of the education and training of adults. They are dominated by the texts of white males. They are experiencing a mid-life crisis under pressure from new right, feminist and post-colonial challenges. They also largely appear superficial by comparison with certain of the wider social and cultural literature available. This, in itself, might be a good enough reason for titling this text *Changing Places?*

However, other reasons have informed that choice. First, there are the two senses in which providers of learning opportunities are changing places in the contemporary period. Participating in them as learners or as workers, they are places in which people change through learning. However, they are also places which are subject to change. Second, there is the sense in which changing places for adults are not restricted to formal providers of learning opportunities, but increasingly come to include such other settings as the workplace, home, social movement, and so on. Third, there is the notion that discourses of 'adult education' as a place within which debates occur are subject to change as the learning of adults becomes located in different discourses. This text is both an example of and an argument for the changing discursive location of adult education and is itself a changing place for me as the author.

What follows then? First, I outline some of the changes which have contributed to

the growth in interest in the notions of a learning society and lifelong learning (chapter 2). This provides a more systematic examination of certain of the claims made for postmodernity above. Particular attention is given to the economic, cultural, technological and demographic changes in the contemporary world and the ways in which those changes are constructed in particular ways through specific discourses. Second, I examine the impact of these changes on the boundaries which have been dominant in shaping the discourses and practices of adult education and lifelong learning (chapter 3). I argue that there has been a shift in discourses from a focus on inputs, on adult education and provision, towards one on outputs, on learning and the learner. This results from and in many boundaries starting to break down or become more permeable. As a field of practice, policy and study, adult education has been subject to processes of de-differentiation. New and more diverse settings are now recognised as places in which learning occurs and new metaphors are necessary to encompass these changes. I argue that a bounded field of adult education is being displaced by a more open moorland of lifelong learning – a metaphor itself located in my childhood experience of Exmoor and Dartmoor in the southwest of England. This is followed by an examination of the ways in which provision has changed to support access and participation, open and distance learning and the assessment and accreditation of outcomes in the increasing number of learning settings (chapter 4). There is an exploration of the ways in which providers of learning opportunities embrace learners and learning when the latter are separated from designated institutions. It is suggested that the notion of flexibility governing other aspects of the economy and social formation is also being developed in the provision of learning opportunities for adults with the notion of the learning organisation as a governing principle of organisational development. The implications of this for institutions and workers with adults is then examined, in particular the adoption of neo- and post-fordist models of organisational development, and the role of the reflective practitioner as a model of professional development for those working in the moorland of lifelong learning (chapter 5). Finally, I turn to the discourses of a learning society and provide a critical examination of the contemporary trends and the differing notions of a learning society which have developed alongside and as part of the trends identified earlier (chapter 6). It will be argued that, as with other discourses, those of a learning society have been subject to change and as a governing principle for lifelong learning give rise to a range of practices signifying notions of an educated society, a learning market and learning networks.

The increasingly influential discourses of a learning society harness lifelong learning in ways which are certainly prejudicial to some of the equity goals of supporters of alternative visions of such a society. Lifelong learning is being galvanised predominantly to equip individuals globally to compete ever more strenuously against each other in the market for qualifications, employment and other opportunities. In

other words, the currently dominant discourse of a learning society acts as a 'regime of truth' through which power is better able to be exercised in the contemporary period. Educators, therefore, need to be more cautious as to the precise form of a learning society to which they lend their support and more aware of tensions, ambivalences and contradictions in differing notions of such a social formation. Often they have failed to engage with the complexities of what they practise on the assumption of the inherent worth and good intentions of their endeavours (West 1994).

This failure of reflexivity is due in part to the modernist forms within which workers with adults, and indeed most educators, are located, which shape their identities, goals, practices and discourses. Gore (1993) argues that all pedagogies are framed within a modernist 'regime of truth', articulated in terms of universal macro-level explanations and centred on conceptions of teleological progress and goal-directed rational selves. From these perspectives, much of the learning engaged in by adults can only be considered anti-educational and something to be deplored, or un-educational and therefore beneath their concerns. The challenge of this text – and it is as much a challenge to myself as to the reader – is to engage with contemporary complexity and become more modest and maybe even less serious about the claims that we make for our practices (Jansen and Van der Veen 1992; Burbules 1995). The ambivalence in discourses of a learning society will therefore draw the text to a close, or, more accurately, will draw the text to its opening in the multiple readings to which it will be subject.

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