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Chapter 1

Unprotected participation in lifelong learning and the politics of hope

A feminist reality check of discourses around flexibility, seamlessness and learner earners

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The politics of hope

Policy discourses over the past decade in most OECD nations have mobilised notions about lifelong learning as a new way of thinking about the relationship between work, education, training, family, and leisure (Delors 1996; Karmel 2004). The concept is not new, with its derivation in the 1960s referring to the interaction between work and formal education (e.g. apprenticeships), and then community-based non-formal education in the 1970s. Now the concept of lifelong learning (LLL), as utilised in policy, rhetorically captures formal and informal, non-formal, abstract and experiential learning in schools, universities, TAFE, communities, workplaces and homes. LLL is portrayed as the future way of living and learning for children, young people and adults, a 'wonder drug' (Coffield 1999). The implicit assumption is that we can learn something from any aspect of our daily lives that can inform how we do paid work more productively (Field 2000a).

Policy statements mobilising the discourse imply a broad conceptualisation of LLL as a key aspect of a learning society. LLL is about learning to be, learning to do, learning to work and learning to learn (Delors 1996). Knowledge economies can no longer rely upon an educated elite, but require constant retraining and upgrading of a renewable and higher skills base for all. LLL is the discourse mobilised in educational discourses as the panacea for youth 'at risk' (Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Knight 2004); in industry discourses to rectify skill deficiencies in training to maintain national productivity; in welfare discourses arguing about the need to update the skills of the adult unemployed to reduce welfare costs; in management discourses as a basic condition for individuals working in 'learning organisations'; in community service discourses as a key element in social capital building in disadvantaged communities and to counter social exclusion (Schuller and Field 1998; Tett 2003); in home-school discourses about the family as active participants in their children's learning (Lopez and
Scribner 1999); and in discourses of community education promoting LLL for leisure (Department of Victorian Communities 2005). LLL is, many argue, a basic premise of full citizenship in a democratic society, a means to impart agency and well-being. LLL, therefore, it would appear, is seen to benefit women, young people and a range of ‘equity’ groups.

While each discourse reinvents the meaning of LLL within its own parameters, there are common threads trans-nationally. One theme is that LLL facilitates a seamless flow between education/training/work/home, that it accrues for the individual personal benefits through ongoing education and training whether in terms of employment, personal well-being and empowerment, or career development. For the public, LLL accrues benefits in terms of maximising skills and public educational investment. LLL therefore requires structural and cultural reform of education systems and educational workers to facilitate multiple pathways. A second theme is that LLL requires greater flexibility on the part of the individual, and, that in turn, individuals, through LLL, gain greater flexibility and are committed to their ongoing self-improvement (and therefore, it is assumed, choice about lifestyle and career). The assumption here is that the new work order has supplanted the twentieth-century ideal of the full-time single career pathway with the ‘portfolio’ or ‘boundaryless’ career based on flexible, multi-skilled self-motivating workers (Gee et al. 1996). Flexibility, mobility and serial jobs require continual upskilling and retraining.

Third, it is assumed that LLL occurs in multiple contexts, with multiple providers; anywhere, anytime, in workplaces, communities, homes, as well as formal educational sites. The post-welfare state only seeks to regulate a range of self-managing public and private providers rather than provide LLL except to the marginalised. Fourth, the discourse of LLL is frequently connected to democratic notions of citizenship, agency and participation, implying LLL has democratising capabilities. LLL promises new opportunities for marginalised groups and increased access to education and training, building individual and community capacities to respond to a globalised new work order (Clegg and McNulty 2002; Edwards et al. 2002; Kilpatrick et al. 2003).

Finally, LLL recognises that adults are also learners, and, as ‘learner earners’ undertaking education/training/work simultaneously, they are self-managing their learning. This imparts the notion of innovative and resilient individuals who are independent and self-reliant citizens. LLL is therefore about identity formation, and schools, universities and further education are expected to produce learner identities:

There are the personal and social contours of the risk society, which oblige schools to prepare children for creating and engaging in a learning society. Learning, in a risk society, becomes not merely enhancement of the self, or a means of social and economic advancement, but . . . an indispensable mode of being and acting in the world.

(Strain 2000: 244)
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Work and education/training (and therefore not being in work) increasingly define who we are and how we are valued.

Learning to earn and earning to learn: paradoxes, tensions, contradictions

The above optimistic account is contestable. The discourses of LLL and how they are mobilised with particular subjects in mind, whether ‘at risk’ youth, middle managers, or women not in paid work, cannot be de-contextualised from the cultural and structural re-formation of the education–work nexus of the past two decades in most Western nation-states. When scrutinised from a feminist perspective that works the binaries between public/private, family/work, unpaid/paid labour, and emotional/rational in relation to empirical studies of particular equity groups, a number of contradictions, paradoxes and tensions emerge. In particular, concepts of LLL such as seamlessness, boundarylessness, flexibility and relevance when enacted through policy produce differential experiences for women and girls within what are for many more neo-Fordist than post-Fordist conditions of work and learning (Albeit 2000).

Individualisation of risk and responsibilisation

LLL took on discursive power in the early 1980s as rapidly changing labour markets were seen to be a condition of national productivity in more competitive times. In Western developed nation-states, and Australia and New Zealand in particular, de-industrialisation arose from the flow of manufacturing to cheaper labour fields in Asia and South-East Asia. Bipartisan policies informed by neo-liberal market ideologies of the OECD, the IMF and the World Bank during the 1990s imitated the structural adjustment reforms undertaken in South America, New Zealand and the UK in the 1980s (Henry et al. 2001). Structural adjustment meant that the democratising discourses of LLL, while mobilised most often in new ‘regionalised state’ formations such as the EU, were readily subverted, by the neo-colonial tendencies of global capitalism in developing nation-states, and multi lateral and unilateral trade agreements between developed nation-states (e.g. North American Free Trade Alliance (NAFTA), Asia Pacific Economic Community (APEC)), due to its neo-liberal assumptions of competitive individualism and deregulated markets (Brine 1999). Neo-liberal orthodoxy during the 1980s and 1990s of deregulation of financial and labour markets and structural devolution was prescribed in the case of Latin America and Africa by international funding bodies and voluntarily adopted in the case of Australia and New Zealand, on the periphery of emerging regionalised economies (Summerfield and Aslanbeigui 1998; Blackmore 2005).

The discourse of LLL was mobilised by Anglophone nation-states to restructure education and training to make it more relevant to the economy
Education and training were a source of national income in expanding international education markets in Asia and South-East Asia, and the means to improve competitiveness globally by upskilling adult and new labour generally (Blackmore and Sachs 2006). New modes of educational governance characterised by devolved and marketised education systems now focused on self-managing organisations. Structural devolution of educational management, together with new technologies, facilitated the dispersion of management tasks and responsibilities down to individual organisations (schools, TAFE and universities), and within organisations to sub-units and individual teachers competing for limited funds within what were becoming more corporate, quasi-autonomous, and entrepreneurial public organisations. The infiltration of a market orientation into the structures and cultures of educational organisations affected what was taught, to whom and how. Under-funded public and private educational institutions reliant upon enrolments, particularly the non-elite unable to attract students (preferably full fee paying), struggled for survival. Markets do not deliver equity.

The effect of this restructuring has been the casualisation of educational labour markets, particularly in the training sector; increased market competition within and between sectors (e.g. use of competitive tendering to deliver government labour market and literacy programmes); and the shifting of costs to users. In this context, LLL has been defined as an individual responsibility requiring increased individual investment in schooling and higher education to compensate for reduced government funding in public education (schools and universities) (e.g. Australian government funding, excluding international and domestic student fees, has reduced from 85 per cent to less than 30 per cent recurrent university income since 1996) (Australian Vice Chancellor’s Committee AVCC Statistics 2004). Australian disinvestment in education in real and relative terms (GDP expenditure on education reducing from 4.3 per cent to 3.8 per cent since 1992) stands in contrast to increased investment in education and training in Canada, the USA, the UK, the EU, and Asian Tiger states as a source of social cohesion and economic growth (AVCC 2002).

Welfare and labour market services have also been outsourced to private providers (e.g. churches), a trend most evident in NZ and the UK where national government policies are not mediated by state or provincial governments as they are in Canada, Australia and the USA. In the Australian federal system, provision for those at risk is maintained through increasingly marginalised public sector providers (schools, universities and TAFE) as federal education funding has shifted as a result of neo-liberal policies from public to private education, and from the state to users. Governments in all countries more closely target discrete groups ‘at risk’ to create new efficiencies. Again, the safety net for marginalised workers is being cut away with the deregulation and/or demise of industrial awards, the rise of individualised workplace contracts in Australia emulating the American labour market model of under-employment and low wages for the unskilled. Increasingly, in the UK, the USA and Australia,
there is the expectation that the unemployed (in particular, single mothers) have a 'mutual obligation' to the state to work in return for receiving welfare, thus individualising the responsibility for children. Nearly all Australian workers, part- and full-time, now experience a sense of their precarious position in the workplace, as redundancy agreements and contracts undercut the notion of tenure even among middle-class professionals and managers (Pusey 2003).

Thus, since the 1980s, the nation-state has increasingly mediated global/local market relations by deregulating financial and labour markets to attract international capital. At the same time, an increasingly interventionist state has been failing to protect individuals, not only from the extremes of globalising markets, but also from the infringement of human rights with the rise of terrorism (Hesford and Kozol 2005). Similarly, neo-liberal education reforms have significantly altered relations between the individual and the state with the shift from government to governance (Rhodes 1997), signalling a move away from a citizen-based notion of rights associated with a sense of the public, to an individualistic client-based notion of rights based on contractual obligations (Pierre 2000). This shift from a welfare to a post-welfare state in most Anglophone states has transferred risk and responsibility from the state onto the individual and the family, and therefore women who traditionally assume the greater responsibility for the aged, the young and the sick. LLL has been portrayed as one measure to reduce risk, but it is increasingly an individual responsibility.

**Narrowing not broadening of education**

LLL in the 1970s and 1980s was discursively constructed as an ongoing educative process within a social democratic political frame. Education for all was the aim through greater participation in, access to, and equity from LLL, as in the case of the neighbourhood house movement. Policy texts during the 1990s have been informed by a limited version of human capital theory promoted from conservative think tanks and through international policy forums (e.g. OECD), drawing on neo-liberalism's assumptions about the self-maximising self-interested individual who is not gendered, raced or classed (Henry et al. 2001). This version of human capital theory neglects how social capital in communities, work and families maintains the invisible social infrastructure upon which fast capitalism relies. It assumes an unproblematic connection between levels of investment in education/training (as if only by choice) through LLL and the rewards obtained in paid work (as if only by merit). Education and work are treated as being neutral domains with regard to culture, race, gender and class. Within this policy frame, LLL focuses on skills-based training rather than personal development or citizenship formation, on 'employability skills' not generic skills, on compliance to standards and not critical and independent thought (Gee et al. 1996; Blackmore 1997; Mahony and Hextall 2001; Gaskell and Rubensen 2004). This has led to a narrowing rather than broadening of how LLL has been understood and enacted in
education policies in the EU, North America and Australasia. Studies of choice indicate little evidence of the ‘consumer rationalism’ assumed in policy texts (Potts 2003; Reay et al. 2005).

Seamlessness and coordination

LLL is the premise upon which the post-compulsory sector is being restructured, co-ordinated and managed. In Australia, the UK and the EU, qualification frameworks have been developed to create ‘flexible pathways’ and provide ‘seamlessness’ between education sectors, and between states for cross-national credit transfer, e.g. the Bologna Agreement for universities. Australian federal and state-run programmes now manage and track individual young people’s pathways into work and further education and training (e.g. Mapping Individual Pathways, On Track). The push for seamlessness, together with international pressures (e.g. PISA and TIMMS) for an ongoing improvement of outcomes as measured by student access, participation and retention, standardised achievement tests, and graduate outcomes, has led to new institutional formations. These have taken the form of neighbourhood clusters, increased curriculum specialisation of schools (e.g. specialist schools in the UK), ‘network facilitation models’ (e.g. Local Learning and Employment Networks or LLEN in Victoria to coordinate youth education and welfare services), and community capacity building such as Education Action Zones, Cities of Excellence in the UK and New Community Schools in Scotland (Gewirtz et al. 2005). In Australia, the focus on outcomes has led schools to be more responsive to the needs and interests of ‘at risk’ young people by widening the range of curriculum and pedagogies (e.g. Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, Australian Vocational Education and Training in Schools or VET) in partnership with TAFEs to broaden student choice, whereas the tendency in the UK has been to ‘exclude’ students unable to engage with mainstream schooling (Ball et al. 2000; Campbell 2002).

Paradoxically, while there is a desire by government to divest responsibility in provision of education and training, there has been a push to introduce and re-regulate private and public providers. Seamlessness has required greater coordination and cooperation between schools, technical and higher education sectors, public and private institutions and produced new funding models (e.g. academies in the UK and proposed business-run, federally-funded Technical Colleges in Australia). LLI providers, informally connected during the 1970s and 1980s, are now governed through national frameworks of certification and accreditation (e.g. Australian Qualifications Framework) and converging modes of curriculum ‘delivery’ (e.g. competency-based approaches). Informal education has been replaced by multiple gradations of certification. Yet certification can mean fewer benefits in terms of accessing employment due to the rise of credentialism, while options for informal and non-formal education are reducing.
The rapid expansion in private sector provision (by churches and 'for profit' firms) of training and welfare programmes has introduced new players, leaving public providers catering for 'non-profitable' clients, many of them single-parent, female-headed families. There has been a blurring of education, training, welfare and employment programmes with increasingly complex welfare conditions for the unemployed. Thus private training bodies, churches and NGOs have become complicit in implementing and monitoring increasingly harsh welfare policies. The boundaries between sectors and their different responsibilities are blurring and being redrawn. For example, underfunded community and neighbourhood houses established in the 1970s for informal adult education in Australia are now moving into new fields in order to survive, picking up 'at risk' young students (aged 13–14), at a lower cost to government, early school leavers who find adult learning approaches more amenable.

Competencies and knowledge work: contractual or pedagogical relations?

The restructuring of education in line with 'the national interest', new efficiencies, and individualised choice (e.g. LLL) has been steered through strong policy frames by the state and by executive strategic planning in educational organisations. Outcomes-focused policies are part of the strong accountability frameworks based on performance-based funding that utilise the technologies of performance indicators, performance management and quality audits. These technologies of performativity facilitate governments and executive managers' capacities to steer individual self-managing workers and learners from a distance while the difficult decisions over distribution of people and resources and individualised needs are devolved to units and equity groups competing for reduced resources at the interface. In curriculum, for example, strong policy frames focusing on outcomes are evident with the imposition of competency-based approaches during the 1990s in the training sector, a mode now penetrating higher education and schools with the integration of TAFE and VET programmes into their provision and a focus on generic graduate attributes as defined by professional bodies and international standards movements.

Paradoxically, schools, like universities, are struggling with debates about the need for different modes of producing, transmitting and learning new forms of knowledge, together with pedagogies that produce learner identities more appropriate for the twenty-first century (Strain 2000; Young and Spours 1997). The focus of more critical pedagogies is holistic, on creativity, entrepreneurship, and personal agency as well as meta-cognitive skills of 'learning how to learn', rather than vocationally specific skills that will rapidly be out of date (e.g. New Basics in Queensland and Essential Learning in Tasmania) (Hayes et al. 2006). In the USA, many jurisdictions developed programmes that integrated academic and occupational curricula to improve the transition from school to work through a coherent sequence of courses (Kincheloe 1995); some sought to
address underachievement marked by race and ethnicity by developing multi-
cultural programmes; others sought to detrack with the hope to reduce in-
equality; and some looked to single sex schooling (e.g. black males) (Rubin and 
Silva 2003). Similar reforms in school curriculum are less evident in the UK
with its prescriptive National Curriculum, curriculum specialisation, and return
 to ability grouping that encourages schools in the context of education markets
and league tables to develop practices of 'triage', i.e. putting most resources with
middle-level students where the most difference can be made on outcome
measures, excluding/ignoring the most difficult low-achieving students, while
encouraging the high achievers (Gillborn and Youdell 2000). Within the USA,
as elsewhere, there is considerable debate as to whether standards-driven
accountability frameworks can deliver, or may actually impede, more equitable
outcomes (Skira and Scheurich 2004).

Another articulation of the convergence between competencies and
outcomes, leveraged by market demands for client, industry/profession
responsiveness, is the development in universities of graduate attributes and
workplace-based experiential learning where students integrate practical
problem-based learning approaches with more theoretical positions, e.g. Coop
programmes in Canada (Gaskell and Rubensen 2004). Such interdisciplinary,
experiential and workplace-based learning could optimistically be considered
to be more typical of what Gibbons et al. (1994) refer to as Mode 2 knowledge,
focusing on problem solving and a theory–practice dialogue necessary for
knowledge-based economies. A pessimistic reading is that the lock step
approaches of competency/outcomes have normalising tendencies, intensify
government control, are usually driven by strong externally defined standards
that treat learning as a set of discrete outcomes and are not as situated and multi-
dimensional (emotional, personal, cognitive, etc.), while viewing curriculum
and pedagogy as vocational tools to produce learner earners and not citizens.

A third articulation is how literacy is increasingly treated as a vocational skill
rather than a means of personal empowerment, a major shift in the Adult,
Community and Further Education sector. Previously, literacy classes were as
much about personal development and community as facilitating access to
further training for work for women of non-English-speaking backgrounds
(NESB). Such critical pedagogies, developed to build social capital within local
communities, have been supplanted by packaged 'teacher-proof' curriculum
based on generic competencies, reducing pedagogy to transmission (Smith and
Keating 2003). Many teachers feel competency-based approaches reduce pro-
fessional autonomy, thus de-professionalising more than re-professionalising
(Sanguinetti 1998). User pays and vocationalism together have encouraged
more instrumentalist attitudes to education, particularly to higher education,
shaping academic/student interaction as a contractual rather than pedagogical
relationship within a market-driven context.
Vocational education and training: an equity strategy?

Schools have also been expected to respond to the demands of the LLL agenda (Shacklock 2003, 2004). VET and vocational learning are now expected to act as an 'equity strategy' (Bowman 2004). But vocational education, whether within secondary school or the further and community education sector in most Anglophone education systems, has historically been treated as the lesser and marginalised relative to mainstream academic curricula. Thus institutional responses to break down barriers between vocational/academic sectors to improve the transition from education to work face systemic historical dispositions that nurture the minority of students pursuing the academic track into university (Teese and Polesel 2003). Competitive public and private education markets arising from parents' exercising choice, together with systemic accountability focusing on outcomes, mean academic performance for university entrance is the mark of a successful school and student. Schools therefore take significant risks in terms of student markets, and therefore survival, by focusing on vocational or community programmes that are not 'marketable', such as providing a crèche for young mothers, welcoming a critical mass of students with disability, or offering alternative vocational programmes (Angwin et al. 2004). Finally, the cost is high to provide well-resourced vocational education in schools where demand is greatest, usually those which have the most disparate student needs in the more disadvantaged areas that have the fewest community resources or capacities to attract students. LLL, with its assumption of the integration of theory/practice and facilitating transition/pathways from school to work, is itself not valued in high stakes assessment and competitive education markets.

Despite this, in Australia as in Canada, VET and VCAL are popular with individual teachers, students and parents because these programmes impart personal achievement and local community relevance (Fenwick 2004). New school-based apprenticeships in hospitality and retail have provided increased access of girls in equal numbers predominantly in the public sector, but with a decline in numbers entering the traditionally male-dominated, blue-collar trades. There is also a flow-on effect from workplace VET in rural areas into local labour markets in the hospitality industry. But these jobs are highly casualised, part-time and traditionally feminised (Fenwick 2004). Butler et al. (2005: 10) argue that post-compulsory policies still operate within 'a masculinist VET frame'. VET policies and programmes reproduce rather than dismantle gender segmentation in education and work and are not preparing young women for the realities of the workplace as 'the current political agenda is to steer women and girls into the traditional institutionalised role' with little sense of what these jobs will offer in terms of employment opportunities, pay or career paths (ibid.: 11). While boys leaving school early are more likely to get into longer-term training, apprenticeships and full-time employment, girls who
leave early disappear, falling into casual work without training possibilities and are less likely to have stable familial relationships or remunerative employment (Collins et al. 2001; Teese 2002: 188; Long and Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2004).

Those most at risk are the early school leavers who have to negotiate a complex mosaic of post-compulsory and youth support providers (thirty-eight in one regional Local Learning and Employment Network), geographically dispersed and often invisible, rather than follow the coherent linear pathway into higher education (Angwin et al. 2001). They are attracted by any form of work, perceiving work as a form of flight as they are disengaged and/or dissatisfied with school. Any work is an economic strategy for short-term survival. But this ultimately predetermines long-term intermittent employment in low-paid unskilled jobs (Teese 2002: 185). The most invisible of all are pregnant teenagers, pregnancy being the primary reason for young girls leaving school. They experience ‘the difficulty of just juggling their education with managing a child. I think most of the girls do have ambitions and want to move forward in their lives, but they find the realities of a young baby too much for them’ (Principal, quoted in Angwin et al. 2004: 7).

Therefore, for those most at risk, the emergence of new/old forms of vocational education and training provision promises new opportunities, but without challenging the gender order of work/family relations or the gender regime of organisations. Evaluations of VET indicate equity groups (indigenous students, NESB, young mothers, rural and remote people, people with disability), the primary VET targets, benefit least in terms of employment opportunities and economic benefits (Bowman 2004; Butler 2005; Lawrence 2005). Yet VET has improved these

[students’] capacity for self direction and their capacity to relate well to others . . . [and]their perception of the relevance of lifelong learning and their ability to exploit learning opportunities grows. Their horizons enlarge and new interests are formed. Their self-esteem in raised and their ability to communicate is enhanced.

(Teese 2002: 188)

Such programmes create new flexible worker identities, inculcating the desire to work, and with both skills and capacities (Tennant et al. 2004). Relevance for work and even what girls enjoy means access to service work that is under-valued and underpaid. But the opportunity to gain secure and fulfilling work that meets their expectations, utilises their capacities and potential, and that provides a good and ongoing remuneration is not high. Despite relatively successful participation, progression and outcomes in the education of women, indigenous and rural/regional groups, obtaining positive and more equitable employment outcomes is now the issue (Quay Connection 2003; Dumbrell et al. 2004). Current policies on LLL do not engage with the social, economic and cultural contexts that shape young women’s life chances.
Paying more, achieving more, but earning less

LLL is increasingly the learner’s responsibility and a condition of their ongoing employment with the incremental creep towards user pays in all education sectors: schools, TAFE and universities. Self-funding of education and training is not new for women. Women in the education professions have historically invested in their own education and training more than men (e.g. paying for clerical training in the 1950s and 1960s, professional development and postgraduate degrees in teaching), whereas men in training have often been funded by government or employers (e.g. apprenticeships, MBAs in business) (Blackmore 1997; Pocock 1998). Transition from school to further education is now the point of greatest scarcity and where equity issues are highlighted. In universities, the Higher Education Contribution Scheme in 1992 offered a more equitable solution than upfront fees for non-traditional users of higher education. Yet women take significantly longer to repay their debt. Now they are confronted with increased fees (25 per cent increase in HECS in 2005) and full new fee paying places as government funding of higher education shrinks, with student support facilities such as child care threatened by the abolition of Compulsory Union Fees.

Despite women’s ongoing educational achievement in school and higher education and their investment in professional development, they do not reap the same rewards for LLL in the workplace as their male counterparts, casting empirical doubt on the human capital thesis. The gender wage gap emerges and increases within three years between equivalent male and female university graduates (House of Representatives 2002). In Australia, government discourses justify this phenomenon by drawing on Hakim (2002), arguing that men have a career orientation and women have a family orientation to paid work, thus rationalising women’s tenuous relationship to well-paid work. LLL is a discourse mobilised within increasingly risky and unprotected work conditions that require women to work and train harder and longer in part-time work, while still undertaking full-time home duties and self-funded training.

Spatially segmented work, spatially segmented learning

LLL is a discourse that can serve dominant economic interests in the changing capital/labour configurations of post-industrialism with the faster flows of people and ideas rather than individuals. Mobility and flexibility are the key to access and success in education and work. Yet family and social relations of intimacy and sense of efficacy are often about belonging, place, and a sense of security. Masculine as well as feminine identity is challenged as women become economically independent. Notions of family are challenged by female-headed households, extended families, and same sex parenting. Nor are women a homogenous ‘equity’ group. Differences among women arise due to class,
indigeneity/‘race’/ethnicity, linguistic background and location. Pockets of poverty and wealth coexist within close proximity in cities, and the gap between cities and rural regions is widening, with increased differentials in the provision of transport, communication, health and welfare infrastructure (Harding and Greenwall 2002).

LLL and informal learning is critical in rural communities where a higher proportion of women, for example, than men in rural and remote areas achieve higher level VET qualifications and participate in informal education but have limited occupational opportunities for skilled work locally (Golding 2004). Reverse gender segmentation exists in LLL here because:

Women typically need to learn locally in order to adapt to changes in their lives, their family business and in the rapidly changing world of work. In the smaller and remoter towns, much of this women’s learning takes place by necessity through adult and community education, work and informal training rather than through accredited vocational education and training (VET) . . . women are the new ‘hunters and gatherers’ for learning: for themselves for their families, and in some instance, for and behalf of their male partners . . . by contrast men are not as ‘hungry’ for the necessary learning or are unable to access a local, appropriate convivial space in all and remote towns to acquire that learning . . . they had traditionally learnt through work, on the job, on the farm and public organizations.

(Golding 2004: 156)

Again, once in work, rural women, like their city sisters, do not receive commensurable income to men despite being greater consumers of LLL than their male counterparts. But as participants in LLL, they build social capacity in their families and as active citizens provide the social glue for communities, unrecognised by government.

Other studies in the UK and Canada that include women as co-participant researchers produce narratives that indicate how single parents on welfare (Butterwick 2004), Aboriginal women, and low-income female workers with children were ‘not wanted’ by employers. They also had the greatest difficulty in accessing education and training because they lacked affordable childcare that matched school hours against employment hours, i.e. the everyday routines of parenting, work, welfare rules and childcare did not synchronise (Tett 2003). As Tett’s (2003) Scottish study indicated, policies failed to recognise the psycho-social effects of lack of control of material and social conditions of people’s lives which impact on health and social relationship of communities as well as individual households. Thus marginalised women were expected to participate in community, in work, in LLL, and also maintain family without the necessary conditions that made this balancing act possible.
Flexibility, fluidity and boundarylessness

Gender identities are also increasingly under threat and in crisis (Connell 2000). Globalisation has seen fluidity between the transformed conditions of work, the changing social relations of gender, multiple modes of learning, and new patterns of career and family. LLL is itself a product of radically transformed relations between education/home/work/leisure with its assumption about the fluidity and flexibility between these domains. For example, the institutional flexibility required to meet the needs of volatile student markets and frequent government policy shifts has largely been achieved through radically changing the conditions of educational labour through its privatisation, feminisation and casualisation. Privatisation of labour has occurred with the blurring for academics and teachers between work and home, resulting from extended work hours under enterprise bargaining, the intensification of labour requiring more home-work, and the requirements for online teaching internationally, collectively eroding family time (Pocock 2003). Australian full-time employees now work the highest average number of hours per week in the OECD. Such patterns of work intensification are evident in UK, American and Canadian universities (Morley 2003) and schools (Mahony and Hextall 2001). Education systems and organisations as greedy organisations simultaneously rely on this privatisation of work and employee good will and passion, but ignore their employees’ familial responsibilities in terms of organising workplaces flexibly for workers (Blackmore and Sachs 2006).

Flexibility of educational organisations also relies on increasing the already rapid rate of casualisation of the educational workforce in casual and part time work (rising from 8 to 24 per cent in Australian universities, 1992–2004), a marginal labour market already highly feminised (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004; AVCC 2004). Casualisation arises from the strategies of downsizing, outsourcing and contractualism. TAFE in Australia, like the further education sector in the UK, was already highly reliant on contract and sessional labour (up to 50 per cent in some instances) (Gleeson and Shain 1999; Whitehead and Moodley 1999). Alice, a middle manager in a large suburban TAFE commented:

Our teachers have been living with this for years now. The casualisation of the teaching profession in VET, which is predominantly women, means when the teachers’ contracts come due, the teachers are pitted against each other in competition for their own and others’ jobs. They’re all on six-month contracts, the coordinators on three years. Seven of our coordinators positions are all up in December, competing against each other for our jobs. I don’t know whether to go for my coordination position again or go back into teaching. Doing something else, being 46, the realities are bleak. But here we’ve got no pathways, no career prospects except marking time and grabbing whatever we can get. The name of the game is surviving.
People will work for below award conditions, with less job security and fewer ongoing positions. Each year we’re told there’s cut-backs again.

In these peripheral education labour markets, women lack the benefits of institutional collegial relationships and support as well as professional development and institutional commitment to their well-being (Blackmore and Angwin 1997). Flexibility in most organisations has become less about individual flexibility to be family friendly and caring for worker well-being or careers and more about institutional flexibility to meet the demands of volatile markets. In Australia, such trends will worsen with the introduction of Australian Workplace Agreements removing union protection and reducing award conditions to a minimal, and work contracts negotiated by individuals. AWA will impact most on marginalised casual workers who tend not to be in unions, but also women, even in senior management, who can have less negotiating power in male-dominated institutions because of familial responsibilities. Women more often negotiate away salary increments and bonuses for family time (a pattern already evident in collective Enterprise Agreements of the 1990s).

Any discussion of women’s work as educators and indeed leader/managers in all sectors not only referred to the boundarylessness between work, community and family, but also how work decisions (promotion, mobility, part-/full-time) were contingent upon familial responsibilities and relationships (Blackmore and Sachs 2006). Biographical narratives of women, even in leadership positions, indicate complex life courses characterised by ‘flexible’ ‘portfolio’ careers, and frequent movement between paid work, unpaid family duties, community work and education/training (Pocock 2003; Probert 2001). It signals the disappearance of the twentieth-century male model of full-time career in one job, now putting both working-class and middle-class men and women at risk, as experienced by the older male workers in rural areas (Pusey 2003).

Women’s increasing participation in paid work is emulating the US core-periphery model of work that is gendered, raced and classed. Reich (1997) refers to the core of professional managerial class of symbolic analysts, largely white and male, supported by a middle circle of skills-based technicians including the quasi-professions of teaching and nursing, and serviced by a periphery of semi-skilled workers in casualised employment, predominantly women, recent immigrants and people of colour. Most Western post-industrial societies are rapidly moving towards this model of flexible specialisation. But portfolio careers are the privilege of the core where the attributes of LLL (credentials, experiential learning, mobility, flexibility) accrue primarily to the transnational, usually male, symbolic analysts who are mobile and skilled within an elite global labour market (Connell 2000). The same attributes of multiskilling, continuous upskilling, certification and flexibility have become the condition for marginalised educational workers to merely retain their low-paid ‘serial jobs’ (Blackmore and Angwin 1997). Furthermore, transnational masculinities rely upon the social capital building and domestic labour role of women and peripheral
service workers. Flexibility, therefore, usually means increased risk and increased demand for the constant upgrading of skills through certification for those on the periphery, but is advantageous to those in the professional managerial class at the hard core of the new work order where training is largely in-house, experiential and seen to be readily transferable.

**LLL for learning organisations**

Finally, our study of women leaders in schools, universities and TAFE during the 1990s (Blackmore and Sachs 2006), focused on a cohort who had been educated in the public sector during the 1960s, trained in the universities in the 1970s when feminism troubled dominant epistemologies and politics, and taught in public schools in the 1980s when top-down policies converged with bottom-up activism to focus on participation and equity. It was these women’s flexibility, adaptability and experiential learning in multiple sites of paid and unpaid work that now made them highly employable as change agents and managers of educational restructuring during the 1990s. Merilyn’s story characterises the ‘accidental’ nature of their careers that produced a professional and leadership habitus infused with a passion for education and social change (Blackmore and Sachs 2006).

I fell into jobs...I was manager of the Australian Competency Research Centre, a commercial, autonomous unit...a huge experience of change and reform in that sector. I had a teaching background, secondary. This combination...was the ticket to this job. The critical thing is to do with change. My TAFE institute made the decision to restructure, and spill positions: they wanted people in there that knew what change was about. Change is how I have operated most of my working life...I’ve always been in relatively tenuous employment situations...The cultural pattern is very strong: my father was a teacher and a Principal. The educational influence was always pretty strong at home.

This pattern of recruitment of women into middle management (deans, heads of school, directors, principals) was also evident in all UK education sectors, where women took on the responsibility for the ‘domestic’ labour, i.e. emotional management work, risk management and quality assurance in systems undergoing radical workplace re-ordering (Deem and Ozga 1997; Whitehead and Moodley 1999; Gleeson and Shain 1999; Blackmore and Sachs 2006). As middle managers, they were trapped ambiguously between implementing policies in antithesis to their leadership habitus focusing on students, learning and social justice, and ‘managing’ a new social order based on the corporate values of markets and managerialism (Gleeson and Shain 1999). Their former colleagues, women teachers and academics, were increasingly positioned as technicians within this managerialist frame of technical
professions emerging in the 1990s. Discourses of learning organisations and innovation were downplayed to a focus on competencies, attributes, and the privileging of student and employer notions of relevance over teacher professional knowledge and judgement. As middle managers in corporatised schools, universities and further education they mediated relations between increased top-down, executive managerial power and reduced local autonomy and professional judgement arising from the multiple accountabilities of the audit and outcomes-based education. These were not the post-Fordist, horizontally structured learning organisations based on relationships of trust that encouraged collegiality, innovation and creativity that they preferred (Blackmore and Sachs 2006). While these wo-managers displayed the attributes of LLL desirable for learning organisations experiencing continuous change, readjustment and realignment, the burden of managing risk in organisations in crisis was dangerous in terms of their personal health, well-being, and relations with colleagues, families and friends. Many women contested the purpose of reform and how the resources/power/knowledge are unequally distributed, often to their detriment. Yet they, as individual teachers and academics, were held responsible for outcomes over which they had little control. Indeed, the corporatised educational organisation was less about learning and more about how 'employees are compelled to share their job related informal learning to enhance productivity' (Livingstone 1999a: 165).

Thus, the LLL discourse is mobilised at a time when education is now delivered through a complex set of contractual, consensual, competitive and cooperative arrangements, bewildering for both providers and users alike in their multiplicity, contradictions and array of choices, to 'service changes going on elsewhere in the economy and social formation' (Edwards 1997: 67). These arrangements are recasting and realigning work/home/education relations, fixing them into new patterns that could arguably be seen to be more controlling and exploitative in terms of daily work relations and practices than previous rigid boundaries between the domains of work, home and education.

So despite the discourse of LLL as a means by which to reduce risk for particular equity groups, the policies that inform the material conditions under which these groups live and work do not support an inclusive, reflexive or empowering lifelong learning for women now, nor for the future generation. There is little systemic and systematic recognition of the changed conditions in which choices are made by women and equity groups. While schools, TAFE and universities are producing flexible and self-reliant worker identities, the workplace does not meet their expectations, often being more alienating than satisfying. The discourse of LLL has been mobilised in the context of neoliberal educational and economic policies, post-welfarism associated with a rhetoric of self-help and mutual obligation, and a re-privatisation of work and care. These have added to women's paid and unpaid labour and marginalise young women without the minimum educational credentials.

Despite this, the discourse of LLL is appealing to women educators and
managers, themselves high achievers in LLL, seeking to improve women's opportunities through LLL and to promote social change. The logic of the discourse is seductive and difficult to refute. LLL is powerful discourse because it penetrates to the soul of educational work about self-improvement, while making individuals more self-managing of their own LLL. The danger lies in the assumptions embedded in LLL as conceptualised in policy and practice. The material conditions of both work and family life are arguably worsening for some, through work intensification, employment insecurity, and more expensive education and training. It is also a period of high risk even for the middle class (Pusey 2003). Dual family incomes are essential to maintain living standards. Women and children in single parent families now constitute the majority of those living in poverty, with a widening gap between rich and poor (Harding and Greenwall 2002) reflected in rising educational inequality based on location, class and indigeneity/race/ethnicity with significant implications for schools in these locations in New Zealand, Australia, the UK, the USA and Canada (Waslander 1995; Teese and Polesel 2003; Canadian Statistics 2004; Vinson 2004; Street 2005). The paradox of LLL is that if women and girls are not learner earners, they will be further marginalised, yet the benefits they accrue from their participation in LLL do not bring comparable rewards to many men. Increasingly, both men and women outside the 'hard core' of tenured and/or high paying contract transnational professional/managers are now 'unprotected' in the new work order.

New possibilities, old problems

Girls and women, as other equity groups, are doing more LLL successfully, but without the rewards (Fenwick 2004). The instrumentalist conceptualisation of LLL arising from human capital theories leaves untroubled shifts in the public/private upon which worker flexibility is premised, ignores the complex networks 'at risk' young people and other equity groups negotiate, and negates the professional knowledge production of learner earners in organisations. VET continues to be a masculinised area that encourages girls to enter traditional pathways, while failing to meet the needs of women in small business (Kempinch et al. 1999). Policies that take seriously the differential benefits of LLL need to protect the family–work balance rather than undermine it; create conditions of work and learning that facilitate LLL; develop more sophisticated indicators of what counts as educational success; and realise LLL is about building social as well as economic capital.

Alternative perspectives to official discourses about LLL focus on reflexivity (Edwards et al. 2002), social capital (Kilpatrick et al. 2003) and inclusion (Clegg and McNulty 2002). These perspectives, as have feminists' perspectives on pedagogy for some time, take the position that why and how people engage with learning is not merely dependent on the provision of opportunity through institutional networks, but also the conditions of learning and the negotiation of
social networks or ‘networks of intimacy’ (friends, family and community). School/parent partnerships, for example, are more likely to work if they actually ‘engage with the social realities of women’s lives to foster learner identities’ (Clegg and McNulty 2002: 572), as opposed to one premised upon middle-class femininity where parents are compliant with teachers’ notions of ‘good’ parenting (Tett 2003). Learning is not just about gaining employment, it is about identity. Students learn about education and work through their families and friends, their networks of intimacy. The availability of the learning opportunities is an insufficient condition, as it does not ‘create the structurally located dispositions involved in participation’ (Clegg and McNulty 2002: 582). This is particularly applicable to more marginalised women and young women, where identity and education are not closely interlinked in their networks of intimacy, as they were, for example, among the professional managers. Yet even for this relatively privileged group of women, who had invested significantly in LLL in the production of leadership/managerial habitus, the current conditions of work shaped by markets and managerialism are producing alienation and disengagement. Work may be the primary source of status and identity, but educational work no longer sustains the motivating disposition among many educators for social justice (Bourdieu 1997). Learning is a social and collective practice. It contributes to social capital in that individuals and groups will cooperate to achieve things they may not otherwise desire, do or attain (Kilpatrick et al. 2003: 417).

Governments seek through policy to dictate behaviours, but fail to draw upon the habitus and dispositions of all the actors in the partnership as a ‘resource on which to build’ (Clegg and McNulty 2002: 582). Schools and more informal modes of learning can, in some instances, mediate between an individual’s networks of intimacy and institutional networks of learning, providing a space in which social capital is exploited productively for both individuals and the collective. Thus social capital is considered to be a ‘resource’ based on relationships among people, and not merely an individual attribute, a positional good, mobilised to exclude or gain comparative advantage over others (Kilpatrick et al. 2003: 419). At the same time, as Bourdieu (1997) points out, social capital is also about power, place, as it is inflected by gender, class and race distinctions. Social capital is not a social panacea for economic ills that are structurally produced, as I have argued, with the slip of responsibility from the state to voluntarism, largely borne by women (Gewirtz et al. 2005). But in the existing political economy of LLL with its unequal distribution of possibilities, inclusions and rewards, individuals are increasingly responsible for both their ability to access education, and for their failure in education and work, and at the same time they are increasingly dependent on education and their successes are claimed as exemplifying the learning society (Coffield 1999). We are living in a knowledge society, therefore, ‘in which the collective learning achievements of adults [and young people] far outpace the requirements of the economy as paid work is currently organised’ (Livingstone 1999a: 164).